

The Cultural Notes on the Life of Christ

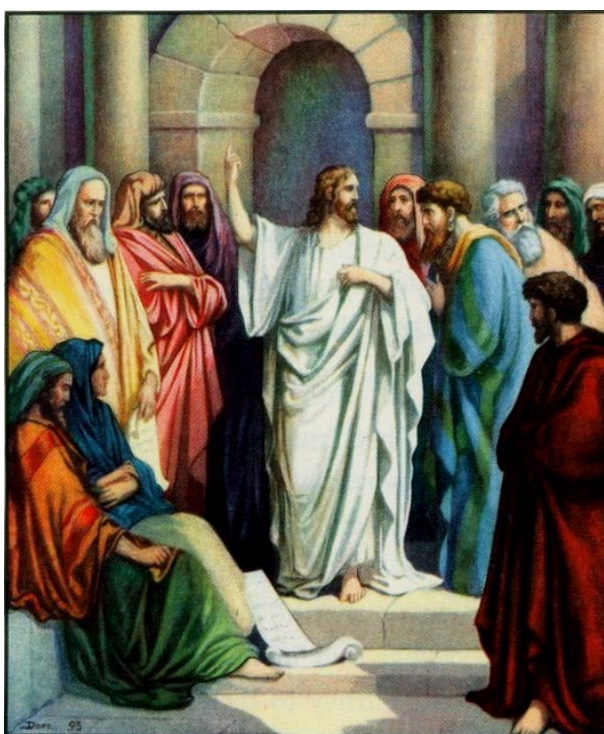
These pages contain the essential cultural notes to aid the reader in understanding the historical, cultural and Jewish issues that shaped the ministry environment of Jesus.

All notes were derived from a larger study known as the *Mysteries of the Messiah* at www.MysteriesOfTheMessiah.com

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TRANSLATED BY _____

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JESUS TEACHING IN THE TEMPLE by Lillie A. Faris.

The essential cultural notes from *Mysteries of the Messiah* were condensed into this eBook for the sole purpose of making it available to translators, who will translate it for their people groups. Please feel free to download a copy and let us know that you are translating it. When finished, please send us a copy so we can post it on our website for others to use.

In His Service and Yours,

William H. "Bill" Heinrich, D.Min.

The purpose of this eBook is to explain the important persons and events that influenced the cultural setting in which Jesus lived and ministered. It presents only the most significant passages and questions related to history, culture, and religious issues of His day. Our goal is to provide a basic study guide on the life of Christ that is suitable for translation into numerous languages so the whole world may obtain a better understanding of our Lord Jesus and His ministry as presented in the gospels.

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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

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Old Testament Period

03.01.03

c. 2100 - 1850 B.C. Abraham

Abraham is the patriarch of the Israelite people who, centuries later, became known as the Jews. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son was symbolic of God the Father demonstrating His love and means of provision to the Jewish people and all humanity through Jesus. Then God and Abraham entered into an everlasting covenant in which God gave him three important promises:

1. Land (Deut. 28-29)
2. Descendants (Davidic Covenant, 2 Sam. 7)
3. Blessings (Mosaic Covenant, Ex. 19-20; New Covenant, Jer. 31)

The Old Testament prophets spoke often about the fulfillment of God's covenants promised to Moses (Deut. 28-30), to Abraham, to David (Ps. 89:1-4; 2 Sam. 7:16), and to Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-30). Therefore, by the first century, the Jewish people waited anxiously for the Messiah to come and fulfill these eternal and unconditional covenants.

03.01.05

1446 B.C. The Exodus; the Torah; Moses and Balaam Predict the Redeemer

Moses recorded two prophecies of a future Messiah (Gen. 49:10. Deut. 18:15). His second prophecy was given by a pagan seer known as Balaam, who was asked by Gentile enemies to curse the Israelites. But God intervened and Balaam blessed them instead. That blessing was also the prophecy in Numbers 24:17 of a coming Messiah. These three prophecies were known to the Jewish people as well as to the Gentile communities. Scholars believe that these were among the earliest prophecies the magi had when they came looking for the Christ child.

03.02.01

1049-931 B.C. The United Monarchy

The term "United Monarchy" refers to the reigns of Kings Saul (reigned 1049-1009 B.C.), David (reigned 1009-969 B.C.), and Solomon (reigned 969-931 B.C.). A few short years after Solomon's reign, the empire was divided. But of these three kings, David was the most significant. He transformed a dozen squabbling Israelite tribes to an international superpower and empire. So powerful was he in ancient history that future generations, even in the time of Christ, reflected upon him in history. When the Jews of the first century used the phrase, "son of David" they were expecting a messiah who would be like King David and would overthrow the

Romans and give them political freedom. Jesus had a different plan – a plan of salvation. (But when He returns to reign for a thousand years, He will rule the world as David ruled his empire.) Once the military actions ceased and the Davidic Empire was established, God made a covenant with David that established his dynasty as God’s choice to rule His people forever (2 Sam. 7:4-17). This covenant, known as the Davidic Covenant, has three features.

1. The dynasty of David would rule over the Promised Land forever (2 Sam. 7:10)
2. David’s dynasty would be permanent (2 Sam. 7:11, 16)
3. The kingdom established by the covenant would also be permanent (2 Sam. 7:13, 16)

David’s climb to kingship was not an easy one, as he had a struggle with King Saul who made numerous attempts to kill him. David’s literary works portray a man who rose from being a shepherd to a powerful monarch, yet one who experienced some horrific failures which were followed by the discovery of God’s love. He may not have realized that some of his words were “messianic.” In fact, not all of the messianic psalms were recognized in the first century as “messianic.” When David wrote his feeling and life experiences, such as in Psalm 16:10 and 22:14-18, these became known as messianic prophecies after the resurrection of Jesus. After David, his son Solomon ruled. He enjoyed a time of relative peace and is remembered for building the temple.

03.02.04

733 B.C. Israel Falls to the Assyrians; Israelites deported to the East; 723 B.C. Israel ends

Because of Israel’s (the ten northern tribes) idolatry, God permitted His people to suffer under pagan rulers and religions. The Assyrians captured them and deported them to the east while at the same time they imported five eastern pagan tribes to live in an area that later became known as Samaria (2 Kgs. 17:24-33). The eastern people intermarried with the few remaining Israelites and their descendants became known as the Samaritans. At the time of Jesus, the Jewish people considered the Samaritans as “half breeds,” and had a great hatred for them.

03.02.08

605 B.C. Judah Falls to the Babylonians; First Deportation of Jews to Babylon

A century after the ten northern tribes had fallen in idolatry, the people of Judea and Jerusalem had done the same. Jeremiah was a young man when he received his commission to be a prophet. He gave the prophecy that the two southern tribes (Benjamin and Judah) would be carried off to Babylon and they would be held captive there for 70 years (Jer. 25:8-11). The first deportation was in 605 B.C., and another in 597 there was a second deportation. But the Jews rebelled again

in 587/86 against the Babylonians. This time they returned and destroyed Solomon's temple and deported more Jews to Babylon.

03.02.14

539/538 B.C. Babylon Falls to the Persians (Persian Empire 539-331 B.C.)

The Persian King Cyrus II (reigned 550-530) united the Persians and Medes to wage war and defeat the Babylonians in 539. The Persian kings not only permitted the Jews to return to their homeland, but also issued four decrees to have the Jews return and rebuild their holy city.

03.02.15

723 - 539 BC: Summary of Significant Developments of Assyrian and Babylonian Captivities

The events that happened between the years 723 to 539 B.C. could fill volumes. There were many dramatic changes, and the following is merely a summary of those events.

Assyrian Captivity:

1. The ten northern tribes were relocated to the east
2. A new ethnic group known as the Samaritans emerged when the remaining northern Israelites intermarried with their new foreign neighbors who were brought in by the Assyrians.

Babylonian Captivity:

1. It is believed that the synagogue as a local institution of worship and community center was established in Babylon.
2. During the Jewish exile the Aramaic language, a sister language to Hebrew, was accepted by the Jews as well as the Aramaic square script alphabet. It was the official language of the Babylonian Empire.
3. The Jews called upon God to bring them a messiah who would deliver them from bondage.
4. When freedom was offered, not all Jews chose to return to their Promised Land. In fact, only a small contingent returned while some remained in Babylon and others migrated to India and China. Many who remained in Babylon maintained strict obedience to the Jewish faith as a means of survival in a pagan culture. Centuries later, their descendants produced the valuable and exhaustive commentary known as the Babylonian

Talmud, which is considered by scholars to be more reliable than the Jerusalem Talmud, which was written in Tiberias.

5. Under Ezra, a new class of religious leaders known as scribes was established in Jerusalem.
6. The Oral Law, as it was known in the days of Jesus, was established by Ezra. However, some Jewish scholars claim it originated with Moses.
7. The name “Jew” as derived from “Judah,” became the new name for the Israelites

03.03.01

538 - 444 B.C. Exiles Return to Judah; Temple Reconstruction Begins

Zerubbabel, who was a descendant of King David, was instrumental in the construction of a new temple which was completed in 515 B.C. But there were some significant differences between it and the earlier one. This one did not have,

1. The sacred Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:10-16)
2. The Holy Fire on the altar (Lev. 1:7)
3. The Glory of God (Shekinah Glory)
4. The tables of stone upon which the finger of God had written the Commandments.
5. The Urim and Thummin no longer shown mysteriously from the breast of the high priest, but by the Second Temple Period, the Scriptures were used to determine the will of God.

Inter-Testamental Period

03.04.01

Introduction

The Old Testament Period ends with the Persians ruling the Jewish land and the New Testament Period opens with the Romans controlling it. Sandwiched between the two was the Greek Empire as well as a century of Jewish independence. The Inter-Testamental Period was filled with wars, rumors of wars, social and religious conflicts, and tensions. Times of peace and

prosperity were rare and brief. In fact, descriptions of what evangelicals today call the “signs of the last days,” also describe this era – an era that culminated with the birth of Jesus. Judaism of this era was a descendant of the Old Testament Hebrew faith, but was not identical to it. On the other hand, it must be distinguished from Rabbinic Judaism which developed mostly after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

This 400-year period is also called the silent Inter-Testamental Period. The term “silent” is used because there were no prophetic voices. Unfortunately, this term suggests that God was not involved in the lives of His people. In fact, there were at least two significant demonstrations of divine intervention:

1. Alexander the Great captured Jerusalem, but did not destroy it.
2. The Jewish farmers had an incredible military victory over the professional army of the Syrian-Greek dictator Antiochus IV Epiphanes, known as the Maccabean Revolt.

03.04.05

334 – 63 B.C. Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Period

Young Alexander took control of Greece upon his father’s assassination and two years later began a massive military campaign against King Darius of the Persian Empire. He developed a well-trained army with 140 to 160 war elephants that he used in five battles. Consequently, in only ten years, he had control of a vast empire and became the fulfillment of one of Daniel’s prophecies (11:3). He gave the Jews first class citizenship and encouraged them to move to his new city of Alexandria in Egypt. Many did and eventually the city became the largest Jewish metropolitan area of the ancient world.

03.04.09

323 B.C. Death of Alexander the Great

Alexander died suddenly at the age of 33 on June 13, 323 B.C. in Babylon, leaving no heirs. His massive empire extended from the Mediterranean Sea to Punjab in India. The four generals, Antigonus I, Cyclops, Ptolemy, and Seleucus I Nicator, who inherited power, established dynasties that for a while lived in peace. Eventually they began to fight each other and by the second century B.C., the Seleucids controlled ancient Israel and Judah.

03.04.17**176-164 B.C. Antiochus IV Epiphanes, King of Syria Controls Jerusalem**

Since the time of Alexander the Great, the Greek kings had an unofficial policy of tolerance toward the Jews and their religion. All villages and communities throughout the Greek Empire adopted the Hellenistic lifestyle with the exception of the Jews. Within the Seleucid dynasty was Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the king of Syria, which for administrative reasons included the entire region of Israel and Judah. Antiochus was undoubtedly the most significant character of the Inter-Testamental Period, as he left a lasting and horrific legacy. He brought forth the “abomination of desolation” with a dozen major points that were recorded in the non-biblical books of *Maccabees* in the second century B.C.:

1. The temple in Jerusalem was dedicated to his god, Zeus Olympus (this was the ultimate “abomination of desolation.”)
2. He erected an altar over the existing altar and offered a pig sacrifice to Zeus Olympus
3. He instituted a month-long celebration of his birthday
4. He instituted the worship of the god Dionysus with a processional march
5. He forbade the observance of the Sabbath and all Jewish festivals.
6. He forbade sacrifices and reading of any Scriptures.
7. Any Jews who violated his laws were sentenced to death.
8. Jews were not permitted to enter their own temple.
9. The Sanhedrin was terminated.
10. He sold the position of temple priesthood.
11. He imported temple prostitutes and used the temple facility as a brothel as part of pagan worship.
12. He stole all of the treasures in the temple, including the veils of fine linen, so that the building was left bare.

In essence, Antiochus declared himself to be a god, and attempted to convert all Jews to his pagan religion. Since they resisted, he instituted intense persecution against them that included killing anyone who had possession of the Torah. Daniel’s prophecy of the Anti-Christ is quite

descriptive of Antiochus. Eventually, they rebelled in what became known as the Maccabean Revolt.

03.04.20

167 B.C. The Maccabean Revolt; Hanukkah – 25 Years of Military Battles and Guerrilla War Begins

The Jews, who at this time were ill-equipped, fought the huge professional Greek army that had 32 war elephants. There were a number of battles, but eventually the Jews won. However, they lived under Greek domination for several generations and some of them had become Hellenized – that is, they accepted the Greek culture. For the next 2 or 3 decades, the following significant Jewish groups would emerge from this cultural clash:

1. Pharisees
2. Sadducees
3. Essenes, who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls (discovered between 1947 and 1956)
4. Hellenists, Jews who accepted the Greek way of life

These four groups are explained in further detail in the Glossary section at the end of this eBook.

03.05.02

164 B.C. December; Temple Consecrated; Sanhedrin Resumes

On the 25th day of Kislev, 164 B.C. the temple was consecrated and God was honored for His divine intervention. Israel was never more vividly conscious of the living God in their presence than at this time in the Inter-Testamental Period. Although a prophet had not spoken in more than two centuries, His Divine presence was unmistakable, as another miracle had taken place.

The dedication of the temple was a time of great joy and celebration. But it was more than a dedication celebration – it was the Feast of tabernacles that had been delayed for three months due to the political situation. That is why the dedication was an eight day event – the Feast was always an eight day celebration of “God with us” or “God living among His people.” But in the process of preparing for the sacred service, the priests discovered they only had enough olive oil for the temple lamps to burn for two days. As the eight-day festival continued, they realized that God multiplied the oil to last until additional oil could be pressed and the temple dedicated. This miraculous event became known as the Feast of Dedication and was celebrated by Jesus in John 10:22. Again, God had made His presence known.

03.05.12

Summary Influence of “Hellenistic Reform” (331 – 63 B.C.) that Shaped Jewish Life in the First Century

Hellenism had a number of positive and negative influences that are recognized in the New Testament. Galatians 4:4 states that in the fullness of time, Jesus came to earth. God had already been at work for centuries in shaping and preparing it to receive His Son. Some of these influences are as follows:

1. In Greek philosophy, man is central to life; whereas in Judaism God is the central figure. In essence, the Greeks were philosophical while the Jews were theological. Furthermore, the God of the Jews was an invisible deity, who had no “sinful human vices,” and whom they called “Father.” This was beyond the comprehension of the Greeks. Their gods and half-gods were formed into idols and had all the vices and pleasures of humanity. The inability of each group to accept and tolerate the differences of the other resulted in tensions and conflicts in Israel. Interestingly, in Egypt the differences were tolerated and peace prevailed.

Amazingly, among the Greeks, the idea that a god might appear in human form was accepted in mythology. Little wonder then that in later years, when they heard that Jesus was God, they accepted this fact while the Jews had great difficulty with it. This belief, coupled with the expectation of a messianic figure, explains in part, why the Greeks laid their mythologies aside and accepted Jesus. Consequently, Christianity exploded in Gentile nations while it was slow to be accepted, and often opposed, in Jewish communities. That is why most of the New Testament *had to be* written in Greek for these new believers.

2. The introduction and use of *koine* Greek was an important development in preparing the world for the gospel. It was the language of the common man. At the time of Jesus, the Roman Empire consisted of a dozen language groups. Had it not been for the invasion of Hellenism, there would have been many more language groups.

3. There was a profound economic unification in the Mediterranean world, especially in international trade. International trade routes were well established centuries earlier in the days of King Solomon, but even more so after Alexander the Great invaded this area. Therefore, by the time Jesus was born, news of His ministry traveled quickly by ancient standards. By the end of the first century A.D., the gospel had belted the Mediterranean Sea.

5. Greek logic and thinking, which is foundational in Western thought processes, is significantly different from how the ancient Jewish people processed information. They thought pictorially. For example, two phrases to describe God in the Old Testament are “tower of strength,” or a “cleft of a rock.” Such descriptions are replaced in the New Testament with words such as “protection” that have a greater feeling of personal and intimate relationship.

6. The Greeks with their philosophical logic and reasoning are generally credited with introducing to the world the question, “why?” along with critical thinking. However, Jewish parents had taught their children to ask “Why?” since the first Passover. The question was established as part of the Passover Seder long before it was popular among the Greeks, but the Greeks popularized it throughout the Gentile world.

7. Those Greeks who achieved success in life occupied their leisure time with philosophical thoughts, debates, and the like. However, that was a small portion of the population. The earliest form of Christianity was outside the sphere of Greek philosophy, and appealed to those whom philosophy did not reach, which may explain the explosive growth of Christianity among the Gentiles. Philosophers, in the meantime, were losing students and, therefore, had very degrading opinions of Christians in terms of philosophy and theology. The significance of this lies in the fact that Hellenism, with its focus on philosophy or rhetoric, alienated many people who then, became attracted to Christianity.

8. The Greco-Roman culture was “set up,” as it were, for the Gentile people to hear the gospel. People were tired of their gods who had no solutions for guilty feelings and their sinful natures. Therefore, some scholars believe that it was Greek philosophy that prepared the Gentile people to receive the concept of Jesus – God in human flesh. This gives added insight to the unique words of Galatians 4:4, that in the “fullness” of time, Jesus came.

9. One of the earliest contributions of Hellenism was the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek – the *Septuagint* in the 3rd century B.C. By the time Jesus began His ministry, scholars and teachers in the entire ancient world understood Greek and could read a Greek Old Testament to confirm the His words.

Hellenism also had its negative effects. The cultural and religious threats that challenged young Jews were,

1. The loss of Jewish interpretation of the Hebraic details of the Old and New Testaments. In essence, the understanding of Jewish literature as written by Jews in a Jewish context was lost. It gave way to the Greek method of interpretation – often one of

allegorical interpretation. That is, the application of a symbolic or spiritual meaning(s) rather than the literal meaning. This would eventually have a huge negative effect on Christian interpretation of Scripture.

2. Assimilation into the pagan culture. The youth were always confronted by the pleasures of the Greeks. To first century Jewish teens, Judaism was an obstacle that prevented them from finding fulfillment in the so-called “true” pleasures of life just as Christianity is seen today by some as an obstacle to the “real” pleasures of the world.

3. Due to the tremendous influences of Greek ideas, the Jews produced a number of writings that were largely apocalyptic, and often combined with various forms of legalism. In the two centuries prior to the birth of Jesus, these books made frequent references to the great disasters that would fall upon humanity, but that the Jews would be saved by a messiah.

4. The worldviews and lifestyles of the Jewish rulers, who became Hellenized were for the most part just as pagan as any Greek or Roman ruler. Their descendants became known as the Sadducees. One can debate if their lives reflected the influence of Hellenism or a horribly depraved sin nature (if there is a difference). Nonetheless, most certainly had no interest in faithfully serving their God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Maccabean Revolt began as a rebellion against the paganism of the Greek tyrants. The Essenes and orthodox Pharisees desired to rid their land of Greek influences, but their efforts were minimized by Jewish Hellenists as well as the number of foreigners in the land. It is important to recognize that there were degrees and varieties of reactions against Hellenism, just as there were among those who embraced it. In the meantime, the Sadducees embraced Hellenism as much as they could without causing a popular revolt to have them removed. Opposing the Sadducees were the Pharisees, who became entrenched in their Jewish ideologies while the Essenes distanced themselves from both the Sadducees and Pharisees. In fact, all of the Jewish factions became polarized in their doctrines and practices.

Finally, from the time the Maccabean Revolt started, until the time when the Romans took control of Israel in 63 B.C., the Jews had numerous squabbles and a civil war. Here is a brief listing:

1. 03.05.05 143-135 B.C. Maccabean Revolt ended, in 135 B.C. The Jews won their land one little piece at a time from the Syrian Greeks.

2. 03.05.06 135-63 B.C. True independence throughout the entire land; Rule of the Hasmoneans. The Hasmoneans were of the Maccabean family and eventually then became known as the Sadducees.
3. 03.05.07 135-104 B.C. During the rule of John Hyrcanus, he destroyed the Samaritan temple and forced the Idumeans (descendants of Esau) to be circumcised as part of their conversion to Judaism.
4. 03.05.08 104 – 102 B.C. When Aristobulus I ruled Israel, he placed his mother and some of his brothers in prison. His mother starved to death.
5. 03.05.09 102 – 76 B.C. Alexander Jannaeus ruled Israel and was brutal to the Gentiles living in the Galilee area. He told them to convert or leave.
6. 03.05.10 90 – 88 B.C. Jewish Civil War; 80 women and 800 Pharisees crucified by the Sadducees.
7. 03.05.11 76 – 67 B.C. When Queen Alexandra Salome reigned, the Pharisees controlled the temple
8. 03.05.13 67 – 63 B.C. Civil war between Aristobulus II and John Hyrcanus II; Roman Invasion
9. 03.05.16 63 B.C. Rome took advantage of the Jewish civil war and conquered Israel (Judah).

03.05.33

Summary of the Messianic Expectations and Political Tensions among Various People Groups at the Time of Jesus.

Messianic anticipations are as follows:

1. The Cumaean people expected a messiah (see 03.05.24)
2. 63 B.C. In Rome, the Romans anticipate the birth of a king who would rule the earth (see 03.05.15)

3. 50 B.C. Rabbi Nehumias predicted the birth of a messiah in 50 years (see 03.05.19)
4. 42-38 B.C. The Roman poet Virgil predicted the birth of a messiah (see 03.05.24)
5. The Parthians, who sent the magi, obviously expected a messiah.
6. The Samaritans expected a messiah they called the *Taheb*.
7. The Persian Zoroaster holy book *Bahman Vasht* mentions a messiah and star.

However, within the Jewish communities there was another serious issue of concern – hatred and bitterness between various religious sects. While the cultural influences of this era have been listed elsewhere, it is important to summarize the social and political tensions. It has often been said that this was a time of *Pax Romana*. While there was limited military conflict, the social-political tension was worse than what exists today in the Middle East. The hatred between various groups was as follows:

The Jews hated the Samaritans because:

1. For theological reasons, the Samaritans altered the Torah and rejected the rest of the Hebrew Bible
2. The Samaritans kept their old alphabet while the Jews adopted the Aramaic square script of Babylon (it is today's "Hebrew" alphabet).
3. They confronted the Jews while rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem in the days of Nehemiah and Ezra.
4. They fought with the Syrian-Greeks against the Jews during the Maccabean Revolt.
5. They denied their Jewish background and worshipped Greek gods to avoid persecution from Antiochus IV Epiphanes.
6. They persecuted, and sometimes killed Jews traveling through Samaria toward Jerusalem.
7. They desecrated the temple by throwing human bones in the sanctuary during Passover.

The Samaritans hated the Jews because:

1. Theological reasons: they believed the Jews altered the Torah and accepted the rest of the Hebrew Bible.
2. Jewish leader John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple in 128 B.C.
3. The sons of Hyrcanus captured and sold many Samaritans into slavery in 108-07 B.C.
4. The Jews won the Maccabean Revolt
5. The Jewish temple was well-known for its corrupt Sadducean leadership

Leading Pharisees hated the Sadducees because:

1. For theological reasons, the Sadducees believed only in the Torah and rejected the rest of the Hebrew Bible.
2. The Jewish temple was well-known for its corrupt Sadducean leadership.
3. In the 90-88 B.C. Civil War, the Sadducees crucified 800 Pharisees and, as they hung dying on crosses, their wives and children were slaughtered in front of them.
4. All Jews hated the descendants of the Hasmonean (Maccabean) Dynasty because murder, corruption, bribery, and total corruption existed in nearly every leader except Queen Salome.

The Sadducees hated the Pharisees because:

1. For theological reasons, the Pharisees believed in the Torah, and other Scriptures, but held the Oral Law in higher authority.
2. The Pharisees required the Sadducees to perform ceremonial rituals according to their traditions, otherwise the people would have rioted.
3. The fact that the Pharisees controlled the synagogues throughout the land and overseas was a point of jealousy for the Sadducees.

4. The Sadducees hated the Pharisees, especially those who did not have formal religious training. In 63 B.C., the Sadducees killed Honi; the miracle worker did not attend any formal school in Jerusalem and dared to speak of righteous living.

The Essenes hated non-Essenes:

1. For theological reasons, the Essenes believed all other Jews left the orthodox faith of Judaism.
2. The Essenes believed they were God's chosen remnant and everyone else would eventually be destroyed by the messiah. They were, however, open to have Jews join their group after a three-year initiation period.

Orthodox Jews hated the Hellenists because:

1. For theological reasons, the orthodox Jews (mainly the Pharisees and Essenes) were passionately angry with the Hellenists for abandoning Judaism and accepting the Hellenistic culture of sexuality and materialism.
2. The Hasidim (Pharisees) Jews hated the Hellenists for killing 60 of their members in 162 B.C. (see 03.05.03).

Jews hated the Idumeans because:

1. The long history with the descendants of Ishmael (Esau/ Edomites/ Idumeans) was one of constant warfare with the Israelites/Jews (see the book of Obadiah).
2. Nearly all the Jews hated Herod the Great because he was an Idumean. The Romans placed him in the position of King of the Jews because he was an effective administrator and military leader. The Romans wanted a governor with whom the Jews would not join and start a revolt. Herod was the perfect candidate.
3. Herod was the ideal agent of Hellenism, but skillfully respected and manipulated Jewish sensitivities to prevent riots.

The Herodians hated the orthodox Jews and Zealots because:

1. They opposed the Herodian dynasty and Roman Empire.
2. They were nationalistic and opposed Rome.

Into this quagmire of human conflict Jesus came to teach the principles of the Kingdom of God. Clearly the Sermon on the Mount was absolutely stunning to His audience – a message they had seldom heard except from an occasional small-town rabbi.

03.06.04

4 B.C. The Death of Herod the Great

Herod the Great received his title “the Great” for his architectural achievements.

1. He remodeled and enlarged the Jewish temple built by Zerubbabel five centuries earlier. But the temple was not completed until A.D. 62, decades after Herod’s death – only a few years before the Romans destroyed it.
2. In Jerusalem, he rebuilt a beautiful palace for himself in the Upper City along the western side.
3. He enlarged the Antonia Fortress that was located beside the temple.
4. Two miles below Bethlehem he removed the top of one mountain and placed it on the top of another, then built a palace fortress on top the second mountain and named it the Herodian.
5. He built an artificial harbor and city he called Caesarea Maritima (by the sea)
6. He built temples to pagan gods in many areas outside of the Jewish land, as well as theaters and hippodromes.

As a military commander he was incredibly cruel, even by Roman standards.

1. When Rome gave him the command of the military in 40 B.C., he brutally removed the highway men and robbers who threatened traveling caravans.
2. The Parthian capture of Jerusalem in 40 B.C. was a humiliating event for the Romans. Herod successfully defeated them and recaptured the city.
3. He assassinated anyone whom he suspected might overthrow him, including members of his family – a number of his ten wives and many children were killed by his death squads.

4. His attempt to kill the infant Jesus was one of the minor events of his life.

The last months of Herod's life were misery beyond description. Being in constant fear of being overthrown, he immediately killed those he imagined would challenge him. For example, in a single day he deprived Matthias the position of high priesthood, and had another Matthias and his companions who raised a conspiracy, burned alive. That night, as if an ominous sign came from heaven itself, first century historian Josephus said that there was an eclipse of the moon. Shortly thereafter, his body began to putrefy while he was still alive. Worms consumed his organs as he groaned in agony. He burnt up with fevers, gasping air; he could hardly draw his tainted breath. He attempted suicide, but that failed. Josephus tells that he died a painful, prolonged, and agonizing death at age 70.

When he died, his empire was divided by the Roman Senate. Herod Antipas received Galilee and a Jewish area east of the Jordan River known as Perea. Herod Philip received a northern section which is for the most part is outside of the gospels with the exception of the Banias narrative. Archelaus received Judah, Jerusalem, Samaria, and Idumea, but he was such a poor and violent administrator that the Romans deposed him. That is why Pontius Pilate was the governor during the ministry years of Jesus.

04.01.01

Introduction: The World Stage is Set; John's Prologue

The entire Bible is a story of God's love and salvation for humanity. To that end, Galatians 4:4 states that in the fullness of time Jesus came. Yet the term "fullness" can be understood only within the cultural context of the first century and the significant people and events that preceded it. There were four major areas of preparation that had to be completed before "fullness" was achieved in preparing the world for coming of the "Anointed One." They are,

1. The Greeks: They provided a cultural milieu and language.
2. The Romans: They provided elements of law and order throughout the empire and improved transport. This was a profound accomplishment as the previous two centuries were filled with violence, political and religious chaos, persecution, and assassinations.
3. The people throughout the Roman Empire and in regions beyond were expecting a messianic figure or king of some kind. From the Roman senate to the common slave, there were expectations of the appearance of a very important person.
4. The Jewish people provided the religious background and foundation necessary for Jesus to come.

04.01.04

Luke 1:1-4 Introduction by Luke

Luke was by profession a physician and his medical training required him to be observant and dedicated to detail. He researched his material, and his writing style reflects a sophisticated Greek style that is uniquely different from other New Testament authors. So when he made statements like “I have carefully investigated” and that he spoke with “original eyewitnesses and servants,” he underscored the significance of his truthful writings.

04.02.02

Matthew 1:1-17 The Genealogy of Jesus as Recorded by Matthew

Critics have said that there are several issues with this text, the most important one being the question: why did Matthew omit several names from his genealogical list (Mt. 1:1-17)?

Matthew’s purpose was not to present every single name, but to present a general listing with an emphasis on King David that his Jewish audience clearly understood. But in modern thinking, why did he divide the list of names into three groups? This is a clear example of how written communication is at times beyond the common definition of words. In this case, there is a mystery of the term “fourteen generations,” and the explanation is as follows:

In biblical times there was no standardized numerical system of numbers, but rather, alphabet letters had numeric values. For example, students today are familiar with the system of Roman numerals where I = one, V = five, X = ten, etc. Letters are combined to create specific numbers, such as XXIV is 24. Likewise, the Jews had their system.

When Matthew presented his genealogy, he wrote it in a manner so the Jews would recognize the Hebrew numeric value of the most important king in their history, King David. The name “David” spelled with three consonant Hebrew letters with their corresponding numeric values are as follows: *daleth* = 4, *waw* = 6, and *daleth* = 4. The name of “David” is a simple arithmetic problem of $4+6+4=14$. Therefore, to see the written number 14 is also to see the name “David.” Messianic Jews and many other scholars agree on this point, including the fact that the last group has only 13 names, not 14. So why is the last group counted as 14? Jechoniah is named twice, rightly as the last member of the second group. Or perhaps Matthew counted “Jesus” (pre-resurrection name) as number 13 and “Christ” (post-resurrection name) as number 14. It is a bit unnerving to modern readers when names are skipped as in a case like this. Yet this was part of first century biblical hermeneutics and every Jew understood and accepted it.

To Matthew, the numeric value of 14 is of far greater importance than recording every name. In addition, Matthew had no problem skipping names, because a grandson or great-grandson was also considered to be a son. Therefore, there are no mistakes in the genealogical record. He omitted names in order to have three groups of “14” that spelled “David.”

At this point it is also important to explain why there are three groups of names, not two or four groups. The most emphatic way to say anything in Hebrew was to repeat it three times. In this case, the numerical value of King David was underscored three times to emphasize its importance, and was also a convenient memory technique. Two other examples are as follows:

1. When the prophet Isaiah wanted to emphasize the holiness of the Lord, he repeated the word *holy* three times (Isa. 6:3).
2. When the apostle John described the future horrible plagues, he said, “woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth” (Rev. 8:13).

The genealogical records were important for these reasons:

1. From the earliest days as a nation, the Jewish people considered their ancestry important. Their promised land was divided into tribal areas. In the course of doing business, at times land was sold or mortgaged. Every fifty years the lands reverted to their original owners, so a record of genealogy was important.
2. Genealogies were critically important for certain religious or political offices. Amazingly, a priest gained his position by birth as proven by these records, but a rabbi owed his position to himself and dedicated study.

04.03.04.Q1

Why was it Important for Mary to Visit Elizabeth?

A specific reason is not given in the biblical text. However, at this time for a woman to be pregnant and not married was a huge curse and shame. Only Mary and Joseph realized that her pregnancy was of God. So to avoid becoming a social outcast in Nazareth, she went to live with Elizabeth who was very elderly and also pregnant. When people recognized the miracle of Elizabeth’s condition, they would be more likely to accept Mary’s pregnancy.

04.03.08

Matthew 1:18-25 Joseph is told of Mary’s Conception

Joseph was told by an angel, “don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife.” The news of the pregnancy was shocking. In a small village, such news was unheard of and was considered a curse upon a family for decades to come. Joseph had the right to keep the dowry she brought into the relationship, and he also could make one of the following four choices:

1. Marry her quickly and have everyone assume the child was an early delivery – except that would have broken the traditional one-year waiting period between betrothal and marriage, so the gossip would never end;
2. Make a public confession of the pregnancy which would NOT have resulted in the bride being stoned to death (a Mosaic law that was seldom observed) because that would have caused the death of an unborn child. Or,
3. Have a quiet divorce and send Mary into another village or city to have the child. After all, one of the two most popular rabbis, Rabbi Hillel, had made divorce easier to obtain with the modern equivalent of “no-fault” divorce (the cause of later discussions by Jesus).
4. However, it was not until the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph that he realized that he was to exercise a fourth choice – to marry her and be the legal father of the boy-child who would be known as “Immanuel” (fulfillment of Isa. 7:14).

Joseph had to choose between God’s mercy and his legal rights. He chose God’s mercy and no doubt was frequently challenged later by the out-of-wedlock birth, even in distant Bethlehem.

04.03.08.Q2

Why could Joseph *not* have Stoned Mary to Death (Mt. 1:18-25)?

The Mosaic Law requires the stoning of an unfaithful man and woman (Deut. 22:23-24), but by the first century this punishment was seldom enforced. By this time Jewish leaders differentiated between two types of adulterous women – the married woman and engaged virgin. According to the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 50a, the punishments were as follows:

1. The adulterous married woman was sentenced to death by hanging.
2. The adulterous betrothed virgin was sentenced to death by stoning.

Granted, in either case the punishment was death. It was simply a matter of how the execution was to be performed. However, the Romans removed the authority for the Sanhedrin to exercise capital punishment in Judea. Therefore, Babylonian comment could have been written for two reasons:

1. For Jews living in the Diaspora who were not under the authority of the laws of Judea.
2. To reflect the ideals of Judaism, not for the actual intended punishment.

Either way, if she was found guilty by the rabbinic court, the end was the same. Nonetheless, being unfaithful was one thing, but being pregnant and unfaithful was another. Joseph could not, would not, have stoned Mary for four reasons:

1. As previously stated, the custom of stoning an adulterous woman was completely out of use by the first century in most areas where Jews lived. At a later time the scribes and Pharisees brought before Jesus a woman they accused of adultery. But that was only a hypothetical question, which leads to the second reason.
2. Capital punishment was eliminated by the Romans under the reign of Herod the Great with the exception of Gentiles who entered restricted holy areas of the temple. Herod's domain included the district of Galilee, but the legal authority of the Sanhedrin was limited to Judea.
3. The stoning could not have been committed by Joseph, because the couple's wedding had not yet taken place. Cultural rules required her father or older brother to carry out the death sentence. The same is true today among orthodox Muslims, where the family execution is known as an "honor killing" and is supported by Sharia Law. However, such an execution would have only occurred after a judicial action, not by a family in revenge.
4. But the most important reason is the fact that since Mary was pregnant, stoning her would have resulted in the death of an innocent child, which would have made the executioner guilty of the child's murder.

Therefore, a divorce was Joseph's only option until an angel directed him to do otherwise. But a quiet divorce was an expensive option for Joseph because he would have been obligated to support her. His decision to consider this, illustrates the fact that for Mary's sake, he would take the expensive route rather than the socially honorable and economically affordable one.

And this is why: during the previous two centuries, the Pharisees attempted to bring the people back to basic Torah instruction by emphasizing the kindness of God rather than legalistic attitudes. This was obviously contradictory to many of their other rules and contrary to what many students of the Bible learn today. One of the reforms they instituted was that a husband had to pay support for the wife he divorced. Not all Pharisees agreed as there were many religious sects under the Pharisee umbrella. Amazingly, while they are justly criticized for their legalistic harshness, they should also be noted for some of their kind and responsible landmark decisions.

In summary, if Joseph had accused Mary of adultery, a public divorce based on adultery would have cost him nothing. He would have saved his family's honor and kept her dowry. But a quiet divorce would have cost him alimony payments. However, then he received a message from an angel and he chose to follow the difficult road of life that God had chosen for them.

04.03.10.Q1**Where was Jesus Born?**

Of course we know that Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem located within the District of Judea, but maybe we can be a bit more specific about the miraculous birth. At this time, many people kept valuable animals, such as a donkey or cow, in their homes. Furthermore, homes built on the sides of a hill were often in front of a cave. Throughout Jewish history it was common for caves to be used for tombs, homes, stables, and temporary shelters. The cave was cool in the hot summers and warm in the cold winters. An example is found in 1 Samuel 28 where King Saul went to see the witch (medium) of Endor. She took a calf from “within her house” (v. 24), killed it, prepared it, and served the king and his servants.

Jesus was born in a stable, but it is unknown if this was a stable only for animals or part of a home. Two early church fathers and historians, Justin Martyr in the mid-second century and Origen in the mid-third century, both said that Jesus was born in a cave in Bethlehem.

Scripture says that Mary “laid Him in a manger.” The word *manger* is often used in this verse, but it is an old English word meaning *feeding trough for domestic animals*. Such feeding troughs were not made of wood, but carved out of stone as shown below.



04.03.10.D A TYPICAL STONE MANGER (FEEDING TROUGH). Mangers were feed troughs carved from a large limestone block as this one, or carved into the side of a cave. Jesus was most likely laid to rest on a bed of straw in a manger similar to this one found near Jerusalem. The newborn child would have been washed, gently rubbed with salt to prevent infection, and wrapped with a large soft cloth. Photograph by the author at the Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem.

04.04.01

Luke 2:15-20 Bethlehem: Shepherds Honor the Infant Jesus

Shepherding was not an occupation on the bottom of the social ladder, but it was certainly was a lowly one. Since it was a 7-day a week job, shepherds could not observe all of the Mosaic commandments. But according to the Oral Law, it was *above* the three occupations for which a wife could divorce her husband – dung collector, leather tanner, and copper smelter. It was above the occupation of tax collectors who were often condemned by the rabbis. But shepherding was close to camel drivers. A family said it was cursed if a son decided to enter this form of livelihood.

However, since Bethlehem was a holding area for sheep that were to be sacrificed at the temple, the rabbis elevated the status of those shepherds. They were known as the *Sanctified Shepherds of the Seed of Jacob*. They had to care for the sheep and herd them from Bethlehem to the temple. The grazing fields were also “sanctified.” These shepherds and their families lived according to strict rabbinic rules and regulations. It was an honor to be a shepherd of the sacrificial sheep, in spite of the degrading occupation.

Jesus, God’s sacrifice for humanity, was born where sheep were raised for sacrifice. Just as angels guarded the Christ child, it was the shepherds who had guarded the sheep and who were the first to be invited to see the Messiah. For centuries, sheep were raised on these hills that would eventually sacrificially die for the sins of their shepherds (Ex. 12:1-13); now a shepherd was born here who would die for the sins of His sheep (Jn. 10:11).

04.04.06.Q1

How does the Prophecy in Matthew 2:6 Agree with Micah 5:2?

The apparent conflict arises because part of Matthew's quotation is found in Micah, but another part is found in 2 Samuel 5:2. The answer lies in understanding how first century rabbis interpreted Scripture; a matter of first century hermeneutics. Rabbis often took the liberty to cite quotations given by two prophets, but gave the credit to the better known prophet. Therefore, Matthew’s prophecy does agree with the Old Testament because he used the common method of quoting Scripture. He presented a paraphrase of Micah 5:2 with emphasis on the small village of Bethlehem as the fulfillment of prophetic words. Matthew said that the smallest village of Judea was where God’s greatest gift came from in fulfillment of Micah’s prophecy.

04.04.06.Q3**Was the Star of Bethlehem really a Star?**

The wise men, also known as magi, said they came “for we saw His star in the east.” This phrase has been fuel for microanalysis, debates, and criticism. Several opinions of the “star” are presented in this study, followed by the opinion of this writer. But first notice the unique features of the star:

1. It moved erratically compared to other stars; east to west, then north to south
2. It appeared and disappeared at least twice.
3. It apparently was not visible to everyone.
4. It literally came close to a house in Bethlehem and hovered over it.
5. It was seen only by a selected few people.
6. This star is referred to a pronoun “His.”

Obviously this was not a natural heavenly body commonly referred to as a “star.” While it was observed in the east and traveled westward, there were never any straight-line east-west roads. In fact, the terrain of the land would make such a road impossible and, furthermore, there were no rivers, wells, or other water sources in the vast northern section of the Arabian Desert (as it was called then) directly east of Jerusalem. Therefore, when the magi came from the east and traveled west, they most certainly followed a star that took them on the road that circumvented the desert. Incidentally, it appears that only they – the magi – saw it. It moved, stood still, changed direction, evidently was over the city of Jerusalem, changed direction from westbound to southward, hovered over a house, and still no one else noticed it. How strange!

This writer suggests that the movement pattern of this so-called star and its position over a specific house eliminates the possibility of a true physical star, although that is how it appeared to only the magi. This situation permits only two divine possibilities:

1. It was either an angel of light (cf. Num. 24:17; Job 38:17; Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7; 2 Pet. 1:19; Jude 13; Rev. 1:20; 2:28; 9:1; 12:24), or
2. It was the Shekinah Glory of God to the Gentiles.

04.04.06.Q4**Who were the Wise Men/Magi?**

The magi were the proverbial “wise men” from a royal court of the Parthian Empire, although other kingdoms such as China, India, and possibly Arabia, also had magi. They were

knowledgeable in mathematics, the sciences and astronomy as well as astrology. More importantly, they were advisors to kings and held positions of educators and ambassadors. However, over the centuries the definition of the name changed with an emphasis on astrology, or Oriental soothsayers (as in Acts 12:6).

04.04.07

Matthew 2:9-12 Bethlehem: The Magi Honor Jesus

When the magi arrived, they “presented him with gifts.” These gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were incredibly expensive and of prophetic significance for three reasons:

1. Gold was the symbol of royalty.
2. Frankincense was used for a number of products, including medicines, perfumes, and cosmetics. It was one of four ingredients used to make the incense in the tabernacle (Ex. 30:34) and temple. It is a pungent, bitter yellow substance from the genus tree, which, when burned, emits a highly prized fragrance. It was so valuable that it was carefully guarded along the trade routes where it was produced near the Red Sea and in Southern Arabia. Pliny said that in Alexandria, frankincense was so expensive, that when the spice workers left their place of employment, they had to remove all their clothes to prove that none of the valuable ointment was being stolen.
3. Myrrh also has a pleasant fragrance and was made from the myrrh tree. The tree sap could be dissolved in wine to make a bitter-tasting but mild anesthetic (cf. Mk. 15:23). It was also used for burial, medicinal, and cosmetic purposes. It grew in South Arabia and North Somalia and shipped throughout the known world. The Hebrews used it as one of five ingredients needed to make anointing oil (Ex 30:2-24). It was offered to Jesus as an analgesic when He was on the cross (Mk 15:23) and placed on His body after He was laid in the tomb (Jn 19:39). Myrrh was used to embalm the dead; a gift given to One who was to die.

04.06.02

Luke 2:41-50 Jerusalem: Jesus Visits the Temple

The 12th year of a child’s life was an extremely important year. There is a reason why the Scriptures refer to Jesus “when he was 12 years old.” During that year he or she was examined by rabbis to determine if the basics of Judaism and the responsibilities of adulthood were understood. Reciting the Shema was how a pre-teen acknowledged that he was under the rule of God and, in fact, had taken upon himself the “Kingdom of God.” In essence, the child examined his or her own heart for the need of God in their life. Then, on the day after the 13th birthday, he

or she became responsible for his or her own spiritual welfare and as such became a son/daughter of the commandments. On the New Testament side, anyone at any age can come to God when they recognize their need for God. In both Judaism and Christianity the adult, not the child, makes the decision to accept or reject God, rather than a choice being made by parents for an infant. Younger children, however, are still dedicated to God in both Judaism and Christianity.

However, rather than being examined by the local rabbi, when Jesus was 12 years old, He was examining the most highly educated Jewish scholars in the temple. He was “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.” It is rather astounding that a 12 year old boy would have a dialog with the doctors of theology and Jewish law (both Written and Oral), especially since He only attended the local synagogue school and had no further training. This leads to a very interesting question:

04.06.02.Q1

How did Jesus attain the Incredible Knowledge that He displayed at the Temple when He was merely 12 years old (Lk. 2:41-50)?

The answer is found in Isaiah 50:4-9. Every morning, He spent time with His heavenly Father who taught Him.

04.07.01.Q1

What kind of Work did Jesus, as a carpenter, do between His Childhood Years and when He began His ministry?

There is complete silence in the gospels concerning the life of Jesus between the age of 12 and when He began His ministry. All that is known is that He was a carpenter's son, and as such, He earned His living as a carpenter. Therefore, let us examine the trade of a carpenter.

For thousands of years houses were built of stone in the mountain and desert regions, or with mud bricks along the coastal areas. Except for rafters and doors, there was very little wood in them. Many scholars believe the carpenter was a master stone mason and wood worker, the latter being a craftsman who made a wide variety of wooden household and agricultural utensils. Others argue that the carpenter built the wooden supports needed for the construction of Roman arches rather than trim and shape stones. A partial list of carpentry tools is found in Isaiah 44:13, such as the measuring line, marker, chisel, and compass which have been used throughout history in woodworking as well as masonry construction. The Greek poet Homer (c. 850 B.C.) said that the carpenter constructed ships, houses, and temples. Clearly, he was a highly skilled craftsman among working men. His trade taught Him to transform dead and useless objects into living and useful things; that the meanest material fashioned and shaped can become precious,

friendly and useful to men. Later He would teach the divine principles of the Kingdom of God so that dead and useless people could become precious, friendly, and useful to God.



04.07.01.B A FIRST CENTURY “CARPENTER” AT WORK. This wood worker, in authentic costume, is employed at his woodcraft in a manner similar to the work of Joseph and Jesus. Photograph taken at the reconstructed Nazareth Village by the author.



04.07.01.D A PLOW AND YOKE FOR TWO DONKEYS. This plow and yoke, typical of biblical times, were acquired by the writer in Nazareth. The natural formations of tree limbs were selected for the various parts of the implement. The 2nd century church father Justin Martyr said that Jesus and His father made plows and yokes. Photograph by the author.



04.07.01.I THE KITCHEN OF A RABBI’S HOUSE. The author stands in a reconstructed kitchen of a 4th century rabbi’s home in Katzrim. The hanging shelf kept food safe from wild animals. In small villages, the rabbi generally had the nicest home. Photograph by Paivi Heinrich.

The homes of Jewish peasants generally had only two or three rooms, a family bedroom and another “family room,” which included the cooking area. It was the only room where guests could visit unless there was an attached courtyard. The home in which Jesus lived may also have been a shelter for some valuable domestic animals. These were kept indoors at night as not to be threatened by thieves or wild animals. An example is found in 1 Samuel 28 where King Saul went to see the witch (medium) of Endor. She took a calf from “within her house” (v. 24), killed it, prepared it, and served the king and his servants. Jesus said in Matthew 5:14-15 that a lamp that has been lit will give light to the whole house. That was because houses were of simple design and consisted of a large room and a smaller sleeping room. The wall separating the two rooms often had square openings called “windows” through which fresh air flowed and allowed some light to shine in.

05.01.02**Luke 3:1-6 (See also Mt. 3:1-3; Mk. 1:2-4) The Wilderness Near Jordan, A.D. 26: John Declares his Ministry**

The gospel writer said that “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 every writer 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,

In the eighteenth year of Israel’s King Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijam became king over Judah.

1 Kings 15:1

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 Kings 13:1

“Prepare the way for the Lord.” The phrase “prepare the way” had a cultural meaning that indicated a king or other dignitary would be coming soon. Since roads were generally in bad shape after the winter rains, in the springtime road crews repaired the roads so the king could have a quick and safe trip.

05.01.03**Matthew 3:4 John Baptizes the Believers**

Matthew stated that “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. 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 those ancient prophets as well as with the people who were reduced to economic slavery by the Romans.

There is a question as to whether John the Baptist really ate “locusts and wild honey” or if this phrase had a different meaning (Mt. 3:4-6). The unusual answer is both. 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, also known as “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.
2. The most likely definition is that the *locust* was the bean pod of the locust tree. This wild edible plant has a taste similar to chocolate and is commonly known today as *carob* or *carob pod*. 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 did not grow in the desert areas where John did most of his preaching, the pods are easy to carry and preserved well in the desert climate.



05.01.03.A THE “LOCUST” OR FRUIT OF THE CAROB TREE. The carob tree was also known as the locust tree, which produces a bean that was commonly eaten by poor peasants. The beans can be stored year-round, while the locust insect has a life

cycle of only one or two months. Photographed by the author who held two “locust” pods in his hand.

05.02.02

Luke 3:15-18 (see also Mt. 3:11-12; Mk. 1:7-8) John Announces the Christ

The gospels indicate that John used the phrase, “His winnowing shovel.” This is an agricultural term 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 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. John the Baptist use judgmental language when he used the phrase “winnowing shovel” (v. 17). This was done on a threshing floor, and afterwards the chaff was used for fuel in kitchen stoves.



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 reconstructed Nazareth Village by the author.

05.02.03.Q2

Why did Jesus have to wait *past* Age 30 to begin His Ministry (Lk. 3:23)?

According to Moses, the age of ministry 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 aged 30, but older when He began His ministry. That raises the question as to why Jesus waited until He was past 30 to begin His ministry.

He could not have begun earlier because that would have broken the Mosaic commandment of Numbers 4:3-43. But Jesus had to wait until the ministry of John the Baptist was completed. 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 teaching ministry. (He began with a teaching ministry and had five disciples before He performed His first miracle in Cana.)

05.04.02

John 1:35-51 The First Disciples

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 aspiring disciple would ask the rabbi – in this case Jesus – “Where are you staying?” (cf. Jn.1:38b). The question was not necessarily to be taken literally, but in essence meant, “Would you consider me to be one of your disciples (or students)?”

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, “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 today 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.

The passage John 1 has a unique phrase, “under the fig tree” (v. 48). 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. Therefore, to sit under a fig tree was an ancient body language that said one was a serious student of Scripture. If someone said, “Levi enjoys sitting under a fig tree,” it meant that he enjoyed reading the Hebrew Bible. 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. Furthermore, the fig tree 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. 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.

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.

05.04.02.Q1

What were the Jewish Expectations of the Messiah?

There were as many opinions of what the messiah would be like as there were religious sects. But most importantly is that absolutely no one expected a Messiah – that is God in the human form of Jesus. Nearly all Jews agreed upon was that he would be a political figure who would overthrow the Roman occupiers. The challenge that Jesus had was for them to see Him as the true Messiah, even though He had no intentions of overthrowing the Romans.

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. For centuries God had been preparing the people for the coming of their Lord. Now there were as many opinions of him as there were opinions of how long he would rule upon this earth. Here are some comments by rabbis who lived in the days of our Lord:

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 and how long he would be here. Obviously they were confronted with a major paradigm shift because Jesus looked like an ordinary man and He was not the mystical political deliverer they expected. Therefore, Jesus had to carefully change their preconceived expectations of the messiah.

05.05.02

John 2:1-11 The Wedding in Cana

In John 2:1 the passage reads, “On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee.” So what was so important about the third day, if anything? The Jewish people have a culture of blessing each other whenever possible, and to live under the blessing of God as much as possible. Weddings were performed on the third day of the week because at the time of Creation, on the third day is the only time God said “It was good” twice. The rabbis wanted God to bless every family, every marriage, with “it is good” as often as possible.

The obvious question that is eventually pondered is this: why did Mary ask Jesus to resolve the crisis at the wedding (Jn. 2:1-11)? To run out of wine at such a festive occasion was a huge embarrassment to the bride and groom. Help was urgently needed, and scholars have suggested that the primary reason Mary asked Jesus to help in this situation was because she was part of the wedding party. In other words, it was probably Mary’s sister or other close relative who was getting married. In addition, there are several reasons why Mary 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.”
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 by now had 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 popular teacher. She probably questioned that if some Hebrew prophets performed miracles, would her son do likewise?

With all these incredible thoughts and experiences she knew there was something profoundly different about her Jesus. So why not ask Him to do something? 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.

05.05.02.Q3

Did the Wine that Jesus created contain Alcohol (Jn. 2:1-11)?

All wines contained alcohol. It was symbolic of joy and happiness, but drunkenness was highly condemned. It was the custom of the time that ordinary wine was diluted with water, but Jewish writers differ on how much it was diluted. The range was one part wine to two parts water, to one part wine and four parts water. Once diluted, it would be impossible to become intoxicated with the beverage.

05.05.05

John 3:1-21 Jerusalem: Jesus met an Inquiring Rabbi; Nicodemus and His New Birth

In John 3:10 Jesus said to Nicodemus, “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.

It is unfortunate that some have criticized Nicodemus for meeting Jesus at night time, as if it was a shameful meeting. But popular rabbis always had a following of students and listeners. When walking around the Old City of Jerusalem today, one can acquire posters of popular rabbis that teenagers purchase for their rooms – like rock stars in the West today. The meeting was not a matter of shame, but at times one simply needs to have a private conversation without visitors and followers looking on.

While Nicodemus had questions, he certainly was a careful thinker who did not follow the crowd. After the crucifixion, he was the first to come with spices of myrrh and aloes for the body of Jesus. 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?

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, during the days of Hezekiah the brazen serpent became an idol (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 is the perfect example of how two cultural perceptions, separated by centuries, leads to perplexing conclusions.

From 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. When the ancient Israelites looked upon the snake on top of the pole, they looked upon renewed life. Today, when we look upon Jesus on the cross, we look upon renewed life. In the Old Testament Period, it was certainly not the snake that healed, nor was it Moses, but it was God. Centuries later it was Jesus who healed. Ironically, among the Greeks and Romans the symbolic snake appeared with ancient gods and goddesses of healing as well as in pagan accounts of virgin births.

06.01.03

John 4:4-26 The Village of Sychar: The Samaritan Woman

Jesus went through Samaria about 4 months prior to the Samaritan Passover, at 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.

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.
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 deep 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 finally concluded

that He was the long expected *Tahbe*/messiah without the performance of any signs or wonders. Ironically, the Jews required a sign.

It is difficult to describe the hatred the Jews and Samaritans had for each other. In the two previous centuries the relations between them had become strained to the breaking point, so that 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) demonstrated the strong love Jesus had for them, 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; remove from this file

Those who live in Seir and the Philistines,

And the foolish people that live in Shechem.

Ben Sirach 50:25-26

Jesus used the image of “living water” when speaking of Himself. According to Jewish tradition, there were six grades of water: Naturally flowing water was the best and stagnant water was the worst. Only flowing water in a stream or water in a lake was acceptable for mikvaoth (or mikvah *singular*) immersions. 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 Jewish tradition 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*.

The Samaritan woman was a “type and shadow” of her people. When Jesus was speaking to the Samaritan woman, He was also speaking to an “adulterous” people. 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 the first century historian Josephus, each of these five people groups brought their own gods with them into Samaria.

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.

When she said **“I know that the Messiah is coming,” (John 4:25)** she expressed the opinions of thousands of people throughout the ancient world.

06.03.08

Mark 1:40-45 (See also Mt. 8:1-4; Lk. 5:12-16) 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.” ⁴² Immediately the disease left him, and he was healed. ⁴³ Then He sternly warned him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴ telling him, “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go and show yourself to the priest, and offer what Moses prescribed for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” ⁴⁵ 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 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.

However, the ancients described the three kinds of leprosy in simpler forms:

1. Black
2. Clear white
3. Dull white

The physician said in Luke 5:38 that the man was *full of disease*; the word *full* being used in other phrases such as veins being *full of blood* or the ears *full of noise*. Those with this condition were known as the “living dead.” What Luke identified as *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. 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 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 was so bad that God brought forth His judgment.

It was also believed that only the Messiah would be able to heal anyone afflicted with the deadly disease – a Messianic Miracle or Messianic Sign. Therefore, when 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 m/Messiah had come.

Lepers were not always social outcasts. 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), he spoke 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.

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.

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 their audiences would not have thought they were offending Deity by using the word “God.” 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.

06.03.08.Q2

Why did Jesus heal the Man, but *not* declare Forgiveness of his Sins?

This is a classic example of 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, the suffering people 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.

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**” (Mk. 1:41), 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”** (Mk. 1:44). 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.

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. Furthermore, to speak of one’s self was seen as arrogant and conceited.
2. Neither did Jesus want to be known as a mystic. He was far more interested in preaching the Kingdom of God than performing 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.

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 was ever 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 was 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 must have 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 while the English King James Version uses the old English word “dumb.” There was a 3-step protocol to an exorcism 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 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.

Amazingly, the Essenes, who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, 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. That was a profound observation as it was written *before* Jesus was born.

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.

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.

06.03.10

Mark 2:6-12 (See also Mt. 9:3-8; Lk. 5:21-26) Capernaum: Scribes Question Authority of Jesus

The phrase in Mark 2:7, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” should have made the leading Pharisees 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.

07.01.02

Luke 5:29-30 (See also Mt. 9:12-13; Mk. 2:15-17) Eating with Sinners

In Luke 5:30 is the question that the Pharisees asked, “**Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?**” It is interesting that the religious leaders asked this question of the disciples, because Matthew, who was with Jesus, was a former tax collector – one despised by these same leaders. Nonetheless, it was common practice to eat only with those one shared common values and appreciation. The classic example is the prophet Daniel’s refusal to eat with the king of Babylon for three reasons:

1. Eating involved prayer before and after every meal. The issue was how a righteous man could pray to God with pagans and sinners who broke nearly every imaginable law of God.
2. Eating with someone carried a strong implication of an approval of their lifestyle and what that person believed. Dining was a form of fellowship. Denial of fellowship meant disagreement with someone. This was demonstrated by Daniel when he refused to eat with his king, even though he was a prisoner. Eating with the king meant Daniel was in agreement with him on a wide range of issues, including those of religious merit.
3. Eating the king’s food would have caused Daniel to defile himself (Dan. 1:8) because the food was not kosher.

Daniel obviously remained strong to his Hebrew faith. While he studied and learned of Babylonian ways, he did not accept or practice them. As to first century religious leaders, they avoided eating with tax collectors and *sinner*s. The term *sinner*s had several definitions, especially when related to women.

1. It is generally assumed that prostitution was the only kind of “occupation” a woman could have had that would have given her that social stigma. This has been promoted by some Jewish and Christian writers who suggest that no other kind of activity would have produced the title of *sinner* other than a career prostitute. However....
2. A *sinner* could have been a woman who had her hair uncovered in public. Women always had their hair covered from the moment they were betrothed.
3. However, she could simply have been a noble woman from one of the wealthy families who recognized her sinful nature. The Pharisees also defined a sinner as anyone who did not conform to their legalistic rituals, which included numerous prayers and washings throughout the day. The ultra-strict Pharisees even considered anyone who touched a Roman or Greek coin as filthy because he violated the command against graven images.

It was a common belief that the messiah would never associate with *sinner*s of any kind because they would defile Him. What they overlooked was that every time Jesus ate with them, He revealed the Kingdom of God. It was not that Jesus accepted their lifestyle, but rather, He was willing to forgive them. This is vividly illustrated in John’s revelation of Jesus,

¹⁹As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be committed and repent. ²⁰Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and have dinner with him, and he with Me.

Revelation 3:19-20

07.01.04

John 5:1-15 Jerusalem: Sabbath Healing at Pool of Bethesda

This was a unique miracle, for not only was the man healed, but he was also reflective of the Jewish people. That leads to the following question:

07.01.04.Q1

What is the Significance of this Invalid Man having Suffered for Thirty-Eight Years (Jn. 5:1-15)?

A point of interest pertains to why the Jewish invalid man was by the pagan pool, in the first place, waiting to be healed. Did he not have faith in God? Why didn't he go to his rabbi and ask for prayer?

Scholars believe that in the Inter-Testamental Period, when the Greeks dominated this area, this was a pool dedicated to the Greek god Asclepius – the Greek god of healing. After the Maccabean Revolt, all signs of paganism were removed from within Jerusalem, but this pool was on the outside of the city wall. Therefore, it is believed that it was still honored by the local Gentiles and Roman soldiers. Archaeologists have clearly demonstrated that in the 3rd and 4th centuries (A.D.) this was an active shrine to Asclepius. As to the crippled man, while he was waiting for a healing from a pagan god, Jesus came along and healed him. Without a word spoken, Jesus demonstrated that He was God!

Many translators use the word “invalid” rather than “sick,” which suggests that his physical condition existed since birth. His life and the lives of other handicapped people were reduced to begging with no hope or purpose for which to live. Most certainly all of them wanted to be healed and, Jesus, with love and compassion, met their needs. But among them was one who was **“sick for 38 years.”** The cause of this man's illness is unknown. Yet God had a purpose for him because, not only would he tell others of the love of Jesus, but his illness was a reflection upon the Israelite people who wandered for 38 years in the wilderness from Kadesh-barnea to the Zered Brook. A summary is as follows: After the Israelites left Egypt, they accepted the false report about Canaan from eight of the ten spies. As a result, God punished them to wander in the desert. It was only after nearly four decades of life in the crippling hot desert that they entered into their Promised Land. The impotent man symbolized the impotent nation. It is Jesus who takes any person from a spiritual wilderness, regardless of why, how long, or what the situation was, into the full enrichment of life by faith in Him. He came to give life and to give it more abundantly to anyone who desires it (Jn. 10:10). Jesus healed the man and He wanted to heal the nation, but the nation rejected Him.

07.03.03

Luke 6:12-16 (See also Mk. 3:13-19) Jesus Appoints 12 Disciples

In this passage, Jesus appointed His 12 disciples. However, when reviewing their names, it appears that the gospel writers do not agree on their names. That leads to the obvious question:

07.03.03.Q1

Do the Gospels Agree on the Names of the Disciples?

Yes and no. Critics have long argued that the gospel writers did not agree on the names of the disciples. But the reason is that the order of the twelve names was not important to the authors, only their listing. In fact, their list is similar to listings found on other Jewish writings.

| <u>Mt. 10:2 ff.</u> | <u>Mk. 3:16 ff.</u> | <u>Lk. 6:14 ff.</u> | <u>Acts 1:13 ff.</u> |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <u>Simon Peter</u> | <u>Simon Peter</u> | <u>Simon Peter</u> | <u>Simon Peter</u> |
| Andrew | James, son of Zebedee | Andrew | James |
| James, son of Zebedee | John | James | John |
| John | Andrew | John | Andrew |
| Philip | Philip | Philip | Philip |
| Bartholomew | Bartholomew | Bartholomew | Thomas |
| Thomas | Matthew | Matthew | Bartholomew |
| Matthew | Thomas | Thomas | Matthew |
| James, son of Alphaeus | James, son of Alphaeus | James, son of Alphaeus | James, son of Alphaeus |
| Thaddaeus | Thaddaeus | Simon the Zealot | Simon the Zealot |
| Simon the Zealot | Simon the Zealot | Judas, son of James | Judas, son of James |
| Judas Iscariot | Judas Iscariot | Judas Iscariot | - - - - |

07.03.03.A. CHART OF THE DISCIPLES ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL BOOKS

It appears that Jesus had His disciples divided into three subsets of four men each. Simon Peter, Philip, and James were the leaders of these three groups. In the book of Matthew, the tax

collector is known by his own name: Matthew, but in Mark and Luke he is known by his Hebrew name, Levi.

08.01.04

Matthew 5:17-20 Law and Gospel

Jesus said, in verses 17 and 18, ¹⁷ “Don’t assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For I assure you: Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished.

The phrase, “the Law or the Prophets,” is a reference to the entire Jewish Bible. Jewish scholars divided their Bible into three classifications: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

1. The “Law” consisted of the five books written by Moses, known as the Mosaic Law. In Hebrew these books were known as the *Torah*, but in Greek these were known as the *Pentateuch*, which means *The Five Rolls*. The term *law* is translated from the Hebrew word *Torah*. There are distinct differences between the meanings of the Greek and Hebrew words. The Greek understanding of *law* is restrictive, and that meaning has been passed on to English translations. However, the Hebrew meaning emphasizes *instruction*, a vital concept that is lost in translations. Therefore, the Hebrew definition of key terms is critical to understanding their message. Greek dictionaries very seldom include the Hebrew meaning.
2. The “Prophets,” which is a classification of books consisting of the later prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), and the former prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings), as well as the twelve minor prophets. It is a collection of writings from men who had divine insight of current *and* future events, and were proclaimers of God’s message.
3. All other books were classified as the “Writings.”

It should be noted that Jesus always based His teachings and arguments upon the entire Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, Paul underscored the words of Jesus when he said that the Law would never be nullified, but rather, needs to be upheld (Rom. 3:31). When Jesus said He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, He used a figure of speech to refer to the entire Hebrew Bible, even though He did not specifically mention the Writings. Furthermore, he stressed the promising character of Scripture.

08.04.05

Matthew 7:7-12

Verse 12 is a summary statement. Jesus again clarified that He did not come to replace the Old Testament, but to fulfill it. He did not replace the Law *per se*, but instructed His disciples to fulfill the *intent* of the Law. The intent of the Law, as well as understanding the character of God, is explained in the following manner:

Obeying the Old Testament Law = shallow understanding

Obeying the Old Testament Law with grace = deeper understanding

To say that the Old Testament is invalid is correct only in terms of the sacrificial system, as Jesus replaced that system with His body at Calvary. It is significant that all other portions are to be honored as reflected in obedience. On an important side note, it is unfortunate that the Church has adopted a Roman view of *Law*, that means *restriction* and is therefore, *bad*, but fails to see that the Hebrew Bible views *Law* as *instruction* and *freedom*, and is therefore, *good*.

It must be remembered that Jesus was a Jewish rabbi who carefully observed all the commandments of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). He was careful to affirm the Scriptures, as He said that **“I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”** In this passage, Jesus clarified the purpose of His ministry. However, the word “not” can be confusing to the modern reader. Therefore, for the purpose of explanation, it is removed momentarily. The phrase, “to come,” is a Hebraic idiom that means *mission*, *intent*, or *purpose*. This statement is not at all related to His incarnation, but to His purpose or mission. With that understanding, the words “I did not come” in the Greek translation has two possible constructions:

1. Stop thinking that...
2. Never think that...

In this case, Jesus referred to the second construction, “never think that,” applies. There is no question that the purpose of Jesus was to live a perfect life, suffer and be the sacrifice for our sins, to rise from the grave that He can offer eternal life for all those who place their faith in Him. However, this was God’s plan from the foundations of the earth. Therefore, the Law, or Torah, has to be understood as the first written document in that process and Jesus came to fulfill that law.

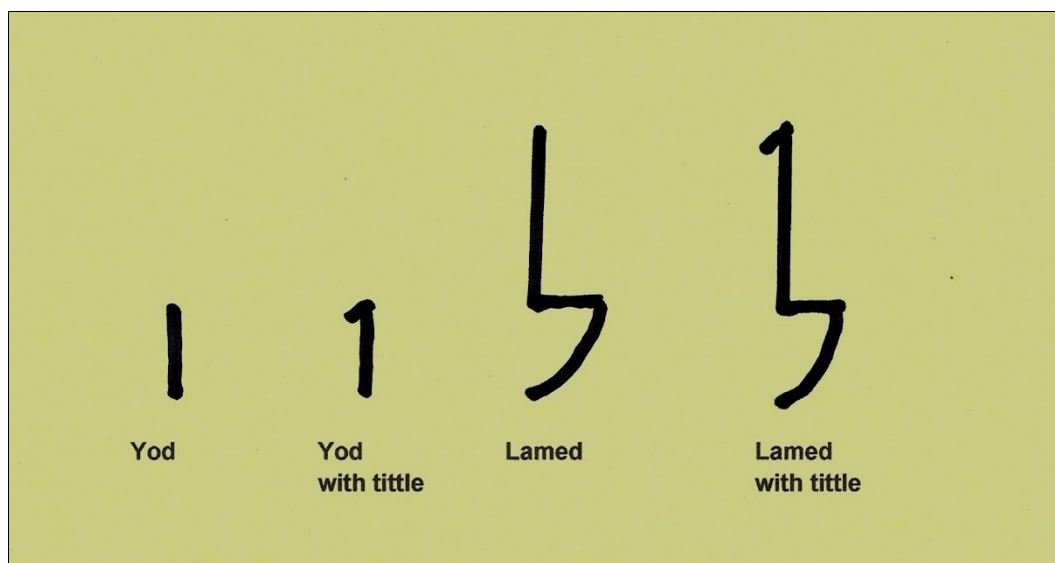
The term *destroy* means to *overthrow completely*. Some translations use terms such as *abolish* or *disintegrate*. In rabbinic usage, the word *abolish* is a technical term to mean, *to cancel* or *nullify*, and *fulfill* is a technical term to mean *uphold* or *preserve*, based upon the correct or incorrect use of the text. When a sage or rabbi incorrectly commented on a text, his peers would say that he was abolishing the text. Since the people of this time were trilingual; they spoke Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew. Therefore, one messianic scholar suggests that the word *fulfill* needs to be examined in those languages to insure understanding.

1. Greek – *To make complete, to fill up, or to fill up the measure of.*

2. Aramaic – to *add*, or *fill out*.

3. Hebrew – to *uphold*, *preserve*, *establish*, or *sustain*. The teaching being given completely agrees with the text of Scripture in question and spells out its correct and complete implications.

The importance of preserving and communicating the Bible accurately is underscored in the proverbial “jot and tittle” passage of verse 18. That archaic phrase is translated as “the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter” and is further explained below.



08.01.04.A ILLUSTRATION OF TWO HEBREW LETTERS WITH SERIFS. The letters *yod* and *lamed* are shown with and without serifs, the small angular decorative line at the top of each letter. Illustration by the author.

Some sources translate this phrase as “not one jot or tittle.” The smallest letter is the Greek word *iota*, from the smallest Hebrew letter *yod* has the appearance of an apostrophe. It appears similar to, but is different from the “tittle” (KJV) that Jesus mentioned. That is the *one stroke* translated from the Greek term *keriaia* and means *a little horn*. It is a small stroke that distinguishes one Hebrew letter from another. It might be considered similar to today’s *font serif* in size, but not in distinguishing one letter from another. Care must be taken when writing Hebrew because changing the stroke of a letter changes the word, and thus, changes its meaning. The statement by Jesus is a pattern of speech similar to the modern English phrase, “dot your I’s and cross your T’s.”

The problem with a literal translation is that languages are in constant change. Everyone understood that the slightest change in the writing of a letter would change the word and its meaning. An inaccurate interpretation of Scripture was said to be an “abolishment” and an accurate interpretation of the Scripture was said to be a “fulfillment of the law.” The point that

Jesus made was that not the slightest or seemingly least insignificant point of the Mosaic Law will ever pass away. God's Word is eternal and, therefore, remains unchanged.

08.02.02

Luke 16:14-18 Pharisees Scoff at Parable; Divorce Issues

In this passage, verse 18 reads as follows, **“everyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and everyone who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”** The translation of this passage has, without question, been problematic for many readers. That is because it places a severe punitive restriction (no future marriage) on the innocent person whose mate originated the divorce and, that is uncharacteristic of Jesus for at least three reasons:

1. This passage puts Jesus in conflict with the Torah, since God, through Moses, made a provision for divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1. While divorce is detestable to our Lord, where does God condemn the victim of divorce, the partner who was faithful, godly, and did not want a divorce? There is none.
2. To interpret the passage as an unconditional indictment without considering the circumstances or motivation is Pharisaic legalism, something that Jesus totally opposed. His emphasis was to focus on the *spirit* of the Law rather than the *letter* of the Law.
3. The typical translation of Luke 16:18 is in contradiction with Matthew 19:2 in which He made an exception for divorce.

The core issue of verse 18 lies in translation of the small word *and*, as found in the phrase, ... *and marries another* ... In Greek, the word for *and* is *koi*, (2532) but Jesus seldom spoke Greek. He spoke in Hebrew and its sister language, Aramaic. Therefore, Jesus would have used the Hebrew word *vav* that can be also translated into English as *and*, but *vav* also has a broader meaning that includes the phrase, *in order to* or *so that*. An Old Testament example is found in Exodus 5:1, 7:16, 8:1, 8, 20, 21, etc.

“Let my people go *so that* they may serve Me in the wilderness.”

“Let my people go *and* they may serve Me in the wilderness.”

The phrases *in order to* and *so that* both reflect intent or the purpose of a divorce, whereas the word *and* does not.

This verse 18 is also reflective of Herod Antipas and Herodias, where Herod divorced his wife *so that* he could marry another man's wife. According to Jesus, that was certified adultery! When Josephus wrote of this, he stated that the illicit romantic entanglement between Antipas and his half-brother's wife, Herodias, led them to divorce their spouses ***in order to*** marry each other. John the Baptist clearly condemned this action, and Jesus did likewise.

Another significant point is that the divorce certificate was always written for the protection of the woman. It was a legal document with terms and conditions that had to be honored, and permitted both parties to remarry. Considering the “spirit” of the biblical commands in light of what Jesus said, there are three reasons for a biblical divorce.

1. Jesus said that divorce was not permitted with the *exception* of adultery (Mt. 5:32; 19:9; Mk. 10:2-12).
2. However, the Apostle Paul said that the only reason for divorce was if the partner left the faith (1 Cor. 7:15). This is not in disagreement with what Jesus said because each conversation must be held within its context. But if one is legalistic about the interpretation of what Jesus said, then obviously the conclusion is that the apostle was wrong – and that doesn’t make sense. Neither does legalistic interpretation!
3. A third reason is that of physical or emotional abuse. This is based on a “biblical construct” foundation because the abusive spouse has broken promises to love, protect and honor their mate.

In all of the above cases, there are valid grounds for the innocent partner to remarry. Nowhere in either Testament is there a punitive condition ever imposed on the innocent party. If the words of Jesus meant that divorce was never permitted, then the Apostle Paul would certainly have written 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 differently. It should be noted however, that today, as in the time of Jesus, most divorces were caused by selfishness or unforgiveness, rather than for any of the three reasons listed above.

The Oral Law said that a woman who had an illicit lover was unclean because of the adulterous relationship and, being unclean, meant that she could not marry him. If she was married and if, during that marital relationship she developed another relationship outside of her marital covenant that was sin. Jesus essentially said the same message to the husband. A careful reading of the original language translates as follows, **“Everyone who divorces his wife in order to marry another.”**

The writings of the Mishnah were still in oral form when Paul learned them as a child in the synagogue and later again from Rabbi Gamaliel, who some say was the grandson of Jerusalem’s famous Rabbi Hillel. The apostle was well aware of the divorce laws when he penned Romans 7:1-6 that restated what Jesus said years earlier. The meaning of adultery is restricted to the individual who desires a divorce in order to marry another. Such a new relationship is an adulterous one. The second part of this verse is focused on another individual, one who desires to enter the second marriage, knowing that the first covenant was deliberately violated. Ancient divorce decrees permitted women to remarry, because a single woman had no means of support and would become a destitute beggar, unless a family within her clan provided for her.

08.02.03

Matthew 5:31-32 (see also Mt. 19:9; Mk. 10:12) Divorce Issues Debated

It has been generally taught throughout church history that a divorce could be initiated only by the husband while the wife had no rights to obtain a divorce, even though in Mark 10:12, Jesus clearly stated that some women divorced their husbands. But the historical assumption remained strong and only recently has been seriously challenged because recently discovered divorce documents from the first and second centuries (A.D.) reveal that some women did divorce their husbands.

Among the leading Pharisees, there were two major schools of theology” The School of Hillel and the School of Shammai. The entire issue of divorce and remarriage was a hotly debated issue in the first century. Some desired a strict adherence to the Mosaic Law (Deut. 24:1-5), while others believed that such strictness, at times was too harsh. Into this religious environment entered the influences of Hellenistic culture resulting in a bottomless quagmire. The debates often centered on the meaning of the word “indecent” used by Moses (Deut. 24:1-5), as its definition, was thought to have changed in the fourteen centuries that had transpired since it was written.

The School of Hillel said that a man could consider a divorce “for any disgust, which he felt toward her.” This essentially was the first century equivalent of no-fault divorce. Opposing this view was the School of Shammai, which stated that divorce could take place only in cases of obvious unfaithfulness. Stoning was not discussed. To make matters worse, according to Jewish writings (Sif. Num. 99) Moses, himself, was divorced. He had married Zipporah (Ex. 2:21), but “sent her away,” (meaning a divorce) to her father (Ex. 18:2) and then married a Cushite (black African from Ethiopia) woman (Num. 12:1). This second marriage quickly became the subject of bitter discussions between Miriam and Aaron (Num. 12:1). Those discussions concerning divorce continued to the time of Jesus.

Clearly, Jesus forbids divorce, not on the Mosaic regulations of divorce, but on the purpose of God instituting marriage. In doing so He eliminated all the arguments between the schools of Hillel and Shammai. The Jews had a proverb on the matter that said, “Hillel loosed what Shammai bound.” In terms of moral and biblical interpretation, both rabbis and their schools had their faults. Neither one fully comprehended the ultimate plan of God for husband and wife. However, in this case, Jesus accepted the divorce regulations of the School of Shammai but also demonstrated forgiveness that this school generally failed to demonstrate.

Even though Judaism esteemed women higher than in neighboring cultures, women were confronted with four major disadvantages.

1. Often but clearly not always, they were looked upon as an object of possession rather than a person of worth. There are numerous writings that support both viewpoints on this subject.

2. Obtaining an exit out of a brutal marriage was difficult, although not impossible.
3. The acquisition of a divorce by a man was far too easy (see below). Such divorces were based on a very broad interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1.
4. Once a woman was divorced, employment opportunities were almost non-existent. Single women, such as widows, often lived in poverty.

According to some rabbis, the reasons some rabbis gave men for a divorce included the following,

1. “Spinning” in the streets, which meant speaking to men in public.
2. Being in public with her head uncovered, or allowing her hair to be visible. Only in a wedding procession could she have her head uncovered. Women were expected to have their heads covered in such a manner that their hair was not seen. This is most likely the reason why the Apostle Paul said that women should have their heads covered (1 Cor. 11:5-6) when he wrote to the church in the morally corrupt city of Corinth.

The divorce decree protected the rights of the woman so that she could remarry and her children would not be considered illegitimate. Notice what the Oral Law said,

All are required to write a bill of divorce, even a deaf mute, an imbecile, or a minor. A woman may write her own bill of divorce and a man may write his own quittance, since the validity of the writ depends on them that sign it.

Mishnah, *Gittin* 2.5

No bill of divorce is valid that is not written expressly for the woman.

Mishnah, *Gittin* 3.1

The position held by Jesus is similar to that of the orthodox rabbinical School of Shammai, as recorded in the Mishnah. The following passage reflects the differences between the two major theological schools.

The School of Shammai says: A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written, “Because he has found in her indecency in anything.”

Mishnah, *Gittin* 9:10

The School of Shammai held that the phrase “because he found some uncleanness in her” from Deuteronomy 24:1, was a figure of speech meaning she was guilty of adultery. However, the School of Hillel said the phrase meant anything and everything that the husband did not like or approve of.

And the School of Hillel says, “He may divorce her even if she spoiled a dish for him, for it is written, “Because he has found in her indecency in anything.”

Mishnah, *Gittin* 9:10

In modern terms, it could be said that Rabbi Hillel instituted a form of no-fault divorce.

(If a man said) “Konam! If I marry the ugly woman such-a-one, though she was indeed beautiful; or the black woman such-a-one, though she was indeed white; or the short woman such-a-one, though she was indeed tall; she is (yet) permitted to him not because she was ugly and became beautiful, or black and became white, or short and became tall, but because it was a vow made in error.”

Mishnah, *Nedarim* 9.10

Both Shammai and Hillel were Pharisees, and that is why the following incident occurred:

Some Pharisees approached Him to test Him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife on any grounds?”

Matthew 19:3

As was previously discussed, this theological debate was an ongoing issue between the two major Pharisaic schools of theology. The School of Hillel permitted divorce for any reason (equal to modern no-fault divorce), which is why the question was asked, “**Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife on any grounds?**” This was in sharp contrast to the School of Shammai that permitted divorce but only for the reason of adultery as written by Moses (Deut. 24:1-4). Moses did not command divorce, but only allowed it. He recognized human frailty and he compromised. But by the first century, as previously stated, the disregard for marriage vows evidently had a sufficient impact upon the culture that Josephus mentioned it.

The Pharisees approached Jesus to ask which school was correct. Rather than giving them their desired answer, Jesus referred to the original purpose of God at the time of Creation. Divorce was granted only because of man’s evil heart. In the Jewish law, adultery was always between an unmarried woman and a married man who was not her husband, but not so for a married man and any woman who was not his wife. In that case he would have committed adultery against her husband. This was obviously an unjust system that Jesus opposed. Both schools of theology had lost sight of the fact that marriage is not a one- or two-way covenant, but a three-way covenant

including God, man, and woman. Hence, while God hates divorce, it is permissible, but only on His terms.

08.02.05

Mark 10:10-12; Matthew 19:10-12 Disciples Question Jesus

In verse 12 of this passage is this phrase: **“If she divorces her husband.”** This statement gives credence to the view that women had the right to divorce their husbands. This statement would never have been made if women were not permitted to obtain a divorce.

However, there were three occupations that were considered so dishonorable, that if a man decided to become employed in one of these, his wife could appeal to the court for a divorce and receive compensation for her loss. Even if she knew that he was involved in one of these occupations *before* she married him, and she agreed that he could continue in that occupation, she could change her mind and file for a divorce. According to the traditions of the elders, these trades were,

1. Dung collectors
2. Leather tanners
3. Copper smelters

Amazingly, tax collectors, camel drivers, and shepherds are not listed in this group. If a wife did not have the right to divorce her husband, no comments about the subject would be either in the gospels or Mishnah.

08.02.07

Matthew 5:38-42; Luke 6:31 Regarding Retaliation

When Jesus said, **“An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,”** He used a figure of speech to say that the punishment must fit the crime, a law that predated the written Old Testament and had numerous counterparts in the Oral Law. When given by Moses, it was for the courts to judge a case and render a legal verdict; it was not for an individual response. It was known among the Romans as *Lex Talionis* and had four important elements.

1. The name *Lex Talionis* was the beginning of mercy for the Romans, an act to establish justice without vengeance although it had been even earlier among the Jews (Lev. 19:18).
2. This law was never administered by an individual, but by a court (see. Deut. 19:18).

3. Even in semi-civilized societies, this law was never carried out literally. Rather, compensation was required for the following:

- a. Injury
- b. Pain suffered
- c. Healing
- d. Lost time of wages lost
- e. For indignity suffered

4. While this law does call for justice, it is not the embodiment of the Hebrew Bible. Other sections call for feeding one's enemy (Prov. 25:21).

The ancient law that appears to have been so incredibly ruthless was, in fact, the forerunner of modern liability law. Nonetheless, to make sure there would be no misunderstanding about it, Jesus removed the retaliation element of it. Neither Moses nor Jesus ever denied mercy, but the leading Pharisees and Sadducees were not as kind.

Critics have frequently discussed the issue of several laws of Moses that are nearly identical to those of Hammurabi written centuries earlier. They challenge the inspiration of Scripture, implying that parts of the Hebrew Code are dependent upon the older Hammurabi's Code. To address this issue, an example of each lawgiver is presented as well as the comment by Jesus in Matthew 5:18. Therefore, the question is,

08.02.07.Q1

Did Moses quote Hammurabi, and if he did, how does this Affect the Words of Jesus in Matthew 5:18?

This topic is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a brief review is warranted since Jesus made reference to a Law of Moses that appears to have originated with Hammurabi. If one assumes that Jesus referred to the Mosaic Law and not to the Oral Law, then, critics say, He legitimized the Old Testament passages. On the other hand, if one assumes that the quotation by Jesus originated by Hammurabi, then the inspiration of Scripture is challenged. To explain this issue, it is important to briefly step into history.

An archaeological discovery that caused phenomenal controversies occurred at the close of 1901 and at the beginning of 1902. A French archaeological team, excavating at the acropolis of Susa (or "Shushan the palace" in the book of Esther), unearthed a seven-foot four-inch tall stele with one of the longest cuneiform inscriptions ever discovered. It was the legal code of King Hammurabi (1792 -1750 B.C.), the sixth monarch of the first Babylonian dynasty. He expanded

the Babylonian Empire that included numerous vassal states. To govern properly, he established a set of 282 laws that were uniform throughout the Empire and became known as the Code of Hammurabi, or Codex Hammurabi. These laws were inscribed on the black diorite stele, and scholars believe that copies were made and distributed. The Code became the standard of conduct and culture throughout the vast section of western Asia. However, some of these regulations existed prior to Hammurabi in the Codex or Code of Ur-Nammu. Hammurabi selected those laws he felt would serve his people best and provide uniformity to his court system on legal and social issues.

Abraham (c. 2000 B.C.), the father of the Jewish people, came from Ur, a city within the ancient country of Sumer (the biblical Shinar). While he predated Hammurabi, many laws of the Codex Hammurabi existed in Abraham's time. Five centuries later Abraham was followed by Moses who wrote the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. As stated previously, the major problem is that some laws written by Hammurabi are nearly identical to those given centuries later by Moses and Jesus. Note the following:

If a man has knocked out the tooth of a man who is his equal, they shall knock out his tooth.

Law No. 200, Code of Hammurabi

²² **“When men get in a fight and hit a pregnant woman so that her children are born prematurely but there is no injury, the one who hit her must be fined as the woman's husband demands from him, and he must pay according to judicial assessment. ²³ If there is an injury, then you must give life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound.**

Exodus 21:22-24

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

Matthew 5:38

While the judicial codes of Ur-Nammu, Hammurabi, and Moses were for judicial conformity, these laws did not prevent or limit the extension of mercy on the part of the judges. Both the Hammurabi and Ur-Nammu codes are arranged in casuistic form, meaning, the law begins with a statement similar to “If a man...” after which the punished is described.

There is one major difference between the codes of Hammurabi and Moses – and that is one of mercy. For many of the 282 laws of Hammurabi, the punishment for a violation was death, even

in matters considered to be trivial today. It is unknown if Hammurabi's judges enforced all laws to their maximum punishment. However, the Mosaic Code is overall far more merciful. It restrained revenge, and essentially stated that punishment must fit the crime.

In spite of some similarities, there are other distinct differences as well. Among the Hebrews, all people had equal rights, even slaves. However, in the Babylonian culture were three distinct societal levels:

1. The aristocrats, gentlemen, free citizens, professionals, officers, and tradesmen.
2. The poor and freemen who previously were slaves.
3. Slaves.

Legislation varied for each level. Another distinct difference from the Mosaic Code is that the Codex Hammurabi deals with outward expressions and actions but avoids issues of religion and matters of the heart. Many Greek and Roman laws were similar. However, the Mosaic Law is thus far superior as it has both outward expressions as well as issues of the heart. The latter is illustrated as follows,

1. "And you shall be holy men to me" (Ex. 22:31)

2. "You shall be holy for I am holy" (Lev. 11:45)

3. "You shall be holy, for I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:2)

These three examples are a keynote of the Mosaic Law; that men should be holy in deed and action before God, and this is the message that was reinforced by Jesus. Furthermore, when Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said," He spoke to everyone – Jew and Gentile alike. He gave instructions that one should not retaliate with anger, but respond with love. It is the opinion of this writer, that God ordained some parts of the Code to be copied into the Bible because, at that time, they were part of the universal code of conduct.

08.03.03.Q1

Why isn't there a Strong Teaching on Tithing in the New Testament?

The doctrine of tithing has been challenged by some throughout church history and defended by others, just as it is today. Those who claim it is not necessary do so, in part, citing lack of a direct command by Jesus or the apostles to continue it. So why doesn't support exist in the New Testament?

At this time tithing was a well-established religious and cultural tradition that did not need to be explained, just as the need for giving alms was not addressed. The belief was so strong, that no

one would have thought of going to the synagogue, if he had not first prepared his tithe. Note the words from the Oral Law:

A man says within his house when darkness is falling on the eve of Shabbath; “Have you tithed?”

Mishnah, *Shabbath* 2.7

The Pharisees were known for tithing. In Luke 11:42, for example, Jesus stated that the Pharisees carefully tithed various garden spices, but neglected the justice and love of God. In the section of the Mishnah known as the *Maaseroth* (meaning “tithes”) is an extensive list of regulations of what to tithe and the “tithing season” of various crops. The Jewish community was evidently in compliance with this biblical requirement.

The New Testament epistles never mention tithing because, in addition to the established tradition, voluntary offerings were sufficient for the needs of the church. Since the early church was essentially Jewish, the members continued the practice of tithing they had been taught from childhood. In addition to the first tithe, there was a second tithe (Deut. 14:22). Known as the *maaser sheni* this tithe was only on produce, crops, and livestock. It was to be given or spent *only* in Jerusalem when the family was there for a festival or other occasion. This second tithe could be spent on personal items or given to the poor, to a synagogue, or to the temple. When given to the poor, it was placed in a *quppah*, or *poor basket*. The *quppah* was the weekly allotment given to the poor and consisted of food and clothing. This biblical tradition continued in the primitive church as recorded in Acts 11:28-30 when Barnabas and the Apostle Paul sent relief to Jerusalem during the famine of A.D. 44-45.

Tithing was never questioned in the New Testament Period because it was a well-established doctrine. According to Jesus, love would ask, “How much can I give?” But legalism will ask, “How little can I give?” This can be further demonstrated in what a pastor once said, “We make a living by what we get, but make a life by what we give.” Tithing is, in reality, given to the Lord.

08.04.03.Q1

Are We to Judge or not to Judge Others (Mt. 7:1 vs. 1 Cor. 5:12, etc.)?

Matthew 7:1 and Luke 6:37 clearly say “**do not judge**,” but other passages such as 1 Corinthians 5:12) indicate otherwise. By definition, the phrase *judge* as found in Matthew and Luke refer to *sharp unjust criticism* but could also be rendered as *condemn not*. Since all of humanity is a fallen race, no one has the right to condemn another or to be a “faultfinder.” In fact, God will either judge us or have mercy on us, depending on how we either judge or have mercy on others. The Hebraic poetry in this passage sets the parameters of the meaning of the word. The meaning

is restricted to this use and does not have reference to discernment or general decisions that need to be made in human affairs. Jesus did not forbid the discernment between truth and error in doctrine or in the life of another, but He meant that one should not judge others self-righteously or condemningly (cf Mt. 23:13-39; Rom. 2:1). In addition, Scripture as a whole directs believers to carefully discern false or real prophets, as well as the fruitfulness of others. Based on careful judgment (meaning discernment), there are several situations where judgment is commanded:

1. Concerning those who are sexually immoral (1 Cor. 5:9),
2. Concerning those who masquerade as purveyors of truth (2 Cor. 11:14),
3. Concerning those who preach a false gospel (Philip. 3:2), and
4. Concerning those who are false prophets (1 Jn. 4:1)

Persons who reflect one or more of these and other characteristics or behaviors are to be avoided and, in some cases, they are to be excommunicated from the local church. This type of judgment or discernment was not what Jesus taught in this passage. He was specifically speaking of unjust criticism. Scripture provides these considerations:

1. God will judge us by how we judge others (with mercy?) (Mt. 7:2)
2. Do not judge by appearance (Jn. 7:24)
3. Mercy triumphs over judgment (Jas. 2:13)
4. God alone is the ultimate judge

Yet care must be taken because one does not always understand all the events that occurred in another's life. According to the Oral Law, that is why the famous Rabbi Hillel once said,

Do not judge your brother until you have come to his place.

Mishnah, *Aboth* 2.4

Furthermore, there are two important phrases that are to be considered: **“Give and it will be given to you.”** This passage is frequently used in terms of tithing to the church. However, note that the context is a discussion on forgiveness, not tithing. Jesus said if we forgive much, He will forgive us abundantly. This same principle of giving forgiveness can be applied to other areas of life such as giving tithes, offerings, and alms. The second phrase suggests that divine forgiveness **“will be poured into your lap.”** Men's clothing at the time were loose like women's dresses are today. Since a belt was worn around the waist, the garment could be folded to create a large front pocket that could be used to carry a huge amount of goods, such as grain.

The blessing of God that would be “running over,” is potentially far more than what could have been placed on one’s lap or pocket.

Concerning proper judgments, Jesus made an exaggeration when He said, **“First, take the log out of your eye.”** The phrase is a hyperbole, a ridiculous contrast, a statement of over-emphasis involving a word play of “speck” and “log/plank” to dramatize a point. In essence, Jesus said that we should take a tree or large piece of timber out of our own eye before taking a toothpick or splinter out of the eye of another, meaning that before attempting to help someone else, one had to clean up his own life. No one has the right to judge another’s conduct or motive until his own life has been cleaned up, then righteous men and women are to use discernment in their judgments of others. Therefore, there are times when judgments according to divine principles are in order.

08.05.01

Matthew 7:28-29 Crowd is Astonished

Verses 28 and 29 read as follows: “When Jesus had finished this sermon, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, because He was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.”

The phrase, **“one who had authority,”** is often said to have been the way Jesus spoke, His charisma. Well, He certainly had charisma and self-confidence, but that is not the correct meaning of the phrase. In days of old, prophets would use a phrase such as, “Thus says the Lord your God.” They claimed to have their authority directly from God. However, by the first century, no rabbi would dare use that phrase alone, but would quote another rabbi as well as the prophets to underscore the importance his message. What made Jesus uniquely different was that He did not quote anyone – not a rabbi; not a prophet – but spoke with confidence in a courageous manner and without hesitation. His authority was unlike anything people had ever seen or heard. He would say, “I say to you,” because He didn’t need to refer to any prophets or other rabbis. That was an outstanding change!

08.05.05

Luke 7:24-30; Matthew 11:12-15

The passage that is difficult to understand is this: “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been suffering violence, and the violent have been seizing it by force.” (Mt. 11:12)

The phrase that has often been perplexing is this: “The kingdom of heaven has been suffering violence, and the violent have been seizing it by force.” It seems difficult to believe that men of

violence would conquer the peaceful message of Christ and His kingdom. But the phrase “seizing it by force” literally means, *to snatch away* or *to carry off by force*. This passage is one that undoubtedly has challenged scholars for centuries and three interpretations are presented.

1. It has been suggested these men of violence are identified as such in their absolute determination to rid themselves of sin, satanic powers, and influences of the pagan culture.
2. Another suggestion is that now is the time for courageous souls to be forceful and take hold of the Kingdom of God.
3. An explanation from a cultural context is this: the sheep were gathered in a sheepfold for the night. It was a common practice that many herds of sheep were sheltered in a community pen overnight. Pens consisted of walls made with mud bricks or stones that often faced a cliff or cave as this provided added protection. Large barns did not exist at this time. Today, as in centuries past, when the shepherds come in the morning, the sheep anticipate freedom to graze in the grassy fields. Knowing this, they gather tightly in front of the pen door waiting for their shepherd to open it. As the gate opens they jump forth and “break through the gate and go out” to freedom. The Hebrew word for “break through” has the same parallel meaning as “forcefully advancing” in Matthew’s gospel. Likewise, when Jesus said that forceful men laying hold on it take the Kingdom of God, He was referring to a military term, but referred to the sheep jumping out the gate to acquire all the blessings that await them.

08.05.06

Luke 7:31-35 (See also Mt. 11:16-19) Jesus Reproves Rejection

³¹ **“To what then should I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to each other: We played the flute for you, and you didn’t dance; we sang a lament and you didn’t weep.**

Of course the phrase, **“we played the flute for you, and you didn’t dance; we sang a lament, and you didn’t weep,”** is almost meaningless in today’s culture. The explanation of this unique cultural phrase is as follows: Flute players performed at weddings, funerals, and other festive occasions. In fact, there were usually several flute players at weddings and everyone danced and celebrated the creation of a new family. When there was a funeral, there had to be a minimum of two flute players who played songs while professional mourners sang elegant songs of lament. This cultural practice was not only among the Jewish people, but in neighboring communities as well. Mourning was and continues to be expressed loudly in public with the beating of the chest. For example, in the Roman world, when Emperor Claudius died, the wailing of the flute players

and professional mourners were so loud that Seneca said that the emperor, although dead, probably heard them. This writer has heard the eerie sounds of uncontrollable wailing and emotionally charged shrieks by professional mourners. The hysterical atmosphere will never be forgotten.

In ancient times, when mothers went shopping, they usually took their children along. Somewhere along the main street or in the marketplace there generally was a flute player or a musician who sat on a mat on which passersby would toss a coin or two. As soon as he played his flute, the children danced and played as children normally do. Whether at funerals, weddings, or other celebrations, the children imitated their parents by dancing and playacting. It is human nature that children imitate what they learn from their parents and Jesus used this social pattern for His lesson. He said that the Jewish leaders were not following this basic social pattern of life; this generation of leaders had their own religious agenda. Therefore, they are like disobedient children who do not dance and play in the market place; who do not mourn and lament at a funeral; who do not weep and comfort families who have lost a loved one. Jesus said that the Pharisees rebelled like disobedient spoiled little children.

08.06.03

Mark 5:1-20 (See also Mt. 8:28-34; Lk. 8:26-39) Gerasa in Gadara: Demon-Possessed Gerasene

In this passage, the gospels indicate that the demon-possessed man could not be held secure, “even with chains.” The encounter Jesus had with the demoniac certainly had a profound influence on the Jewish people, as they reflected upon the story of the ancient super-strong man named Samson. He was chained to a Philistine pillar until God restored his strength and he moved the pillar causing the pagan temple to collapse. Now Jesus confronted a man who apparently was stronger than Samson – as no chains could hold him, and Jesus freed him of his demonic powers and healed him.

08.06.03.Q6

What Happened to the Healed Demoniac (Mk. 5:1-20)?

History has forgotten what happened to him, but evidently he became a significant figure in the Decapolis region. Only a few months later Jesus returned to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and fed thousands by a miracle of bread and fish. That miracle of multiplication resulted with seven large baskets filled with leftovers. Clearly the miracle of the exorcism resulted in a radical change of attitude for some of the local Gentiles.

A hundred years later a significant church was established in Gadara headed by a bishop. By the second century the city was home to several churches, and by the fourth century, it was the seat of one of the most important bishops in the early church. One can never overestimate the power of God to transform a life and make it significant for future generations. Christianity spread quickly and by 325, the church of Gadara sent a bishop to the highly esteemed Council of Nicea. A bishop from the nearby city of Hippos was also present at the first Church Councils of Nicea and Constantinople. It appears that the demoniac became an important and outstanding apostle and evangelist. This is an example of how quickly Christianity took root in the Greek cities.

08.06.05

Mk. 5:24b-34 (See also Mt. 9:20-22; Lk. 8:43-48) Capernaum: Woman Touches Garment

In Mark 5:28, the woman with the issue of blood said that “if I can just touch His robes, I’ll be made well!” Well, she certainly had faith for her healing. By this time Jesus had healed many and His reputation spread across the land like a wild fire.

However, the term *robes* is not the most accurate translation, but neither is the word *hem* or *hem of his garment* as found in many Bibles. The original Greek and Hebrew word mean a *tassel of twisted wool*. These tassels and their knots were a command of God through Moses for all men to wear (Num. 15:37-41; Deut. 22:12) and reminded them of the 613 commandments God had given them. The tradition of wearing tassels is still observed among orthodox Jews today, who are quick to cite Numbers 15:32-41 for the basis of their belief. Each of the fringes consisted of eight threads, of which one was wound around the others; first seven times with a double knot, then eight times with a double knot, then eleven times with a double knot, and finally thirteen times. Since Hebrew letters have numeric values, the numbers spell *Jehovah One*. It was *Jehovah One* that the woman touched since Jesus wore them (Mt. 9:20; 14:36). She not only touched Jesus but she also touched Judaism, a most significant point (because salvation and healing comes from the Jews). It was common knowledge, that if Jesus touched her, or if she touched Him, He would become unclean until evening. So when she did the crowd was stunned. Furthermore, it was not that He who became defiled, but rather that she become pure, cleansed, and healed. Now Jairus was again able to see again the power of the faith of Jesus.

Being an orthodox Jew, Jesus wore tassels that hung from His belt as prescribed in the Torah. One distinctive feature of Jesus that is difficult for modern students to accept is that He dressed and acted like an orthodox rabbi. Because of this, some translations refer to the woman’s touching of the “hem of his garment.” A man’s prayer shawl was sacred to him, and its tassels were on the sacred symbolic garment worn by *every* adult male Jew. Tassels were the blue and white wool threads worn at each corner. Each tassel has five knots, representing the five books of the Torah. Christian artists almost never depict Jesus in robes with a phylactery, nor tassels hung

from the “four corners” of His belt, nor with strings (tassels) at the corners of His prayer shawl (Heb. *tallit*). Amazingly, it is easier for modern students to understand the actions of the woman than it is to realize that Jesus lived and functioned as a Jewish rabbi at the end of the Old Testament Period.

Some messianic scholars have suggested that she touched the corner or border of His prayer shawl (Num. 15:38) which is known as in Hebrew as the *kanaph*. This word has been translated some seventy-six times as “wings” in the Old Testament. For example, Psalms 91:1-4 states we are to be hidden “under His wings,” a play on words that means to hide under a prayer shawl. This woman of faith was healed by touching the tassels that were on His prayer shawl and, therefore, she was literally a fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi 4:2 that read “healing in His wings.” This was most difficult for them to comprehend and rationalize without concluding that, in some manner unknown to them, it was Jesus who created the Mosaic Law. When she reached out to Jesus, she touched the name of God. By faith she was healed, while other people in a crowded street simply bumped or brushed by Him with no response. The miracle was repeated later in Matthew 14:36 when many others were healed.

08.06.06.Q1

Was the Daughter of Jairus Dead (Mk. 5:35; Lk. 8:49) or Asleep (Mk. 5:39; Mt. 9:23; Lk. 9:52)?

The question arises not because there is a conflict in the Synoptic gospels, but because Scripture recorded that it was the opinion of the people that she was dead. While the word “sleep” is often used as a metaphor for death, this interpretation was clearly eliminated by Jesus Himself. However, it can be assumed that the young girl was unconscious, in a coma, or near death. Jesus would have understood that she was not dead, but the people had no concept of someone being unconscious or in a coma. The passages read as follows:

Mk. 5:35 “Your daughter is dead.”

Mk. 5:39 “The child is not dead, but asleep.”

Mt. 9:24 “The girl isn’t dead, but sleeping.”

Lk. 8:52 “She is not dead but asleep.”

It was the Jewish belief that sleep was regarded as a kind of death, in which the soul leaves the body but returns to it on its waking. In addition, Mark 5:35 reflects the opinion of several men who presumed she was dead. The other references indicate that the girl was either unconscious or in a coma. If she was merely sleeping, no one would have called Jesus to wake her up. Being

dead or near death were often deemed to be one and the same, especially since there was no basic medical knowledge, as is taken for granted today, to determine the difference. And even if the difference between these two states of being were known, there was no medical cure to improve the condition of the dying or near death patient. Whether the girl was clinically dead is hardly the question; rather, she had all appearances of death and was evidently close to it.

Matthew used a Greek word which *usually* means natural sleep. However, the girl may have suffered a medical case of catalepsy, which is a condition in which the person's body becomes stiff, ridged, and stops moving. The person remains rigid in whatever posture he or she was in at the time of suffering catalepsy and the ability to communicate is lost. It has all the signs of death, and is either a coma or close to being a coma. Throughout history, and even today, in most areas of the Middle East a person was buried on the day of death without embalming. Some excavated tombs have revealed that some buried persons may have suffered from catalepsy, then woke up only to find no escape from the tomb. Jesus performed an incredible healing in the young child much to the astonishment of the people and the leader of the local synagogue. Nonetheless, there are three points to consider:

1. To speak of death as sleep is an image common to all the Laws and cultures. Therefore, the reality of death in this case cannot be denied.
2. Death is followed by a resurrection just as sleep is followed by an awakening.
3. Jesus used the exact same Law when describing Lazarus in John 11:11. Possibly, to Him, both she and Lazarus were merely sleeping, since in Him there is no death.

Jairus was a synagogue ruler in Capernaum, a position that would have been comparable to today's position of a senior pastor or rabbi. Most village and country synagogue rabbis honestly and sincerely cared for the spiritual well-being of their people. Unfortunately, while Jairus believed in Jesus, his fellow villagers were doubtful which is probably why Jesus eventually cursed the village.

09.01.02

Matthew 12:22-24 (See also Lk. 11:14-23) Capernaum

Mt. ²² Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and unable to speak was brought to Him. He healed him, so that the man could both speak and see. ²³ And all the crowds were astounded and said, "Could this be the Son of David!"

“Blind and unable to speak.” Jewish exorcists were able to deliver an oppressed person from demonic control by first requiring the demon to identify itself and then demanding the evil spirit to leave. However, if that person was unable to speak, they were unable to perform the exorcism. So the rabbis told the people that when the messiah comes, he will be able to perform this kind of deliverance. Therefore, this miraculous exorcism, known as a “messianic miracle,” proved that Jesus was indeed the messiah. For more information, see “messianic miracles” as well as “binding and loosening.” The audience was stunned, because in various Inter-Testamental writings, the advent of the Messiah meant that evil would be defeated.

“Could this be the Son of David?” They had just witnessed a messianic miracle. Therefore, they were asking if He could be the *expected* son of David, because if He was, then he would be their messiah. Jesus repeatedly demonstrated, as recorded by the gospel writers, that He was the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.

But they had a serious problem: Their expectation of the coming *Son of David* was as a military victor who would lead them to political independence and economic prosperity, and establish an international superpower, as King David had done a thousand years earlier. This was the description they read in the *Psalms of Solomon*, a recent first century B.C. book. But when the people saw Jesus heal the demon-possessed man, they realized this was not anything King David had done. In fact, the terms *Son of Man*, or *Bar Enosh* in Aramaic, and *Son of David* became synonyms for *Messiah* by the first century. The expectations were that this “Son” would excel David’s triumphs. So they questioned if He really was from the house of David. It obviously was not the mission of Jesus at this time to rebuild the Davidic Empire, but to bring deliverance and salvation to every soul afflicted by sin and, thereby, usher in the Kingdom of God into their life.

But a few leading Pharisees believed that, if this kind of a demon had been cast out of a person, this could have been done only by a more powerful demon. More specifically, it could only have been accomplished by Beelzebub, the prince of demons (Satan) who ordered one of his subjects out of this man. They concluded that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebub, and therefore, had to die. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, turned the issue around so they would have to realize that if He cast out the demon by the Spirit of God (and He did), then they had a problem of how to deal with the Kingdom of God which was now confronting them. But this conversation caused another problem, they either overlooked or refused to recognize how Jesus could have known their thoughts unless He was a prophet of God? Demons do not have this gift.

09.01.03

Matthew 12:25-32 The Unpardonable Sin

When the Jews accused Jesus of being demonically possessed, and that He performed miracles by the power of Beelzebub (Satan), they not only committed blasphemy but also the unpardonable sin.

Their accusation was clearly a rejection of their Messiah which was a major turning point in the ministry of Jesus. After this rejection He healed only individuals, not groups or multitudes, and only on the basis of faith. Furthermore, when He healed someone, if that person was a Jew He told him not to tell anyone, but if he was a Gentile this command was not given.

| <u>Before His Rejection</u> | <u>After His Rejection</u> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Jesus healed: | |
| Persons & groups | Only individuals |
| Faith | |
| Not needed | Required |
| Purpose of miracles (signs) | |
| Reveal Jesus to Israel | Train future apostles |
| To tell others of the Miracle | |
| Go tell everyone | Jews told not to tell anyone |
| Teaching method | |
| Plain instruction | Taught with parables |

09.01.03.B CHART OF COMPARATIVE ACCEPTANCE – REJECTION ATTITUDES OF JEWISH LEADERSHIP TOWARD JESUS

09.01.05.Q1

What was the Sign of Jonah?

Jesus mentioned the sign of Jonah, but did not say what it was. He didn't need to, because everyone understood what He was speaking about; it related to both time and resurrection. In fact, there are four features or aspects to the sign:

1. Just as Jonah was entombed in the belly of the great fish for the proverbial “three days and three nights,” so likewise Jesus was entombed in the earth for the same time.
2. The ancients believed the bottom of both the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee was the abyss or place for the dead. Some believed it was also the entrance to hell. In the logic of first century listeners, just as Jonah went down to the place of the dead, Jesus did likewise going to the entrance of hell.
3. Just as Jonah was resurrected to life when the mighty fish regurgitated him on the shore, so Jesus was resurrected to life from the tomb (see Acts 1:7). In fact, the entire book of Jonah is a story of salvation that prophetically foreshadows God’s dealing with man – from the first coming of Jesus to His return.
4. Just as Jonah preached in Nineveh for forty days concerning the coming judgment, so likewise the gospel was preached to the Jews for forty years before judgment fell. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple occurred exactly forty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Those forty years were a probationary period for the nation of Israel and its leadership, a “prophetic type of Jonah,” which Jesus said would be a sign to validate His Messiahship.

But the leading Pharisees demanded that **“we want to see a sign from You.”** According to the Jewish Bible, a sign is “an outward compelling proof of divine authority.” This was an incredible request since Jesus had already performed so many miracles, including the messianic miracles.

Therefore, by this request when Jesus said that they were a wicked and adulterous, *generation*, He did not mean everyone. That statement was directed only to those who had seen Him perform signs and wonders and still refused to believe. Now they had the audacity to make this request! What would another miracle prove? It was a point of rejection. Nonetheless, in addition to His instruction about the purpose of the Torah, as it is applied to life, Jesus performed three messianic miracles plus one.

1. The healing of a Jewish leper (Mk. 1:40-45; 06.03.08).
2. Casting a demon out of a mute person (Mt. 9:32-34; 08.06.08).
3. Healing a man who was born blind (Jn. 9:1-12; 11.02.21).
4. These profound messianic miracles were surpassed by the grand finale of all miracles – raising Lazarus to life after three days of death. A miraculous performance of the Divine!

The religious leaders represented “national Israel.” When they rejected Jesus, in effect, “national Israel” rejected Him, and in response Jesus was going to reject national Israel. As such, He began a new phase of His ministry focused solely on those who put their faith in Him.

However, in the course of time, the Sadducees and Pharisees responded by presenting three signs that they rejected the “sign of Jonah.”

1. They rejected the resurrection of Lazarus from the grave (Jn. 11).
2. They rejected the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1:7).
3. They martyred Stephen

Since Jonah is symbolic of a resurrected life, the rejection of the “sign of **Jonah**” is therefore, the rejection of the message of salvation. That rejection was a national decision and the nation would suffer the consequences of it. As previously stated, decisions determine destiny.

09.01.05.Q2

Is the Phrase “Three Days and Three Nights” to be Interpreted Literally or is it a Figure of Speech (Mt. 12:40)? Likewise, was Jesus Buried for Three Literal Days and Three Literal Nights (Mt. 27:57-28:6)?

This has been and continues to be a subject of debate among Christians. This question is an excellent example as to why it is important to understand the cultural issues of the first century Jewish people. The answer is “yes,” but only in Jewish thinking. The phrase “three days and three nights,” is not a literal phrase but a Hebraism for saying, “in three days...” The modern method of reckoning the time from Friday evening to Sunday is certainly not three days. The ancient Hebrews counted a part of a day as a whole. Therefore, any time before sunset was considered a day. A new day began at sunset, generally at 6:00 p.m., or when the first three stars were visible in the sky. Friday afternoon when Jesus died is counted as the first day, Saturday is the second until sunset, and Saturday night is the beginning of the third day. Time was reckoned likewise for Sunday morning, and hence, with Saturday, they counted three days.

For further detail, consider this: This phrase has been used by critics to illustrate errors in the Bible. However, an examination of the Hebraic use of the term clarifies the mystery. At issue is this phrase: **“For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights.”** While this passage is a reference to the time period that Jonah and Jesus would be entombed, Hebraic scholars say that the focus is not on the number of days in the entombment (Jon. 1:3, 17), but on the resurrection that followed. Below are four examples of the phrase “three days and three nights,” used as a figure of speech.

1. Rehoboam told the people to see him *after* three days (2 Ch. 10:5, KJV), but in fact, he met with them *on* the third day (2 Ch. 10:12, KJV). The difference between the words “after” and “on” is significant. Unfortunately, at times the fine details of meaning are lost in translations. Matthew himself used “after three days” (27:63-64) demonstrating that he considered the equivalent to “on the third day.”

2. Esther fasted three days and nights (Esther 4:16), but on the third day she went to meet her king (5:1). She did not see him after fasting three complete days and nights. The phrase, “three days and three nights” is a figure of speech signifying ideal time rather than a literal time. The number three means “ideal” when used in Hebraisms, as is evidenced by the frequency a concept is mentioned. Likewise when a word is reported three times, such as “holy, holy, holy,” it is given the highest Hebraic significance possible. Rarely is anything repeated three times in the Bible.

3. In the book of *Tobit* (3:10-12), a woman by the name of Sara prays for three days and three nights, but on the third day (v. 12), she ends her prayer. Obviously the Jewish audience understood that the time frame was not a literal three day and three night ... seventy-two hour ... period.

4. The Apostle Paul counted this as three days when he said that Jesus was buried and was raised on the third day according to Scripture (1 Cor. 15:3-4). So if the apostle said that Jesus was raised on the third day, the obviously He could not have been buried the entire third day.

The emphasis should not be on the number three, but on the resurrection since that is the main point of the comparison. The problem arises when modern students read that Matthew also said that Jesus was raised to life “on the third day” (Mt. 16:21, 17:23, 20:19) and “after three days” (27:63). Furthermore, Matthew 12:39-40 stated that Jesus will rise after three days *and* three nights. It is difficult to believe that Matthew, who was at one time employed as a tax collector and skilled tax accountant, would make such an error in counting days and nights. As previously stated, the term “three days and three nights,” regardless of the “on,” “after,” or “and,” the term was an idiom for any time touching three days. Scholars today almost universally agree that the three day formula is a figure of speech that never intended to have any literal interpretation.

09.01.05

Matthew 12:42; (see also Lk. 11:29-32)

In this passage Jesus said that **“Something greater than Solomon is here.”** A better translation is “One greater than Solomon is here,” because Jesus was referring to Himself. This was a profound statement. Solomon had immeasurable wisdom, power, and wealth, but what Jesus said of Himself surpassed that of the former king. The historical context of this passage is that first century Jews relied upon Solomon’s wisdom for the discernment needed concerning demons, as well as his power to cast them out. There is nothing in Scripture that indicates that Solomon ever cast out demons. However, since he was deemed to be the most brilliant man who ever lived, first century Jews believed that he knew how to cast out evil spirits and had the power to do so. Whether Solomon was able to do that is not the issue, the issue is that the Jews

believed that *he had* that power and ability. Jesus did not argue the point. He simply stated that Someone, meaning Himself, was present who was greater than Solomon.

It is quite significant that wisdom was not considered a miraculous sign. When Jesus was twelve years old He sat on the temple steps and dumbfounded the priests with His superior wisdom and knowledge, yet this was not considered a miracle. His first miracle occurred later when He turned the water into wine in Cana. He repeatedly awed the audience with His insights, knowledge, and wisdom, and at no time were any of these conversations considered miracles.

When the Pharisees requested a miraculous sign, they did not want to hear another comment about His wisdom. Every time they attempted to trap Him with a trick question, Jesus turned their question around and made them look foolish. They wanted a “sign,” meaning a miracle such as a healing or exorcism, but not wisdom or insight. Therefore, most certainly one who had received such divine blessing of wisdom would know how to successfully cast out demons. Jesus had just healed a demon-possessed man (Mt. 12:22-30) and the conversation continued in that particular theme. Therefore, the discussion of One who is greater than Solomon is actually built upon the discussion of exorcism, and ancient writers preserved abundant clues to enhance modern understanding.

Among these writers, the first century historian Josephus not only preserved the extra-biblical evidence of historical exorcism, but also recorded that he personally witnessed a successful exorcism by one called Eleazar using the name of Solomon as his source of power. The historian’s understanding of Solomon explains why Eleazar and others called upon the name of Solomon for wisdom and power to cast out demons. However, what the first century exorcists did not realize is that, if Solomon did cast out demons, he truly would have had divine wisdom and would not have used first century rabbinic incantations and methods. Nonetheless, Josephus clearly believed that:

1. Solomon had the divine knowledge and power to cast out demons, and
2. Solomon’s power was transferred to future generations to continue the same.

The unknown author of the extra-biblical book titled, *Wisdom of Solomon*, also described the reflections and a functional knowledge of Solomon’s wisdom. This book, written in the first century B.C., reveals the popularity of Solomon as related to the exorcisms of demonic spirits in chapter 8.



09.01.05.A. THE ANCIENT SEAL OF SOLOMON CARVED IN STONE.

The Seal of Solomon (early 4th century A.D.) is an encircled 5-pointed star, like this one at Capernaum. It is believed by some scholars to have originated in Greek art and became known as the Star of Solomon. Photograph by the author.

This is clear evidence that exorcism was common in the days of Jesus, and the spiritual power was attributed to YHWH (God) and the ancient king. Now Jesus stood before them and boldly stated that, **“Something (or One) greater than Solomon is here.”** This had a profound effect as He had cast out demons without any special incantations, root or herbal remedies, or references to Solomon, but simply by the authority of His spoken word. Therefore, Jesus demonstrated that He was greater than Solomon.

09.02.02

Luke 11:37-52 Six Woes: Hypocrisy Condemned among Leading Pharisees

In this narrative, Jesus gave a profound warning to the leading Pharisees. It must be remembered that there were four levels of Pharisees. The common rabbi in the local synagogue was a Pharisee who loved and cared for the people in his congregation. However, the upper level of Pharisees, especially those living in Jerusalem, were motivated by greed and personal accomplishments. It was to them that Jesus said in verse 43, “Woe to you Pharisees! You love the front seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.” The word “woe” suggests a profound warning of pending judgment as further stated below.

In Luke 11:43 Jesus addressed the leading Jews of Jerusalem, **“Woe to you Pharisees.... Woe also to you experts in the law!”** The term *woe* is a dirge, a lament for the dead. Clearly this was a sorrowful term of judgment. The leading Pharisees and the scribes were essentially of the same theological mindset in that they created their own Oral laws which they held in superior position to their Hebrew Bible. In addition, they selected choice verses and applied them to daily lives with extreme legalism. For example,

You must distinguish between the holy and the common, and the clean and the unclean.

Leviticus 10:10

In response, Jesus gave them dire warnings of impending consequences with the term *woe*. The word *woe*, in Greek refers to both *anger* and *sorrow*. Clearly Jesus was *extremely* upset with them, and spoke forth a single word of pending judgment.

09.02.02.Q1

Luke 11:49 Why did Jesus refer to Passages in the Bible that do not Exist?

A case in point is this statement: **“Because of this, the wisdom of God said.”** These words are from Luke 11:49, but there are no clear references to His quotation. Critics have highlighted such passages as proof of numerous errors in the Bible. But the appropriate response is found in the context of the Hebraic mindset. When Jesus spoke to the Jews, they understood the *context* of the conversation, meaning, they understood what Jesus was saying in the broad scope of Scripture. Obviously, if the context was not understood, those in His audience as well as the Pharisees would have been quick to identify the error that has been touted by modern critics. But they didn’t! Jesus referred to the Scriptures of the Old Testament in three ways:

1. Directly
2. Indirectly and
3. In a broad general manner

In Jewish thinking, there was no field of study more important than theology, which far outpaced the second most important field of study – a vocational trade. When men gathered for a festival, after a synagogue service, or other social event, the subject of discussion was often theology, or the impact of Hellenism upon their world. Therefore, the average Jewish person was well grounded in both the Old Testament and Oral Tradition. As a result, it was easy for Jesus to make broad over-generalizations, as in John 17:12 and His listeners understood Him. Today, some 2,000 years later, scholars must reconstruct the setting and context of the event. Yet while

the historical connections at times are difficult to put together, the theological meaning remains secure.

09.03.15

Matthew 13:24-30 (see also Mk. 4:26-29) Parable of the Wheat and Tares

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares is a parable of those who call themselves “Christians” and are regular attendees in the local church. Everyone knows that some take their faith much more seriously than do some others. This parable is one of separation – a separation of those who are truly believers from those who simply mimic the Christian faith. It is one of several parables of separation.

The tare is a poisonous rye grass that looks like wheat when young. However, in the first century, no one knew it was a rye grass; everyone believed it was degenerated wheat. That makes the parable all the more fitting to the local church situation.



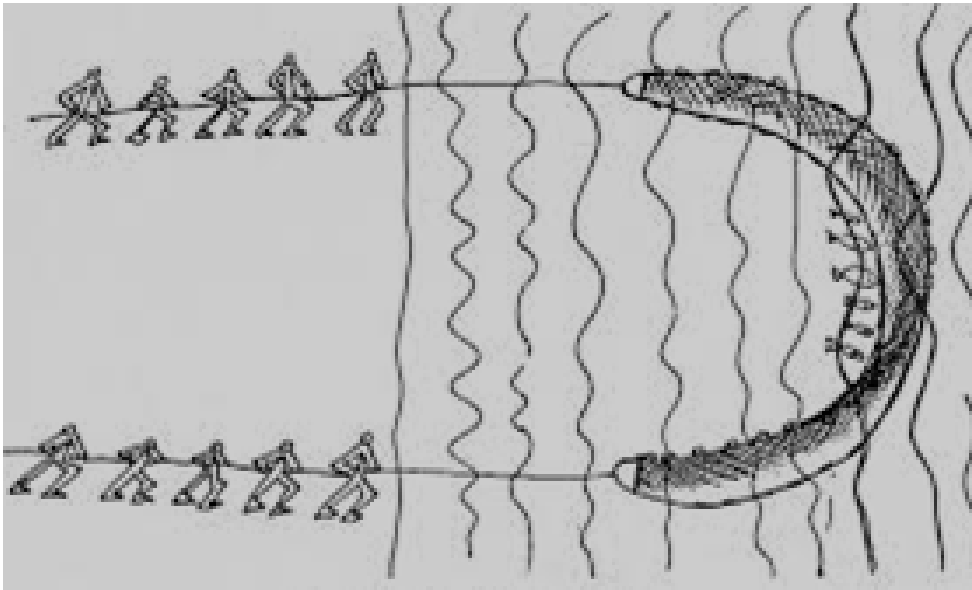
09.03.15.A. WHEAT AND TARES. Wheat (left) and tares grow together in the same field, are similar in appearance, and usually only the farmer can distinguish the difference between them. But by harvest time, the wheat has a full head of grain while the tares fall to the ground as shown. Tares also have a root system that intertwines with the root systems of the wheat, thereby stealing strength from them. Photographed by the author.

The following is another parable of separation. It does not refer to those outside of the church, but about those inside. It is explained in Matthew 13:36-43. Notice the list of characters:

09.03.23

Matthew 13:47-50 Parable of the Dragnet

Another parable of separation is the Parable of the Dragnet. Fishermen worked together to cast a large net in the Sea of Galilee, then men at both ends would drag it to shore. When the entire dragnet was out of the water, the bad fish were separated from the good ones.



09.03.23.A. DRAGNET. This net is 750 to 1,000 feet long, and with one end on the shore several fishermen in a boat take it out in the water about 300 feet and loop around and return to the shore in a semi-circular manner. The net has floats along one edge and weights on the other edge that sinks along the bottom. The ends are then pulled on shore until the entire net is out of the water and the fish are sorted. Google image.

Cast of Characters

| | |
|----------------|--|
| The Sea | = The local church |
| Good fish | = Believers who resisted temptations by the evil one |
| Worthless fish | = Believers who accepted temptations by the evil one |
| Angels | = Agents for the final Judge |

09.04.02

Luke 9:60 (see also Mt. 8:21-22) “Let the Dead Bury their Own Dead”

The discussion Jesus had referred to the common practice of burial of the dead. In that context, the phrase “**Let the dead bury their own dead,**” is unique as well as problematic. The mystery lies in the fact that the statement portrays Jesus as one who breaks the 5th commandment concerning the lack of honor due to one’s parents, which was highly inconsiderate and uncompassionate. Others have suggested that Jesus was stating that the “spiritually” dead should bury the “physically” dead. While this is true, it does not address the problem of disrespect. Since a word study does not clarify this, a cultural explanation must be sought.

The burial **customs** varied greatly from the early Old Testament era to the days of Jesus. Embalming was never practiced with the exception of Jacob and Joseph, who were probably mummified. Burial was on the same day of death, due primarily to the rapid decay of a corpse in the hot climatic region of the Middle East. It appears that the earliest burials were in individual graves. Three examples from pre-King David days are:

1. Aaron was buried on Mt. Hor
2. Moses was buried in a valley in the land of Moab
3. Rebekah’s nurse, Deborah was buried near an oak tree

Eventually, families had family tombs that were carved from caves and when a person died, the body of the deceased was placed in the family burial chamber of a tomb. Over time there was a large pile of bones that became known as a *charnel pile*. For this reason, there are expressions such as “bury me with my fathers” (i.e., Gen. 49:29) or “sleep with your fathers” (i.e. Deut. 31:16).

The collection of bones became a matter of utmost care after Ezekiel prophesied that one day God would restore flesh upon the bones of the deceased (Ezek. 37:1-14). But by the first century there was a two-step process of burial.

1. The body was laid in a *niche* of a shaft tomb on the day of death where it decayed.
2. Approximately a year later the bones were gathered and placed in a box called an *ossuary*. Only then was the burial considered complete.



09.04.02.A. A RECONSTRUCTED FAMILY CAVE-TOMB. This cave-tomb at the Rockefeller Museum in East Jerusalem depicts the phrase “he slept with his fathers.” It reflects the burial custom typical of the Old Testament. But by the first century, the deceased were placed in a different type of family tomb and, after a year, the bones were gathered into a bone box known as an *ossuary*. Photograph by the author.

After the Greek conquest, wealthy Jewish people used Greek style graves, which were uniquely different from the common graves. It is believed that at some point after the Maccabean Revolt that the custom of collecting the bones of the deceased and placing them in a box came into practice.

But in the days of Jesus, as it was in centuries past, the eldest son was responsible that his parents were properly cared for in their old age and in death and that there was an honorable parent’s funeral. That included the application of spices and perfumes just as today flowers are presented in honorarium. When the man said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father,” he may have been addressing one of two situations.

1. He was the oldest son and as such was responsible for the care of *both* of his parents. If the eldest son could not care for his parents, he was obligated to assign his responsibility to someone who could. This was demonstrated when Jesus was dying on the cross and He, as the oldest son, passed His responsibility to John when He said to His mother, “Dear woman, here is your son.” To John He said, “Here is your mother” (Jn. 19:26-27). In the parable the disciple may have simply stated that he had responsibilities to his parents, who probably were elderly at the time, and hence, a concern to him.

Honor and respect of parents and elders has always been a core value at the heart of the Jewish faith. It was a sacred duty (Micah 7:6) for the eldest son to care for his elderly parents and to bury them when they died. Failure to do so resulted in incredible condemnation.

2. It was the custom that a person's body is to be buried on the day of death in a family tomb where it would decompose. This was followed by a week of intense mourning known as *shiv'ah*, followed by another but less intense mourning period known as *shloshim*. A year later the bones were carefully collected by the eldest son, placed in an ossuary (bone box), and reburied. In the discussion that Jesus had, the man's father appears to have died in the past year but the burial process was not completed until the bones were collected. Only then was the rite of burial complete. However, if his father had recently died and the family was still in mourning, this conversation would not have taken place.

When Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their own dead," He meant that someone else in the family should assume the responsibility of parental care and honor. Jesus called him with all due respect to his parents. The cost of following Jesus is not always easy. Jesus was again saying that priorities of life must be correct: serving Him takes precedence over cultural and family norms and affections.

The core issue that was difficult for the disciples to understand was that to be a follower of Jesus they had to surrender themselves unconditionally to the will of God. Furthermore, they had to devote themselves unconditionally to the work of the Kingdom without any lingering connections to the world they left behind. In essence, His command for them not to take anything along was a physical picture of their future spiritual ministry. This was the same message given when Jesus sent out seventy disciples (Lk. 10:1-16).



09.04.02.C. LIMESTONE OSSUARIES IN A FAMILY TOMB. Limestone ossuaries, **or bone boxes**, are shown as they were discovered in a first century tomb. Wealthy families used stone ossuaries to store the bones of their dead whereas common peasants used wooden ossuaries. Photo courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority.

10.01.05

Matthew 10:5-15; Mark 6:11b (See also Mk. 6:8-11a; Lk. 9:3-5) Disciples Instructed

In verse 15 Jesus said, **“I assure you: It will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.”** This passage provides clear evidence that not all areas of hell are the same. There are various grades of judgment in the eternal hell.

“It will be more tolerable on the day of judgment.” This passage clearly states that there are various levels of punishment in hell. In Matthew 11:24-24 Jesus clearly affirmed that while Scripture is inspired, some laws have a higher priority than others (cf. Mt. 23:23-24; 22:38-39). He never said that every law has equal weight to every other law.

10.01.06

Matthew 10:16-33 Disciples Warned

Jesus said, in verses 16-18, “Look, I’m sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as harmless as doves. Because people will hand you over to

Sanhedrins and flog you in their synagogues, beware of them. You will even be brought before governors and kings because of Me, to bear witness to them and to the nations.”

Christians are to be honest and harmless, but use wisdom with the gift of discernment. In many countries today true believers are being persecuted for their faith in Christ Jesus. We are told to be like the sons of Issachar who, understood the times and knew what Israel needed to do (1 Chron. 12:32). Believers will be betrayed by some within their congregations and condemned in court. If Jesus was rejected and mistreated, believers should expect the same. In the 20th century, more Christians have been on trial, persecuted, and martyred than in all the previous 19 centuries since Jesus rose from the grave. His message is to remain faithful into eternity.

10.01.07

Matthew 10:34 Conflict and Sacrifice.

Jesus, who is often known as the Prince of Peace, said, “Don’t assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” What did He mean when He said He came to bring a sword?

Some believed that He was the Messiah while others could not accept Him because He did not fit their preconceived ideas. Consequently, those who accepted Him were rejected by family members who did not accept Him. Complete dedication will be opposed by others in the family who do not agree to such a commitment. This imagery is based upon Micah 7:6. Amazingly, for two thousand years many Jews who did come to faith did so at the great cost, often being permanently separated from the families whom they dearly loved. The sword is clearly symbolic of the division within many families concerning the identity of Jesus. In the Muslim world today, those who come to faith in Christ Jesus are often confronted with the option of renouncing Christianity and returning to Islam or face death. Another example is a personal one. Once, when this writer taught ministry students in the Middle East, one day a student was missing from class. Then there was a knock on the door and two men were looking for him. He fled for his life and I never saw him again.

In this passage, the Greek word for *peace* simply does not do justice to the statement of Jesus. As a Jewish rabbi, He spoke Hebrew and Aramaic, although He was certainly fluent in Greek as well. But His teaching language was the common language of the people – Aramaic. The Hebrew word, like that of its sister language Aramaic, means *peace, completeness, good health and welfare*. Since Jesus would have thought and spoken as a Jew, not as a Greek, this is a classic example where word-study students conclude that Jesus meant the Greek definition of the term, rather than the Hebrew meaning. In fact, the Greek meaning most likely had nothing to do with Jesus.

“The person who loves father or mother more than Me.” The absolutism of Hebrew idioms is more than a mere challenge to the modern reader. Parents were highly respected since they brought forth life into this world. Jesus required a commitment of devotion that was beyond their customary understanding. Teachers – including sages and rabbis – were held in higher esteem than parents because they taught man how to live and how to prepare for the world to come. The Oral Law gives an example of this prioritized devotion:

If his father and his teacher each bore a burden, he must first relieve his teacher and afterward relieve his father. If his father and teacher were each taken captive, he must first ransom his teacher and afterward ransom his father; but if his father was also a Sage he must first ransom his father and afterward ransom his teacher.

Mishnah, *Baba Metzia* 2.11

10.01.13

Mark 6:43 (See also Lk. 9:12-17) The Sea of Galilee near Bethsaida: Five Thousand Fed

⁴³ **Then they picked up 12 baskets full of pieces of bread and fish.**

After Jesus performed this miracle, there were 12 small baskets full of bread and fish. The Greek word for baskets clearly indicates that these were twelve smaller narrow-necked, flask-shaped baskets. This miracle occurred on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, where most of the Jewish people lived. The baskets represent the fact that Jesus is the bread of life for the 12 tribes of Israel.

However, since the Jews have a history with God and His care for them, this miracle also reflects upon two similar miracles of the Old Testament.

1. Elisha's miracle was that he fed a hundred men with only twenty loaves of barley bread (2 Kg. 4:42ff). Those loaves were circular, flat and thin, similar to modern pizza dough bread. Twenty loaves may have been enough for four or five men, but most certainly not for a hundred. Elisha prayed that these would be multiplied. The Lord provided enough for everyone and there was some left over.
2. The miracle of Moses was that God's people were wandering in the desert, every day God supplied them with fresh food (Ex. 18:25). Just as Moses, the first redeemer, had given bread (manna) from heaven to the people, so Jesus gave them bread as they listened to Him speak. However, the manna by Moses fell from the sky and after a day or two, it perished. Jesus said that He was the *true Bread from heaven* that only the Father could give, and in fact, He was precisely that!

This miracle by Jesus demonstrated that He was the bread of life for the Jews. It was both a reflection and a projection. It was a “projected reflection” also known as a “type and shadow” of a shepherd feeding his sheep upon the green grass. The prophets Ezekiel (34:23-31) and Isaiah (25:6-9) mentioned a future event when God’s people will enjoy a feast with Him. By performing these miracles, Jesus performed a “foretaste” of that Messianic feast that was spoken of and is yet to come.

As such, Jesus clearly stated that His position was far higher than that of Moses whom the first century Jews had held in a near god-like position. There is also an implication with the statement “from heaven,” and that is, that what Jesus said is beyond the power of Satan and his demons.

10.01.14

John 6:16-21 (see also Mt. 14:23-27; Mk. 6:48-52) Sea of Galilee: Jesus Walks on Water

This had to have been an incredible moment. The disciples were rowing across the Sea of Galilee in the middle of the night when a storm arose. They were struggling against the wind when suddenly they saw a figure of a man walking across the water. Who would not have been scared to death in that situation?

Both the ancient Jews and their Greek neighbors believed that only God (or gods) had control over the winds and waters. It is understandable then, that some became confused about Jesus’ identity. Certainly, no mere mortal could do such a thing!

To any Greek observers, if Jesus could tell the winds to be still and walk on the waters, then certainly He was more powerful than Zeus, the Greek god of the winds, as well as Poseidon, the Greek god of the waters and earthquakes. In the 8th century B.C., the Greek poet Homer wrote a play with this description of Poseidon driving a chariot across the sea.

Therefore, when Jesus walked on the water or calmed the sea, the Greeks who may have witnessed these events were just as stunned as were the Jews. The stroll that Jesus took across the water was even more profound when considering that all of them believed that the abyss was right below Him – the bottom of the sea was one of the three gates to hell because it was believed that the place of the dead and demons was on the bottom of the sea. In their thinking, that was paramount of having the ultimate authority over dead and the demons. Obviously, whoever this Jesus was, He most certainly had a firm command over Poseidon and the sea monsters of the deep. Today we know that there are no demons on the bottom of the Sea, but the fact remains that Jesus exercised His power over demons whether they were real or imagined.

As if the influence of the Greek culture upon the Jews was not enough to cause great consternation, the Jews remembered the words of Job who referred to God walking on the water (Job 9:8). Without speaking a single word that He was God, this action profoundly declared that

Jesus was God. He did not have to proclaim it because the disciples could see it. In addition, He performed the messianic miracles that the Jews believed only the Messiah could do. His daily life, character, actions, kindness, and compassion all revealed the characteristics of the expected “Anointed One” the rabbis had been teaching for years. Amazingly, it appears that James, the brother of Jesus, and Thomas continued to have difficulties believing that Jesus was Deity until after the resurrection.

Then Jesus said in verse 50, **“It is I.”** These three small words in English are not identification, but an awesome formula of revelation for the disciples, literally “I AM.” All knew that it was the term God used to identify Himself in the Torah. Jesus did not have to claim His divinity; He demonstrated it in contrast of what everyone understood.

10.01.15

Matthew 14:28 Sea of Galilee: Peter Walks on Water

Then Peter speaks: “Lord, if it’s You,” Peter answered Him, “command me to come to You on the water.” Now why would Peter ask the question, “Lord, if it’s You?” Who else would have been out there?

It must be remembered that the Jews were neighbors to many Gentiles. Each group knew what the other believed. And the Jews knew that the Greeks believed that before a sailor died on the sea, he would see his ghost walk across the water. So Peter wanted to make sure that figure out there was Jesus, and not his own ghost.

Now after that exciting event, no wonder Peter declared, **“Truly You are the Son of God!”** At this point, Peter recognized Jesus as *the Son of God*, but that recognition probably did *not* include the element of deity. The word *Son* is capitalized because the phrase was addressed to Jesus, not because Peter recognized Jesus as Lord and Savior. The term *son of God* was in common usage throughout all ancient Middle Eastern cultures. Even within the Hebrew Bible there are a number of descriptions of the term.

1. The angels are called the sons of God (Gen. 6:2) and in the oldest book of the Bible the sons of God presented themselves before the Lord (Job 1:6). It appears to have been a common title for angels.
2. The nation of Israel is referred to as a son of God (Hosea 11:1; Ex. 4:22).
3. The king of the Jewish nation is a son of God (2 Sam. 7:14)
4. Any good Jewish man is a son of God, as written in the Inter-Testamental Period (*Ben Sirach* 4:10)

Therefore, anyone who made this statement of Jesus said so because Jesus was a good man who performed incredible miracles. Jesus was not seen as God Incarnate as Christians do today, until *after* the resurrection.

10.01.17

John 6:53-55

⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “I assure you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ Anyone who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day, ⁵⁵ because My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink.

The words, “**Anyone who eats My flesh and drinks My blood,**” were hard to understand even at the time of Jesus. However, the Hebrew language is a pictorial language that presents a hint to the correct interpretation. For anyone familiar with ancient sacrifices, as the Jewish people were, it really was not that unusual. There are two interpretations of which the second one is generally seen as the most acceptable.

1. All the sacrifices of the Old Testament were, in some way, symbolic of the life and ministry of Jesus. When the Passover lamb, for example, was sacrificed at the temple, it was roasted and then taken home to be eaten. When Jesus said, “Whoever who eats My flesh and drinks My blood,” He was saying that He is that sacrifice – the sacrificial lamb – that the Jewish people were eating. While they did not drink blood, Jesus was speaking of the entire sacrifice as pointing to Himself – He will be the sacrifice for the sins of humanity. The phrase “blood of Jesus” is to be understood as the atoning death of our Savior.
2. This phrase was a figure of speech that Jesus used to dramatize the point that the essence of *Him* has to become the essence of each of us. An Old Testament example that shed light on this was spoken by God to the prophet Ezekiel. In 3:1, God said to him, “Eat this scroll, then go and speak to the house of Israel.” Obviously, that did not mean a physical scroll, but it did mean Ezekiel was to “internalize” the Word of God thoroughly, understand it completely, and then speak to the Hebrew people. Likewise, when Jesus said “eat the flesh of the Son of Man” it was His intent for the people to internalize His words. He meant that His followers ought to consider Him the bread of eternal life. Just as physical food becomes a part of the human body, likewise spiritual food is to become part of the spiritual body.

He deliberately made some statements knowing these would be challenging, and thereby, He forced the people to think and debate His words and His identity. As has been often stated, the

primary challenge Jesus had was to convince the Jews that He was radically different from their preconceived ideas of the messiah.

Not only is this a difficult saying for us today, it was also difficult for some disciples. John recorded that some who heard these words decided to leave. Yet this was not the first lesson they failed to understand. Jesus was surprised that they did not grasp the significance in the feeding of the five thousand (Mk 6:51-52). The gospel writer said their hearts were hardened and their minds were closed. It is important not to separate this passage from the multiplication miracle, but consider it an extension of that event.

One scholar condensed the meaning as follows: When the Israelites were wandering in the desert, they would have died without manna and water. So likewise without Jesus in their lives, people have no hope. Just as manna and water were essential to physical life, so Jesus is essential to spiritual life.

In John 6:60, the phrase, **“This teaching is hard! Who can accept it?”** clearly reveals that some listeners took it literally, and did so for good reason. Take note of the events of human sacrifice in Jewish history:

1. Abram (Abraham) took his only son Isaac to be offered as a sacrifice, but in the last moment an angel appeared and stopped him, and provided a ram instead. Why would Abram consider doing this horrific deed? It is because in the culture in which he lived, child sacrifice was common. God tested Abram to determine how strong his love and faith was for God. It also was an outstanding moment in history for God to say that he did not approve of human sacrifice.
2. There are Old Testament accounts where the Israelites were told to wipe out their Canaanite enemies – every man, woman, and child had to die. Why? It is because they practiced child sacrifice. God knew that if any survived, sooner or later child sacrifice would be adopted by His people. So therefore, the Israelites were God’s hand of judgment against those who destroyed innocent lives.
3. No doubt one of the most wicked of all Jewish kings was Manasseh, who was more wicked than were the Amorites who at one time also practiced child sacrifice (2 Kg. 21:11). Not only did Manasseh set up an idol to Ashtoreth and Baal, but he also instituted child sacrifice (2 Kg. 21).

Therefore, when Jesus spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, some in the audience thought of the horrors of Jewish history rather than becoming united in Him with this figure of speech. They chose to reject Him rather than to stay and learn the allegorical form of expression. But what He really meant was the His followers are to be fully consumed by Him.

10.01.21

Mark 7:14-23; Matthew 15:12-16 Defilement Contrasted

Again Jesus emphasized the importance of being separated from the evils of this world. In the Old Testament Period there were various activities by which one could become “defiled.” There is no parallel to defilement in the New Testament era, but the message is just the same – true believers are to be separated from the evils of this world, and at times from those self-proclaimed Christians who clearly are not true believers.

“But the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” This graphic statement clearly connects, especially with verses 19-23, bodily excrement with the evil thoughts that come from within a person. It emphasizes the differences between the believer and unbeliever. In a similar manner just as kosher foods are not important to His followers, they are to have “kosher” hearts. The concept of *kosher* is for the people of God to be a holy people, separated from the lifestyle and worldview of the world. In fact, not only the words of Jesus, but the entire New Testament requires believers to live a life separated from the world – the precise purpose of *kosher foods* of the Hebrew Bible. The goal is that what comes out of a person is clean and pure due to a transformed life. Note the following examples:

1. You formerly walked in the ways of this world (implies that now you don't; Eph. 2:2)
2. Do not be bound with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14)
3. Keep yourself unstained by this world (Jam. 1:27)
4. Do not be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2)
5. Come out of their midst and be separate (2 Cor. 6:17)
6. Do not love this world, nor the things in the world (1 Jn. 2:15)
7. If anyone loves this world, the love of the Father is not in him 1 Jn. 2:15)
8. Demas (an associate of Paul) having loved this world has deserted me (2 Tim. 4:10)
9. A friend of this world is an enemy of God (Jas. 4:4)
10. Gain the world and forfeit your soul (Mk. 8:36)
11. He who loves this life in this world will lose it (Jn. 12:25)
12. Our struggle is against the darkness of this world (Eph. 6:12)

The term greed is separated from all the other vices because the Greek definition is considerably more profound than its English translation implies. In the Greek it means *to possess* things which are forbidden and should not be desired whatsoever. Furthermore, it is usually in conjunction

with another word that refers to a sheer animal lust. The gospel writer continues with evil actions, deceit, typical characteristics that accompany greed. Deceit is defined as *craftiness, a bait, snare, trickery*, and is associated with *lusts of deceit*. These characteristics, therefore, would not be obviously noticeable. The believer is to have an attitude of purity and holiness.

10.01.25

Mark 8:1-10 (See also Mt. 15:29-39) Northeast Hills by the Sea: Four Thousand Fed

The miracle Jesus performed in the western side of the Sea of Galilee was replicated on the eastern side. When the miracle was over and everyone had eaten as much as they wanted, they had enough leftovers to fill “**seven large baskets.**” The Greek word for “basket” in this passage is a vessel large enough to hold a person (cf. Acts 9:25). The amount of bread that was left over was massive, obviously enough for hundreds of people. Of course there was a silent message in this miracle as there was in the feeding of the 5,000. This miracle took place on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee for people who were descendants of the seven nations previously removed from Canaan by Joshua. Jesus demonstrated that He was the abundant Bread of Life to all Gentile nations.

10.01.28

Mark 8:22-26 Bethsaida: Blind Man Healed with Spit and the Laying on of Hands

²³ He took the blind man by the hand and brought him out of the village. Spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, “Do you see anything?”

The unique feature of this miracle is that it was a two-part miracle. How could Jesus perform a healing that, for whatever reason, did not result in a complete healing in His first attempt?

“**Spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him.**” Jesus healed this man in a double treatment. After the partial healing the man said, “I see people,” but they were blurred. The healing was obviously not complete. Yet the fact that he recognized people and trees indicates that he was not born blind. The only other incident that is similar to this is recorded in John 9 where the blind man’s eyes were coated with clay and he was told to wash in the Pool of Siloam (see 11.02.21).

There is, however, extra-biblical literary evidence that suggests the application of saliva for the healing of the eyes was an accepted healing method. A certain Rabbi Meir stated that a woman was famous for her ability to heal sick eyes with her saliva. Since he accepted this as a legitimate medical practice, it was not looked upon as any kind of charm or magic. Furthermore, the

Babylonian Talmud confirmed it. However, healing with saliva on the Sabbath was forbidden unless it was thought to save a life.

The point of interest in this Jewish account is that since it was perceived as a legitimate medical procedure and not some form of witchcraft, the actions of Jesus would have been likewise understood as a legitimate and not witchcraft.

10.01.28.Q1

What was the Purpose of the Two-Step Healing Process in Mark 8:22-26?

The two-step method of healing a blind person has been problematic for students of the Bible. The unspoken issue is, of course, if Jesus is the all-powerful Healer, why wasn't the man healed the first time? Since it is the only two-step miracle in the gospels, there may be a prophetic element hidden in this event. While there is no clear answer, it has been suggested that this is parallel to the following:

1. The two-step healing is parallel to the understanding of the disciples. They had been with Jesus all this time but still had a *limited understanding* of His message and ministry – but their *full understanding* or “second healing of understanding” was to come after His resurrection.
2. Another parallel pertains to national Israel. The religious leaders had a *limited understanding* at this time, but after their rejection of Jesus, they would be blinded for a while. Israel's vision for the plan of God will be “healed” after the fullness of the Gentiles is completed. At that time, all Israel will have *full understanding* and be saved as the Apostle Paul stated in Romans 11:25-27.

Therefore, the blind man was a “type and shadow” of both the disciples and national Israel.

10.01.29

Matthew 16:13-20 (see also Mk. 8:27-30; Lk. 9:18-20) Caesarea Philippi: Peter Acknowledges Jesus as the Anointed One

¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven.”

Caesarea Philippi, also known as Banias, was an ancient city of demonic worship at the base of Mount Hermon. On the side of a mountain, which is a huge cliff, is a cave out of which flowed

the Jordan River until the mid-1800s when an earthquake changed the discharge of the river. The Canaanites had two important beliefs concerning their god Baal and this cave.

1. They believed that Baal went to Hades every fall, stayed there for the winter, and returned in the spring. The mountain cave at Caesarea Philippi was not only the “gate” for Baal to enter and leave Hades, but it was also his place of authority, as represented by the water flowing out of the mountain.
2. They also believed that Baal, their fertility god, lived in that cave. To appease him, they and their descendants practiced child sacrifice for centuries until the Greeks terminated the practice in the fourth century B.C.

The ancients believed that certain caves were entrances to hell and the underworld of demons. This was especially true during the centuries of Greek and Roman domination. Since they also believed that Pan lived in the cave on the bottom of Mount Hermon, they not only built a temple to worship him, but had his image on various mosaics and coins.

In this passage, Jesus took His disciples to the most pagan place in Israel – a place known as Banias where the ancient Canaanites once offered live infants to their god. Since then it was a shrine of the Greek god Pan, a pagan deity said to be half human and half goat. In Greek mythology, Pan kept order among the other gods who often fought among themselves. Into this sinful place Jesus brought the disciples and asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” They acknowledged that He was the supreme Son of God. Then Jesus responded to Peter and said that the forces of Hades would not overcome the church. Some translations state that the gates of hell would not overcome the church.

The term “gates” suggests a place of authority, because in ancient Israel the city gate was where the local government council met and where businessmen conducted their affairs. By the first century, government buildings were established and the gates no longer functioned as locations of authority, but the imagery remained the same. That is why Jesus told Peter that he (Peter) would receive the keys of the kingdom – meaning the authority of the kingdom of God.

Pan, or *Panias*, according to Greek mythology, kept peace among the other gods and, therefore, the palace of the gods was known as the “Pantheon.” Today, the site is known as “Banias” because the Arabs who moved into the region in A.D. 636, could not pronounce the letter “P.” Pan was pictured as a goat-demon (Heb. *sair* 8163), the half-man and half-goat god who lived in the woodlands, mountains, and lush green stream of the Jordan River. In Old Testament times, Gentiles from all nearby regions came to worship him, as did the Israelites at times (Lev. 17:7; 2 Chron. 11:15; 2 Kgs. 23:8).

Undoubtedly this is the most important question anyone is ever asked is, “Who do you say that I am?” Jesus did not ask, what do people think of what I am teaching or what do they think about my miracles? “Who do you say that I am?” is a question that forces one to acknowledge or deny

His deity. Jesus wanted to know if the faith of His disciples was deeper than that of crowds. An answer of uncertainty or doubt simply underscores one's lack of knowledge or faith. Only an affirmative answer is acceptable. When Jesus asked this question, it was done in the shadow of multiple gods in a pagan culture where Judaism was obviously the minority religion. The question was not addressed to Peter, as is often thought, but to the group. The word for *you* is plural – meaning everyone in the group. But only Peter had the courage to give the answer, and it was the right answer as he acknowledged both the words and work of Jesus. As to the identity of Jesus, there were a number of popular answers among the people. Some believed that,

1. He was John the Baptist raised from the dead, but functioning under a different name.
2. He had the *spirit* of John the Baptist.
3. He was Elias, who like Enoch, never died.
4. Some believed He was Jeremiah who returned to reveal the Ark and sacred vessels which supposedly He hid on Mount Nebo.
5. Or He was one of the other prophets.

When Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Who do you say I am?” Peter responded with, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The statement was said at the pagan shrine of Pan, where demonic influences were supreme. In this spiritual environment, when Jesus said, “the gates of Hades (Hell) will not overcome it [the church],” He clearly meant that the authority and power of Satan would not overcome the believers of His church (cf. Isa. 38:10). Jesus had a second motive with His question. He affirmed the fact that He was not the military messiah that many were expecting, but rather, He was speaking of a heavenly kingdom.

It may surprise the modern student of biblical studies that the teachings of Jesus did not differ much from those teachings of orthodox rabbis who loved their people and were committed to serving God in the best way they could. But all too often their teachings are lost with the writings of many diverse opinions of other rabbis. The difference between Jesus and the rabbis who taught His message was His identity – and that was an issue all had to grapple with. That is why Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?” and not, “What do people think of my teaching?”

“The forces of Hades will not overpower it.” Literally, this phrase literally means *the gates of Hades will not prevail*, or *the gates of hell will not overcome it*. The words *Hades* and *hell* have at times become interchangeable. The *forces of Hades* or *gates of Hades*, in the Old Testament refer to physical death. The term *sheol* has at times been incorrectly translated as *hell*. The Old Testament concept of *sheol* is not a place of torment, but a temporary condition during the Old Testament Dispensation. For that reason the patriarchs are described in Hebrews 9:16 as looking for a better heavenly place. The New Testament understanding of heaven and hell is not related to *sheol*.

“Bind on earth ... loose on earth.” This Hebraic idiom was used to express the rabbinical authority to either forbid or permit various activities in the synagogue. The rabbis functioned as if they were entrusted with a limited degree of divine authority concerning the affairs of the people under their ministry. This concept was continued in the early church and is demonstrated in Acts 15:1-11 with the following three examples:

1. Peter gave a stinging rebuke to Ananias and Sapphira for their deceitfulness.
2. Paul functioned with this authority in I Corinthians 5:3 when he stated, “And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this.”
3. Finally, when the Jerusalem Council met to consider issues related to Gentile believers (Acts 15:1-29), they invoked this rabbinic tradition that was endorsed and extended by Jesus when they decided that their decision was based on what “seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

The phrase “Bind on earth ... loose on earth,” does not mean that Satan was completely defeated and destroyed, because the work of the cross did not change the status of the earth and humanity to the pre-fall innocence of the Garden of Eden. It does mean, however, that Satan’s power is broken and his activity is curbed. A definition summary is presented for each term:

“To loose.” “Freeing of those in prison” “The opening of things that are closed.” “To loose, release, to free, to dissolve, to dismiss or set aside.” By the sacrificial blood of Jesus a person can be loosed from sin (1 Jn. 1:9), attacks and bondage created by Satan (Lk. 13:12, 16; 1 Jn. 3:8), bondage of the tongue (Mk. 7:35), debt (Mt. 18:27), unjustifiable imprisonment (Acts 22:25-30), and sickness (Lk. 13:12).

“To bind” “To wrap up,” “to bind together,” or “to chain.” The word is also related to “imprisonment, supernatural binding, declaring forbidden or permitted, imposing or removing an obligation, imposing and removing a ban.” Some scholars present a modern definition of “overcoming” meaning to be victorious.

The terms are illustrated in the Hebrew Bible in both physical and spiritual senses. In Psalm 105:17-22, Joseph is bound and sold into slavery, then freed from his imprisonment, and became a ruler with the authority to bind others (cf. Gen. 41). While some have applied this physical illustration to the spiritual world, a clearer example of the domains was written by a later prophet. When writing of true fasting, Isaiah said that it will,

Loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke ... Set the oppressed free and break every yoke.

Isaiah 58:6

The chains of injustice and freedom of the oppressed could have both a physical and spiritual interpretation. However, the context suggests a strong spiritual interpretation. Often the authors of extra-biblical books wrote their opinions reflective of the Hebrew Bible. In essence, the authors tell modern scholars that they believed in a literal interpretation of Isaiah concerning loosening and binding.



10.01.29.C. NICHES FOR THE IDOLS OF PAN AND OTHER GREEK GODS. In these niches, the idols of pagan gods once stood when Jesus asked His famous question, “Who do you say that I am?” From a large cave in the base of Mount Hermon flowed the River Banias, the major source of water for the Jordan River. In 1837, an earthquake collapsed a portion of the cave and the river now gushes from a nearby opening in the mountain. Photograph by the author.

11.01.02

Matthew 17:1-8 (See also Lk. 9:28-36a; Mk. 9:2-8) Mount Hermon: Jesus is Transfigured

Students of the Bible have long noticed that the Scriptures seem to disagree on the length of the Transfiguration. The essential question was this:

11.01.02.Q3

Did the Transfiguration occur in Six Days or Eight?

Matthew and Mark recorded that this event occurred “after about six days,” while Luke said it occurred “after about eight days.” As stated previously, the apparent difference can be simply explained in that there were two methods of counting days: exclusively and inclusively. “Inclusively” would count the six days between the events while “exclusively” count the six days plus the eventful days of travel at either end of the six day period. Luke counted time inclusively while Mark and Matthew counted time exclusively.

11.02.05

Matthew 18:6-9; (See also Mark 9:43-50; Luke 17:1-3a) Capernaum: Stern Warning about causing Others to Sin

Mt. ⁶ “But whoever causes the downfall of one of these little ones who believe in Me – it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea! ⁷ Woe to the world because of offenses. For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes.

⁴⁷ And if your eye causes your downfall, gouge it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ here Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. (Isaiah 66:24).

“But whoever causes the downfall of one of these little ones.” The consequence of causing emotional, spiritual, or physical injury to children is immense. Jesus said it would be better for a millstone to be around their neck and to be thrown into the sea. (The bottom of the Sea of Galilee was also known as the Abyss, where legend said the demons lived.) In effect, Jesus said that if anyone caused a little child to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the lake of demons than to receive judgment on Judgment Day.

The passage continues to say that it would be better if that person had a **“heavy millstone”** around his neck and tossed into the sea. At this time there were two kinds of millstones:

1. A small pair of millstones for household use to grind wheat or barley into flour
2. A large heavy millstone that was turned by a donkey or person and its primary use was to crush olives

Jesus used the term of the larger millstone as He emphasized anger and judgment on those who would willfully cause injury others. It was a common phrase in the ancient world.

“Woe to the world.” Dire judgment is coming not only to these “false shepherds,” but also to those who follow them. The phrase *woe*, which in Greek is *ouai*, refers to both *anger* and

sorrow. It is a funeral dirge; a lament for the dead (see 09.02.02). Scholars have two interpretations to this statement:

1. Because of the sins of these “false shepherds,” they are leading their people into a destiny of destruction which is why Jesus is both angry and sorrowful.
2. This warning was focused directly at the religious leaders who had absolutely no desire to serve their synagogues or God in any capacity, but held their positions for personal financial gain and power. They were concerned only about their social status, power, and wealth. However, not all Pharisees had this arrogant attitude. Clearly, Jesus was *extremely sorrowful* with the leading Pharisees and with a single word He promised a coming judgment which will be followed by eternal damnation. Such a warning should put any pastor, teacher, or other leader of the church today in humility and prayer.

“Gouge it out.” This statement is not a teaching of self-mutilation, but is a figure of speech known as hyperbole; a deliberate exaggeration to emphasize the point that drastic measures need to be taken to remove sin. Jesus said that nothing is to tempt the believer and have him fall into the eternal lake of fire.

11.02.08

Matthew 18:18-20 Apostles given Authority

¹⁸ I assure you: Whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, I assure you: If two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them.”

“Bound in heaven . . . loosed in heaven.” There are two interpretations of this subject of loosening and binding and what Jesus intended for His disciples and His church.

1. Binding and loosening as understood in punishing or absolving men in the synagogue relative to religious law
2. Binding and loosening is understood in a spiritual context, that is, to bind and loose the spirits that motivate, manipulate, or control people. But what it does not mean is that either the disciples or the church have the authority to forgive sins or to send anyone to heaven or hell – that is reserved for God alone.

The interpretations of the phrase vary among biblical references as well as among church denominations today and certainly will not be resolved here. However, understanding this phrase has a direct implication of how the disciples would deal with those who were possessed or

controlled by demonic forces. It has been said that Jesus clearly gave limited authority to His disciples to control the spiritual dynamics in their environment.

An Egyptian ostraca was found and it is one of many that clearly suggest that the term *binding and loosening* was used in a spiritual sense. Therefore, on that evidence alone it is highly unlikely that Jesus meant it only in a legalistic or legislative sense. Two examples are:

1. In the gospels, those who could not speak were said to have been “bound” by a non-human force. Zechariah, when in doubt, had his tongue bound by an angel. It was not a physical illness that caused the loss of speech, but a spiritual binding.
2. Another example is found in Luke 13:16 where Jesus said that Satan had “bound” a daughter for eighteen years. He meant that the crooked woman who was “bound” by a “spirit of infirmity” was later “loosened” on the Sabbath.

Therefore, Jesus clearly meant that the phrase **“bound in heaven . . . loosed in heaven”** refers to limited binding and loosening of demonic spirits by people with the use of His power.

“If two of you on earth agree.” What Jesus repeated to His disciples was not a new revelation but a fulfillment of what they had learned in their youth. This discussion had a major emphasis on how someone was to be removed from the fellowship of the early Church. Clearly, if the Church followed divine principles, God would honor their final decision.

11.02.09

Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-4 Peter asks about Forgiveness (“70 times 7”)

“70 times seven.” It has generally been said that since $70 \times 7 = 490$, Christians are to forgive an unlimited number of times when someone is seriously trying to change their life, but keeps making a mess of himself. That may be true, but there is another element to this statement.

The subject of forgiveness was an essential element in the ministry of Jesus, and was represented by an interesting figure of speech. The number seven represents wholeness, completeness, and perfection, not only in the Jewish culture but in surrounding cultural groups as well. Some scholars believe the number 70 represents the number of nations based on Genesis 10. However, that would not have had any relationship to the issues of the Jewish people. Therefore, the greater probability is that the number 70 represented the highest human judicial court, the Sanhedrin, since it has seventy members. It was based upon the Law of Moses in the book of Numbers,

¹⁶ The LORD answered Moses, “Bring Me 70 men from Israel known to you as elders and officers of the people. Take them to the tent of meeting and have them stand there with you. ^{17a} Then I will come down and speak with you there.

Numbers 11:16-17a

Therefore, not only was the number considered to be ordained by God, but it was believed that a Sanhedrin decision was a decision also affirmed by God as noted in verse 17a. To the Jewish mind, this not only meant times without number but also without the highest legal judgment.

From the perspective of Jesus, the term “seventy times seven” is an emphasis on perfect forgiveness. The implication is obvious: perfect forgiveness decreed by every justice seated in the highest court in the land. This figure of speech has little to do with the number 490. Rather, it is focused on the *spirit of quality*, not *legalistic quantity*.

Some scholars have reflected upon Genesis 4:24 concerning the account of Lamech, a descendant of Cain. He was the Old Testament icon for revengeful killings. Concerning him, Moses wrote, “If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.” (But 77 is not 70x7.) Jesus may have thought of him in this discourse. If so, then forgiveness by mere human strength is impossible; such forgiving strength can come only from divine intervention.

Peter and the disciples were challenged with an incomprehensible thought that full forgiveness was being offered to tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners who were struggling to get out of a sinful lifestyle. Note that previously the discussion was on an *unrepentant* brother, whereas the instruction here is given to one who is repentant and is struggling to live a pure and holy lifestyle.

11.02.21

John 9:1-12 Jesus at the Pool of Siloam: Healing the Man Born Blind

¹ As He was passing by, He saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples questioned Him: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?” The common thinking was that any disease or infirmity as this was the result of sin in the family. In this culture, 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. This was *not* based on any Scripture, but an opinion that became a Pharisaic doctrine. Certain sins of the parents were thought to have resulted in specific physical ailments of leprosy or blindness in their children. This curse (Jn. 9:1-12) was considered typical evidence that sins were passed on to the proverbial “third and fourth generation.” In other cases, some Jews believed a child might sin in its mother’s womb. To support this argument, the rabbis referred to the struggle between Jacob and Esau prior to their births (Gen. 25:22). It was the common opinion that if a child was born blind, or if a couple could not bear children, there was a curse on them for some past sin. For that reason, the question was asked of Jesus. The miracle of this healing was the fulfillment

of a prophecy of Isaiah, who said,

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Isaiah 35:5

11.02.21.Q1

Why did Jesus use Spit and Mud to Heal the Blind Man in John 9:1-12?

Scholars have pondered this question for centuries. In ancient times, eyes were sometimes healed with the application of a cream or salve; other times with spit and mud. Could it be possible that Jesus purposefully mimicked existing methods? Admittedly, nearly all evangelical scholars would demand a negative answer to this question. Furthermore, why would He have done so? He already demonstrated so many healing miracles where other so-called healers failed. To make the possible answers more challenging, the healing of a blind man in Mark 8:22-26 (10.01.28) is the only recorded miracle that was performed in two stages. In that case, Jesus placed spittle on his eyes, but not mud.

After considerable research, a possible answer remains to be a little more than an educated guess. The use of spit and mud was clearly out of the ordinary routine of miracles that Jesus performed, and there may have been more to it than to simply demonstrate His Messianic calling and divine authority. The religious leaders were nearly petrified at this miracle and, as if to add insult to injury upon Pharisaic legalism, this healing was not performed in a private home or environment, but in a public forum where it received maximum attention. As stated previously, Jesus did not come to be a Healer of human bodies, but to be a Healer of souls. Miracles, with Jesus, were only a means to a higher end, credentials to enforce the reception of spiritual truth.

The Greeks, Romans, and other people groups used spit and mud because there was a widespread applied faith in its healing potency. Yet no records have been uncovered that verify a miraculous healing by this common ritual (except by those who claimed to be healers). Some scholars believe that the ancients thought of it as a cure for eye diseases, but not blindness. However, the Roman writer Suetonius below, in a discussion of Vespasian, said that the emperor used spittle to restore the sight to a blind man.

While these pagan accounts are obviously mythical, whether there was a healing is hardly the point, because many believed it had actually occurred. Nowhere in the Bible is the reality of pagan healings and exorcisms denied. When Jesus came to heal, He did so by His divine power that was in sharp contrast to pagan formulas and rituals. Furthermore, Jesus healed some who were blind from birth, indicating that their illness was not a temporary medical condition from which they could have naturally recovered.

1. An opinion of this writer is that Jesus *might have* healed the man with spit and mud because others claimed to have done the same with a similar method, but Jesus actually healed where others failed.
2. A thought worthy of consideration is this: just as the ten plagues by Moses were against the gods of Egypt, could it be possible that some of the miracles performed by Jesus were against the Greco-Roman gods? Jesus lived in a Jewish community with pagan Greek influences. He not only needed to prove to orthodox Jews who He was, but also to the Hellenized Jews who accepted many Greek ideologies.
3. Another opinion is that the use of mud reflects upon the creation of Adam in the Garden of Eden, and Jesus symbolically recreated the man's vision so he could see his Creator. But that fails to sufficiently answer "why"?

All ancient people groups believed in healing by divine intervention. It is well known that healers applied some type of ointment to the eyes of the blind. While Jesus at times simply touched the eyes of the blind, quite possibly here He mimicked the narrative in *Tobit*, simply to demonstrate that He truly was the Healer as opposed to others who attempted similar feats. But with this divine revelation the disciples, too, had their eyes of understanding opened. The healing power of Jesus was superior to the healing attempts of the best medicine man or magician of the day.

11.02.25.Q1

Does John 9:39 Conflict with 5:22 and 8:15?

In John 9:39 Jesus said that He came into this world to judge it, but in 5:22 and 8:15 He said that judgment is left to Him because the Father judges no one. The difference lays in the fact that in John 9:39 Jesus said that His "judgment" was a clarification of where people stood in their relationship with God. As previously stated, he came to fulfill the Mosaic Law, not abolish it. He taught the Kingdom of God and helped people discern what God desires. He did not come to condemn the world (5:22; 8:15) but to save it. However, in His future return He will judge all persons and nations. On an important side note, the Church has adopted a Roman view of *law*, that means *restriction* and is therefore considered to be *bad*, while the Hebrew Bible views *law* as *instruction* and *freedom*, and therefore, *good*. Therefore, there is no conflict.

11.02.27

John 10:7-10 The Gate for the Sheep

⁷ So Jesus said again, "I assure you: I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. ⁹ I am the

door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.

In biblical times there were two kinds of sheepfolds. The discussion by Jesus includes both kinds.

1. In villages there were communal sheepfolds where all the shepherds kept their sheep. This pen had a door and only one person held the key. In the morning when the shepherds came, all the sheep followed the shepherd whose voice they recognized. This is the kind of sheep-fold Jesus referred to in John 10:2-3.

2. Sheepfolds in the countryside were large pens enclosed by a stone wall, but there was no door. Briars were often planted on the outside of the wall to deter attacks by wild animals and thieves. But to protect the sheep at night, the shepherd would sleep across the entrance. No sheep could go out or any other animal or person could enter without going over the shepherd and waking him up. In the most literal sense, he was the door to the sheepfold; Jesus is the sheep-fold door of John 10:7.

In this passage Jesus presented His seventh “I am” statement. Not only did John present the divine characteristics of Jesus with those statements, but he verbally underlined their significance by mentioning seven statements, the number of wholeness and completeness.

During the day, shepherds and shepherdesses guarded the sheep. In the later afternoon, however, the women returned to their homes and the shepherds guarded the sheep that were in the sheepfold. These village sheepfolds or pens were stone wall enclosures with thorny briars along top and outer edges. In the event the sheepfold did not have a gate, or if it were broken, then the good shepherd would sleep across the open entrance and thereby protect his flock with his life. An uncommitted shepherd might attempt to scare away a predator, but would not risk his life for the sheep. A good shepherd would risk his life for his sheep.



11.02.27.A. A RECONSTRUCTED SHEEPFOLD. Sheepfolds or pens were built of stone and were topped with briars to discourage predators and thieves. This reconstructed sheepfold was photographed by the author at the former Pilgrim Center in Jerusalem.

Jesus said that, **“I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.”** This passage follows the ten verses in which Jesus is speaking of the relationship He desires to have with His followers. It reflects that God’s desire is the highest and best for every person and He warned that the thief would be the one who desires to steal, kill, and destroy the followers of our Lord.

12.01.02.Q1

Did Jesus send out 70 or 72 Disciples (Lk. 1:1-16 vs. Mt. 11:20-24)?

There is an apparent discrepancy among biblical manuscripts concerning the number of disciples who were sent out on the short-term missionary journey. Among the translations, the King James Version reads 70, while others such as the New International Version of 1984, read 72. Why the numerical difference?

The answer is hidden in the third century (B.C.) Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible; although not of any particular verse. At that time the Jewish people in Egypt were confronted with the challenges of a youthful generation that was speaking Greek and losing the Hebrew language.

So, according to tradition or legend, the elders had 72 scholars translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek. In the course of time, the translation became known as the “Septuagint,” meaning 70 and later represented by the Roman numeral symbol “LXX.” The number 72 had simply changed to 70 for conversational use. Furthermore, in good Jewish tradition, the names of the translators were preserved as well. The phrase did not have a literal meaning, but became a figure of speech. The same change may have occurred in regard to the number of missionaries who were sent out by Jesus.

12.01.02.Q3

Did the 70 or 72 Disciples go to Jewish or Gentile Homes (Lk. 1:1-16; Mt. 11:20-24; see 12.01.02.Q1)?

Some scholars have said that the 72 (or 70) went to Jewish communities, while others believe they went to the hated Samaritans and Greeks in the Decapolis cities. If they went to non-Jewish homes, they would have eaten non-kosher meals with their hosts. That alone would have been a major theological adjustment at this time. The rules concerning kosher foods do not appear to relax until the book of Acts. So therefore, it is the opinion of this writer that they probably went to Jewish homes, especially since their journey appears to have been several days in length. And if they went to Gentile communities, they probably stayed in Jewish homes there.

12.01.03

Luke 10:17-24 Seventy Disciples Return

¹⁷ The Seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name.”

The disciples returned to Jesus with great joy. Evidently they were surprised at the power of Jesus flowing through them, because He had not told them to cast out demons. But He cautioned them to focus their excitement on their own eternal life, not on their power to perform exorcisms. The phrase “**Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name,**” is clear evidence that the powers of darkness and Satan were already crippled at this time, which was *before* His victory at the cross. This clearly suggests that the use of “binding and loosening” had gone from a legal matter to a spiritual matter of binding demonic spirits and loosening people afflicted by those spirits.

But shortly thereafter, in verse 20, Jesus said, “**Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.**” The genealogical records of the Jewish people were kept in the temple. Roman cities had the names of citizens recorded. Likewise, the epistles note that the names of true believers are written in heaven (Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23) and Revelation 20 refers to the heavenly “Book of

Life” that has the names of all true believers. Jesus said that it is far more important that one’s name be written in the right book than to have the ability to perform signs and wonders and lose his life.

Finally, some scholars believe that Luke 10:21-22 (cf. Mt. 11:25) was incorporated into an early church hymn. It is believed that a number of sayings by the apostles were remembered because they were put to music.

12.01.09

John 10:22-30 Dec. 17, A.D. 29 Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah): Jesus Affirms His Own Deity

²²Then the Festival of Dedication took place in Jerusalem, and it was winter.

In verse 22 Jesus celebrated the “**Feast of Dedication.**” Two centuries earlier the Syrian-Greeks had desecrated the temple. After the Maccabean Revolt ended, the temple was quickly cleansed and on the 25th day of Kislev (December 25), 165, B.C. the first Feast of Dedication was celebrated. It was a celebration enjoyed by Jesus. Obviously this eight-day feast does not have an Old Testament origin, but it was to remember two significant events:

1. The incredible victory God gave them over the Greek Antiochus IV Epiphanes
2. The miracle of oil for the menorah. At the time of the temple cleansing, there was only a one-day supply of olive oil, which was used for fuel in the giant temple menorahs. The miracle was that the menorahs remained lit for eight days, until new oil could be pressed according to the strict rabbinic guidelines.

This was a clear sign that God was still with them after three years of incredible persecution and more than two centuries since their last prophet. This celebration today is known as the Festival of Lights or Hanukkah.

12.03.01.Q1

What “Messianic Problems” did the Jewish Leaders have with Jesus?

The Jews had some serious difficulties with Jesus, primarily because He broke nearly every one of their sacred preconceived ideas of who the Messiah would be. But even among themselves, rabbis had different and conflicting opinions about Him, because, in their minds, there were obvious conflicts in Scripture concerning the coming of the messiah. Most of their paradoxical problems centered on the words of the highly esteemed prophet Isaiah. Had Isaiah’s life not been so profound and so many of his prophecies fulfilled, his words would easily have been

dismissed. However, both Jesus and Isaiah provided the fuel for endless debates. Note the following difficulties, and some would say “oxymorons,” with which they were grappling.

Students today who are challenged by biblical difficulties are not alone. For centuries Jews scholars and rabbis could not reconcile various messianic prophecies that clearly opposed each other. These prophetic controversies became known as “Messianic Problems.” It was not until the death and resurrection of Jesus, that these issues were clarified. Below are some of the major issues that were discussed, even during the ministry days of Jesus.

Messianic Problems

1. The Messiah will be humble and of honor

Humble: Isaiah 11:1-2

¹ Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse,

and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him —

a Spirit of wisdom and understanding,

a Spirit of counsel and strength,

a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

Honored: Isaiah 53:12

¹² Therefore I will give Him the many as a portion,

and He will receive the mighty as spoil,

because He submitted Himself to death,

and was counted among the rebels;

yet He bore the sin of many

and interceded for the rebels.

2. The Messiah is both man and God.

Man: Genesis 3:15

**¹⁵ I will put hostility between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed.
He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.**

God: Isaiah 9:6

**⁶ For a child will be born for us,

a son will be given to us,
and the government will be on His shoulders.
He will be named
Wonderful Counselor,

Mighty God,
Eternal Father,

Prince of Peace.**

(Note: Wonderful Counselor = Holy Spirit; Mighty God = God the Father;
Prince of Peace = Jesus)

3. The Messiah is both king and priest.

King: 2 Sam. 7:12,16

**¹² When your time comes and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up after you
your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom ...
¹⁶ Your house and kingdom will endure before Me forever, and your throne will be
established forever.’’**

Priest: Ps. 110:4

**⁴ The Lord has sworn an oath and will not take it back: “Forever, You are a priest
like Melchizedek.”**

4. The Messiah is both the Sacrificer and the Sacrifice

Sacrificer: Isa. 50:6

**⁶ I gave My back to those who beat Me,
and My cheeks to those who tore out My beard.
I did not hide My face from scorn and spitting.**

Sacrifice: Isa. 53:7

**⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet He did not open His mouth.
Like a lamb led to the slaughter
and like a sheep silent before her shearers,
He did not open His mouth.**

5. The Messiah is both the stumbling stone and cornerstone.

Stumbling stone: Isaiah 8:14

**¹⁴ He will be a sanctuary; but for the two houses of Israel, He will be a stone to
stumble over and a rock to trip over, and a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of
Jerusalem.**

Cornerstone: Isaiah 28:16

**¹⁶ Therefore the Lord God said: “Look, I have laid a stone in Zion, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; the one who believes will be unshakable.**

12.03.01.A. CHART OF KEY CONFLICTS KNOWN AS MESSIANIC PROBLEMS. Key points of the Messianic Problem are shown above. The Jews pondered the words and actions of Jesus in light of “conflicting passages,” as they understood them, as well as their preconceived ideas of the messiah

12.03.07.Q1

In Luke 16:1-13, what is the Point Jesus made Concerning the Dishonest Manager?

A possible answer is that the manager learned how wealth could be wisely given away to do some good. The giving of alms was always considered an act of righteousness in the Old Testament and rabbinic writings. Furthermore, depending on how the bill was written, the transactions could very well have been legal. This would have been especially true if the invoice were written in terms of commodity, rather than cash and interest. The difference in the value of the products could easily benefit the debtor, while not affecting the master.

In this narrative, both the master and the dishonest manager were working hard to attain as much wealth as they could – a reflection upon the religious leaders. The dishonest manager, like some Pharisees and Sadducees, was cunning, shrewd, and wise in a business sense and financially successful. The point Jesus was making is that the dishonest managers and religious thieves understand that money is a tool and not an end or goal in itself.

Notice that some commentaries say that the manager was a slave. He may have been a servant, but in this case, the manager was not a servant/slave. Dishonest slaves did not get fired, but were either killed or sold. The key point in this story is that Jesus did not applaud the dishonest manager for being a thief, but for his ability to correctly evaluate his options with potential consequences including his employer's generosity. The ungodly are more shrewd than are God's children who should be more intentional and dedicated about how they pursue life.

Most likely the manager was employed for several years and understood the rich man's nature and character – then took advantage of him. In the heart of Jesus, He desires His followers to have the same perception of God as did the manager of his employer. We, like the dishonest manager, risk everything in the confidence of the Master's mercy and generosity.

12.03.10

John 11:1-37 Bethany: The Miracle of Lazarus

The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead was more than just a miracle of raising the dead – it was a challenge to the Jewish people concerning the identity of Jesus. There was a specific reason when Jesus waited four days that leads to the obvious question:

12.03.10.Q1

Why did Jesus wait for Four Days to Raise Lazarus up from the Dead (Jn. 11:1-37)?

In this historical account, the immediate question pertains to the reason of why Jesus delayed his return to the home of His very good friends in light of the emergency they faced. Had He no compassion upon them? The issue here is not one of compassion or friendship. Jesus delayed His return to provide Himself the opportunity to show that He was the Creator of life and the Son of God. There are four reasons:

1. It was the custom of all Middle Eastern cultures, as it is today, to bury a body on the same day as death occurred. The semi-arid climate conditions will cause decomposition to occur immediately.

2. The Pharisees believed the soul hovered over the body for three days after death, because, in the event of a “resurrection,” the person would have a soul when life returned. This tradition may have originated when someone became unconscious due to an injury and awoke two or three days later (a “resurrection”). Nonetheless, in that sense it was believed there was no hope of a resurrection after three days. Jesus proved, beyond any shadow of doubt, that Lazarus was dead before bringing a dead smelly Lazarus back to life. As a result, even the Pharisees and Sadducees could not challenge this issue.

After three days of decomposition, the eyes of the deceased had decayed, the face was hardly recognizable, maggots have infested the corpse and, therefore, it was believed that there was no hope of a resurrection. The Mishnah reflects the common opinion held from the days of Jesus:

For it has been taught, “They adduce evidence as to a corpse’s identity only from the features of the face, including the nose, and they give testimony only within three days of the deceased’s death.”

Mishnah, *Yebamoth* 16:3

4. It was the custom that after the passing of someone, there were thirty days of mourning.

a. The first three days were for weeping. Some scholars believe that during these three days, phylacteries were not worn, fasting was common (not a complete fast, as eating an egg or lentils was permitted the first seven days), and the mourners did not greet other people. However, it is unknown if this was a first century practice in the Holy Land or if this was a later cultural practice.

b. The following seven days were for lamentation. But this time frame included the fourth day which was known as the high day of mourning. It was believed that on that day his soul departed and went to sheol (Hades) never to return. In essence, to rephrase his condition in a modern term, “he was good and dead.” Therefore, a fourth day event was truly a resurrection from death to life – that in the Jewish mind, only God could perform. It was also a silent attack against those who claimed Jesus performed miracles with demonic powers, for it was believed that demons could kill, but not restore or create life.

c. The balance of the thirty days for intermission from washing their clothes and shaving.

5. Jesus always brings understanding of Himself to the level of comprehension of those to whom He desires to show His love and compassion. It was believed that only God could raise a person back to life immediately after death, but it was also believed that not even God could raise anyone once the body began to decay. Therefore, Jesus demonstrated that His power of life was far beyond their concept of God. The primary reason Jesus delayed His arrival by four days was because He was about to perform a miracle *greater* than His messianic miracles – miracles the Jews believed that only the true messiah could perform. This miracle was more than just raising a dead person back to life — an astounding feat by itself—but Jesus also proclaimed His deity without a single spoken word! Because only God can give life!

6. In the gospels, especially in the book of John, it appears that Jesus moved on His own initiative. He was never pressured to do anything and never in a hurry – but always functioned in His timing. When Mary came to Jesus, He essentially told her that He would come in His time and in His way.

12.03.14

Luke 17:11-19 Between Samaria and Galilee: Ten Lepers Healed

¹¹ While traveling to Jerusalem, He passed between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As He entered a village, 10 men with serious skin diseases met Him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

As the story continues, Jesus healed the ten lepers but only one of them returned to thank Him – and that one was a Samaritan, one of the hated ethnic groups. However, the healing of a leper was known as a “messianic miracle,” and the lepers had to go to the temple and be certified by the priests that they were cleansed. That meant that the priests knew that the long awaited messiah had arrived. This would be quite the challenge for the ruling Pharisees and Sadducees, who by this time had developed an intense hatred for Jesus.

12.03.15.Q1

Why did Jesus tell His Followers to remember Lot’s Wife (Lk. 17:32)?

“Remember Lot’s wife!” To protect them from death, Lot and his family were personally led out of Sodom by two angels (Gen. 19). As they fled, Lot’s wife looked back and instantly became a pillar of salt. Her name is not recorded in Scripture, but according to the ancient *Book of Jasher* (19:52), it was Abo (Edith).

When God told them to flee, it was to remove them from the wickedness of Sodom, its pending destruction, and to look forward to a better future. However, a moment of disobedient hesitation cost her life. The lesson is that one cannot have a passion for both the world and for God. The comment “remember Lot’s wife” was a serious warning to *not* be part of a degenerating world, but to keep one’s focus on Christ Jesus. Similar warnings are found in the parable of the ten virgins, two women at the grinding stone, etc. The warning to be prepared to meet God and give an account of one’s life has not changed. Clearly, it was never intended to be a point of humor.

12.04.04.Q1

How can Matthew 20:20 be Reconciled with Mark 10:35?

In Matthew's account, the mother of James and John approached Jesus to ask him for a position for her sons in the new kingdom. Mark, on the other hand, does not mention the mother; he only records that it was the two disciples who came to Jesus to make the same request. In this culture, there was no difference between a requester and his agent. We have the same issue with the centurion and his servant. All too often attention is paid to the origin of the question rather than the response given by Jesus.

12.04.05.Q1

How does One explain the Two Discrepancies (Two Cities of Jericho and Two Blind Men) in Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-51, and Luke 18:42-43?

There are two issues to consider in these passages:

1. Matthew and Mark record that Jesus was leaving Jericho while Luke said He was entering it. Clearly, someone has to be wrong? Right?
2. How many beggars were there? Luke recorded that Jesus met the blind man as He approached Jericho, while Matthew said He met two blind men as they left the city. Mark, on the other hand, simply stated that the name of the blind man was Bartimaeus. Some critics have said there is an obvious conflict.

Concerning the number of cities: This issue is resolved by understanding that there were two cities by the name of Jericho. The first one was destroyed centuries before Jesus. The second one is located about two miles from the first. It was built in the second century B.C. by the Hasmoneans and later expanded and enhanced by Herod the Great. He made it into a city of surprising beauty, creating the ideal vacation destination and travel rest area. The answer to the question, in what some have called a biblical error, was explained by the Jewish historian Josephus. He made reference to “the old city” that was destroyed by Joshua, but was near the new town of the same name.

“... Notwithstanding which, there is a fountain by Jericho; that runs plentifully and is very fit for watering the ground. It rises near the old city which Joshua, the son of Nun, the general of the Hebrews, took the first of all the cities of the land of Canaan by right of war.”

Josephus, *Wars* 4.8.3 (459)

The gospel writers presented their accounts from two different perspectives, so there is no conflict.

Concerning the number of beggars: Matthew, being the former accountant and tax collector, would have been more detail-oriented in this matter, whereas Mark and Luke would have presented the story of an individual named Bartimaeus. In essence, Matthew gave the legal accounting of two blind men Jesus encountered, while Luke and Mark simply referenced the encounter of the most prominent person.

In the modern legal system, such differences are not acceptable. However, in the biblical era, reporting an account in this manner was deemed normal and accurate. The ancients focused on the theme or purpose of the encounter, not as much on the details as is common today. An alternative view is that the blind man met Jesus as He approached the ancient city (as per Luke), the two walked together through the town, and as they left the city Jesus healed him (as per Matthew). Consequently, there is no need to believe that there is a contradiction.

Finally, on a cultural side point, blind persons were given special clothing to wear, which identified them as being blind. This permitted people passing by to offer aid when needed, and chariot drivers took extra precaution when approaching them. When Jesus healed him, **“he threw off his coat,”** a signal to the public of his healing, and he rejoiced in Jesus.

12.04.08.Q1

What were the 12 Reasons the Jewish Leadership Planned the Death of Jesus?

There were many reasons why the Sadducees and leading Pharisees wanted Jesus removed from the national spotlight. And there would be three more after Jesus entered Jerusalem.

1. He claimed to be the Son of God and have divine authority such as the right to forgive sin.
2. He failed to be the messiah they were expecting. The nationalistic Galilean Jews who did not accept Him were expecting a political-messiah who would overthrow the Romans. The Judean Jews who did not accept Him, including the leading Pharisees and Sadducees of Jerusalem, desired to keep the status quo with Roman occupation. They would not have accepted the political-messiah if they felt that he would be a threat to

their lucrative religious businesses and positions.

3. Jesus “was human.” The Messiah, according to Daniel 7:13, would be *like* a man, and to the Jews this meant someone who would *not* be human, but in some mystical way, be superhuman. This individual would be expected to restore Israel to its glory days when it was an international superpower under King David. While Jesus did not fit this picture, thousands of common Jews did accept Him as their Messiah while the religious leaders rejected Him.

4. He held the Written Law in superior position to the Oral Law, which was directly opposite to the position held by the leading Pharisees.

5. The Jewish leaders had created laws to circumvent biblical commands, and thereby justify their own selfishness and greed. Jesus challenged their commands as well as their cold hearts when they should have demonstrated mercy and justice for everyone, especially for the poor.

6. When they challenged Jesus in public, He made them look foolish by exposing the weakness of their argument or lack of knowledge.

7. Neither Jesus nor His disciples attended one of the recognized theological schools of Jerusalem. In fact, Jesus came from Nazareth, a disgusting town in the eyes of the aristocrats. The religious elite were far too proud to consider that mere fishermen disciples of Jesus could possibly be ordained of God to do anything worthwhile, much less be participants in miracles of healing or teach them anything about God.

8. Jesus was born of a virgin. Religious leaders said that was an impossibility and that He was born out of wedlock and, therefore, a sinner.

9. He ignored some of their purity laws when He associated with sinners, including some of the most despised people in the community.

10. Jesus healed on the Sabbath. There were numerous prohibitions for the Sabbath and healing violated one or more of these oral laws. The term *Sabbath* means *rest* but healing was redefined to mean *work*.

11. Jesus was said to cast out demons with the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons, meaning Satan.

12. Jesus was accused of blasphemy for no less than seven reasons.

As stated previously, the upper echelon of the scribes, aristocratic Pharisees, and all of the Sadducees functioned well together to protect their wealth and religious status. All were involved in events of political-religious corruption during the days of Herod the Great according to

Josephus, especially the Pharisees. For example, the daughter of Herod Antipas, Salome, made accusations against another woman in the royal court and accused her of “subsidizing the Pharisees” to oppose the king. The most corrupt of political figures in Rome would hardly be a match for various members of the Herodian dynasty, as John the Baptist had previously experienced. Now these religious leaders were cooperating with the Romans to rid themselves of Jesus.

The Jewish Zealots rebelled against the Romans numerous times since 63 B.C. Yet the Jewish leadership was friendly with their Roman overlords and they did not want to risk the loss of their status or comfortable lifestyles. Everyone knew the political relationship between Pilate and Rome was strained to a breaking point. They knew Pilate attempted to please Caesar in every possible manner and believed that another Jewish revolt could possibly result in his loss of office. So the Sadducees and leading Pharisees took advantage of Pilate’s predicament and used it to remove their “problem.” Therefore, Pilate was forced to appease them even though he strongly felt that Jesus was innocent of all charges. While this political issue was more of a Roman issue than a Jewish one, obviously the Jews used it to manipulate Pilate.

After His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Jewish leadership had three more reasons to kill Jesus.

1. He raised Lazarus from the grave.
2. The Triumphal Entry was a profoundly loud but unspoken declaration that Jesus “said” He was the messiah.
3. He again cleansed the temple. Without doubt this caused a financial loss for Annas and Caiaphas, and they were indeed quite unhappy about this matter. It was bad enough that Jesus had done this once previously, but now He repeated this action along with stating He was the Messiah when He entered the city.

12.04.09.Q2

Is there a Conflict between John 12:1-3 and Mark 14:1-3?

According to the gospel of John, Mary anointed Jesus in Bethany six days before Passover, but in Mark she anointed Him two days before the national festival. Why is there an obvious difference? This again is reflective of the significant differences in the thinking processes between Greeks and Jews.

Today, scholars examine all the details before coming to a conclusion. But the ancient Jews considered events and concepts of far superior importance to chronological order of an account. In fact, the latter point was considered relatively insignificant. The fact that Mark placed this event in the 14th chapter indicates that he was aware of the anointing, but he felt it was important

not to write particular features modern scholars think are necessary. Note that modern scholarship is based upon Greek patterns of thinking, not Hebraic patterns of thinking.

Information omitted by Mark does not imply an event did not occur. Furthermore, the gospels were written several decades after these events. One would certainly become suspect, if every detail was in perfect agreement. This derails the argument of modern critics, who have proposed that this account was added later by church fathers to create a theological story. Such apparent difficulties occur in historical chronology, not in theological matters.

Both Jews and Christians think of Passover as a ritualistic meal on a specific day. However, Passover is essentially a week-long celebration with culmination at the Passover (Seder) meal. They chose the Passover lamb on the 10th day of Nissan and killed it on the 14th day. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was seven days (but fell under the “Passover” name). Where the text has the term “Passover,” the term was applied to all three feasts that were celebrated at that time. Therefore, the phrase, “After two days was the feast of the Passover,” it could mean that it may have been the 8th day of the month, two days before the lamb was chosen, not two days before the lamb was killed.

The reason Mark may have placed this event in this portion of his text is that it is adjacent to the following episode in which Jesus washed the feet of His disciples during the Last Supper. He did not record the feet-washing event of Jesus, yet everyone in the early church was aware of it. This would provide a literary contrast for his readers between Mary, the humble servant, and Jesus, the humble servant to His disciples.

The act of anointing must have highly irritated the religious leaders who, no doubt, looked upon the episode in 2 Kings 9:6 and discounted the scene before them. In this Old Testament passage, one of Israel’s greatest prophets, Elisha, told the son of another prophet (2 Kgs. 9:1) to take a flask of oil and anointed Jehu as King of Israel (2 Kgs. 9:6). Now the religious leaders experienced a truth they could not escape: in the room with Jesus were the greatest leaders of Israel, who had almost unanimously rejected Him, when suddenly, in walked a woman who broke her flask of oil and anointed Jesus as her Lord. She did what the ordained men of God refused to do. Furthermore, she broke the Jewish custom and let her hair down to anoint the feet of Jesus.

This encounter not only demonstrated the heart of the Gentiles and Jewish leaders, but also the status of women in the culture. Normally, religious leaders would not have accepted anointing by women and, if they did, the authors would not have mentioned it. But the disciples were functioning within the framework of the Kingdom of God.

13.02.01

Mark 11:12-14 (See also Mt. 21:18-19) April 3, A.D. 30, Bethany: Unfruitful Fig Tree

Cursed

¹² The next day when they came out from Bethany, He was hungry. ¹³ After seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, He went to find out if there was anything on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” And His disciples heard it.

The fig tree was one of the historic symbols of Israel (Hos. 9:10; Na. 3:12); Israel – a nation that God brought forth for one purpose – to bring forth the Anointed One who was Jesus. For generations, rabbis would sit under the fig tree and teach their students the Torah. As the students would “eat the word of Scripture,” so they would find some fruit to eat on the tree most of the year. In a similar manner, Israel was called to instruct the nations of the world about the covenants of God. This imagery was used by Amos (Ch. 8) when God referred to His people as the “summer fruit” that would be destroyed. The tree cursed by Jesus had an abundance of leaves and gave the appearance of being fruitful, whereas in reality, it was a barren tree. Israel was the same. The religious nation gave the appearance of being full of life but was, in fact, a barren people.

“A fig tree with leaves.” The story of the fig tree is a story of hope. Modern readers who are not acquainted with the land of Israel often question why an innocent tree was cursed, but the tree may not have been quite as innocent as they may have thought. It normally takes three years for a fig tree to mature and produce fruit, after which it has three seasons of fig production as follows.

1. The early fig, known as the *bekurah*, ripens at the end of June, sometimes earlier in the Jerusalem area.
2. The summer fig which is the main crop, it ripens in August and September and the Israelis preserve the fruit in the form of cakes.
3. The *pag* is the winter fig or unripe fig. It ripens only after the leaves have fallen off the tree.

The difficulty with this passage is that Jesus cursed the fruit tree for *not* having fruit, when Mark said that it was *not* supposed to have fruit (Mk. 11:13b). So why was the tree cursed for being a normal fig tree? There are two interpretations.

1. The writers of the synoptic gospels focused the life and ministry of Jesus in the Galilee area while John focused primarily in the Jerusalem and Judea area. Galilee lies in a different climate zone than does Jerusalem, which is atop of the central mountain range. Josephus said that in Galilee figs are ripe every month of the year with the exception of January and February. In Jerusalem, however, the period of dormancy for fruit trees is

longer due to the higher elevation. So anyone from Galilee visiting Jerusalem might expect to find figs on a tree as they would in Galilee, but there would not be any. Jesus might have expected to find a few early figs on this tree, but the *ordinary* fig-season had not arrived yet. However, that interpretation obviously limits the knowledge of Jesus.

2. Another interpretation is that just as an innocent lamb was sacrificed every Passover for the sins of the family, so the fig tree was “sacrificed” because it represented the sins of national Israel. The sins of the Jewish family were covered by the sacrifice; but the sins of the unrepentant nation brought forth a curse.

In the Old Testament, the tree was associated with God’s promises of prosperity as well as His prophetic warnings (Jer. 5:17; Hos. 2:12; Joel 1:7-12; Hab. 3:17; See also Mic. 7:1 and Nah. 3:12). While both the early fruit and later fruit are figs, the taste of each is clearly different. The early fruit appears only for a brief period and clusters of the later fruit ripen throughout most of the year. It is the only tree in the Middle East where, in early spring, the early fruit appears *before* the leaves. Mark referred to the latter fruit, since this is the fruit that would have been the preferred fruit enjoyed by travelers. Fig trees were planted along roads for the benefit of the traveling public and its fruit was considered to be common property.

The accounts of the fig tree are placed on either side of the second cleansing of the temple for symbolic reasons. Not only did the temple leadership fail to represent God to the Jewish and Gentile people, but they were also about to condemn the Messiah. The fig tree as a prophetic event had full significance in A.D. 70 when the temple was destroyed and judgment fell upon the Jewish nation. When Jesus spoke these words, He announced that judgment was coming upon the spiritually dead religious leaders. The following three parables repeat the theme:

1. The Parable of the Two Sons (see 13.03.03; Mt. 21:28-32; also known as “The Son Who did not Work”)
2. The Tenant Farmers (see 13.03.04; Mt. 21:33-46; also known as “The Parable of the Tenants”)
3. The Wedding Invitation (see 13.03.07; Mt. 22:1-14; also known as “The Parable of the Wedding Banquet”).

One of God’s divine principles is that men always be as honest as possible. His hatred for hypocrisy was demonstrated in the cursing of the fig tree. The call for honesty was later quite emphatic when two people, Ananias and Sapphira, made false claims concerning the funds received from the sale of land and met sudden death (Acts 5:1-11).

“The fig tree is the house of Israel.” The children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are referred to symbolically in the form of three trees – each one for a specific purpose.

1. The grape vine is the symbol of Israel’s spiritual privileges (Jer. 2:21; Isa. 5:1-7).

2. The fig tree is a symbol of Israel's national privileges (Isa. 60:21; Jer. 45:4)
3. The olive tree is a symbol of Israel's religious privileges (Jer. 11:16-17)

Finally, while national Israel was cursed, obviously God's love for Jewish individuals continues. In Acts 1:8 the disciples were told to go and preach the Kingdom of God first to the Jewish people, then to the Samaritans, and then to the far corners of the world. If every segment of the Jewish people was cursed, then obviously the passage in Acts would have been written differently. Notice that in Romans 11:17-27 is the "Parable of the Two Olive Trees" that is additional evidence that Israel was not *completely* cursed. The two olive trees represent the Gentiles and Jews who come to faith in Christ Jesus.



13.02.01.A. THE EARLY FRUIT OF THE FIG TREE. The fig tree was symbolic of both the king and people of Israel since the early days of the judges (Judges 9:7-15; Lk. 8:6-9). Jesus cursed the fig tree, symbolic of the curse that would come and the land would be destroyed and Jews from their homeland. Photograph by the author.

13.02.03

Mark 11:18 (See also Lk. 19:47-48) The Temple Courts in Jerusalem: Plot to Kill Jesus Delayed

Mk. ¹⁸ Then the chief priests and the scribes heard it and started looking for a way to destroy Him. For they were afraid of Him, because the whole crowd was

astonished by His teaching.

During the Passion Week, the Pharisees planned to kill Jesus, but as strange as it may sound, they are not recorded in Scripture at the sentencing of Jesus.

13.02.03.Q1

If the Pharisees Planned His Death, why did They not Pursue their Plan?

The missing Pharisees were not there! Significant to the biblical narrative is a point that is frequently overlooked. It is important to underscore the point that *not all Pharisees* were the extreme legalists who attempted to kill Jesus. If so, why would some have warned Jesus that Herod Antipas wanted to kill Him (Lk. 13:31)? Why would Rabbi Gamaliel have taken a personal risk to save the lives of Peter and the apostles (Acts 5:34ff.)? In fact, many writings outside of Scripture, quoted in this text, were written by devoted Pharisees who pursued God within the framework of their knowledge. It has wrongly been assumed that since the leading Pharisees plotted to kill Him, therefore, *all Pharisees* were active in His execution.

But from this time forward, the leading Pharisees are no longer mentioned as having any role in the prosecution and execution of Jesus. They did not consider the motivation to kill someone a sin, but only if the act was committed. Josephus clearly indicates the Pharisees avoided severe punishments and executions (see below). A case in point was recorded by Josephus concerning a man by the name of Eleazar, who was “of ill temper and delighting in seditious practices.” In the discussion of Eleazar’s punishment for his transgressions, which were considered extremely serious, the Pharisees leaned on the side of mercy.

So the Pharisees made answer that he deserved stripes and bonds; but that it did not seem right to punish reproaches with death; and indeed the Pharisees, even upon other occasions are not apt to be severe in punishments.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.10.6 (294b)

The Pharisees, for the most part, were strongly opposed to being *personally* involved in any death sentence. Therefore, in light of the words of Josephus, it must be concluded that the Pharisee elite must have been extremely corrupt and out of their Pharisaic norm that they would repeatedly plot the murder of Jesus. As previously stated, once the Sadducees seized Jesus, the Pharisees are no longer mentioned in Scripture. They still hated Him and wanted to see Him dead, but in their religious legalism they felt that if they did not have an active part in the crucifixion, they remained innocent. So they handed their dirty work over to the Sadducees, who were more than willing to present a mock trial and hand Him over to the Romans.

13.03.07**Matthew 22:1-14 Parable of the Wedding Banquet / Wedding Garment**

This is a unique parable in that it is one of dual separation as follows:

1. Separation from national Israel
2. Separation from those believers who are improperly dressed for the messianic banquet

To bring clarity to this passage, examine briefly the cast of characters.

Cast of Characters

| | |
|--------------|--|
| King | = God |
| First group | = The Jews who did not come |
| Second group | = Gentiles who were not invited previously |
| Slaves | = The prophets sent to the Jews over the centuries |
| Outsiders | = Gentiles (non-Jews) who were invited to come |

Terms

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Appropriate attire | = Character of a godly person |
| Inappropriate attire | = Character of an unrepentant person |

Separation from national Israel

The king (Jesus) gave three invitations, of which the first two went to the Jewish people.

1. The first invitation was sent by the various prophets, who preached the Word of God throughout the centuries, and many of them were rejected and some were even martyred.
2. The second invitation to the Jewish people was by Jesus Himself, and He too was martyred.

There is an unusual element in the parable because the custom was to send out two invitations for a wedding banquet. But in this case, three invitations were sent. The third invitation was by Jesus and His apostles who went to the Gentiles. At verse 11 the second phase of this parable begins – the parable of separation. Now that the Gentiles have been invited, it is apparent that *of those who responded*, meaning those who became saved or said they did, not all will be

permitted to the banquet. Why?

Separation from those believers who are improperly dressed for the messianic banquet

Jesus clearly stated that everyone is invited to His messianic banquet – Gentile, Jew – everyone. But He also makes a unique point that not everyone who is invited will enter into the banquet hall. An important cultural element is this: it was the custom for the wealthy and persons of high rank to provide wedding garments for those whom they invited. If anyone refused to come, or if they came, but did not wear their wedding garments, that was considered an insult to the banquet host. An important feature of this comment is that the deciding factor of who comes is not Jesus, but those people who decided *not* to wear their wedding garments. Those who wear appropriate attire have the character of Christ and those who do not wear the required garments are those who say they are believers, but their lives do not match their words. Just as the persons of rank showed their kindness by providing wedding garments to all the guests, the same shall be provided by the Host – the King, but those “garments” are His character.

On a side note, this parable has often been used to support the doctrine of predestination, but there are two problems with this interpretation.

1. In predestination, it is Jesus who determines who decided before the foundation of the earth who goes to heaven or who goes to hell. In this parable, as in others, the decision is left to the individual.
2. A standard rule of Jewish hermeneutics is that parables are never to be used for the establishment of doctrine.

A wedding was always a time for great celebration, as it was seen as the beginning of a new family. The “dinner” of verse 4 was not the evening meal, but the noon-breakfast or luncheon meal which enabled the attendees to enjoy fellowship for the rest of the day. The custom of the time required that literally everyone be invited, including those living in remote areas and byways (verses 9-10).

In the parable of Jesus, the Jews were the guests of honor at the banquet. They received their invitation by the Hebrew prophets. But by the time Jesus came onto the scene, they had convinced themselves that they would be the only persons at the heavenly wedding banquet, so they did not come to the hallowed event. Therefore, the host of the banquet sent other servants again to invite guests, and after another poor response, the host finally invited anybody and everybody. However, when the host saw that some of the attendees were not wearing wedding clothes, he threw them out. Jesus said that one must be ready at all times for the messianic banquet. But while many are aware of the coming wedding, few will do what is necessary to be prepared for the event.

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.” Those who are “invited” or “called,” as some

translations read, are simply those who heard and accepted the invitation of salvation. Those who are “chosen” did the same but continued their Christian lifestyle and obeyed His Word. This passage has often been incorrectly been interpreted to either support or deny the doctrine of predestination. As previously stated, the standard rule of hermeneutics is that parables are not used to support or deny doctrines.

13.04.02

Matthew 22:15a; Lk. 20:20-26 (see also Mk. 12:13-17) Herodians and Pharisees ask Jesus about Taxes

The subject of this question (v. 22) originated in the year A.D. 6, when a new poll tax (Mt. 9:9; 10:3) was instituted for the benefit of the Roman treasury. The Jews were already reduced to economic slavery by Herod the Great, and the new tax made life even worse. This payment of taxes was seen by patriotic Jews as a confirmation that people gave authority to the Romans to rule over them.

In response, a Zealot by the name of Judas the Galilean declared that it was sacrilege for God’s chosen people to pay taxes to a pagan ruler. So he quickly gathered some followers and started a revolt. The rebellion that Judas and his followers started was quickly crushed. However, the theological issue that Judas popularized continued (see 03.06.14). Jesus was about ten years old when the rebellion was crushed, so by the time His ministry began, the matter had become explosive. He defused it gently.

To add insult to injury, it was the common opinion that to own a coin with the image of Caesar, was to affirm loyalty to him and, therefore, disown loyalty to God. Furthermore, some Roman coins had the inscription *Roma Perpetua* meaning *Rome Perpetual*, or *Roma Aeterna*, meaning *Rome Eternal*.

Concerning the direct issue of taxes and the coin, if Jesus would have responded with an affirmative answer that taxes had be paid, He would have lost his public following and appeared to have abandoned Israel. If He had said that taxes should not be paid, He would have been brought before the imperial courts for subversive activities and treason. The religious leaders knew the Romans would subject them to harsh penalties for unpaid taxes. Jesus separated legal and spiritual obligations, but did not avoid or negate them. In this discussion He clearly indicated that Jews were to honor both civil government and God, insofar as the secular authority does not clash with the believer’s loyalty to God. Throughout His entire ministry, He never attacked the policies of the Romans. The irony is that if Jews had faithfully given their dues and allegiance to God, they would never have been subjects of Roman nor any other form of dictatorship.

The question in this discussion (Mt. 22:15, etc.) has nothing to do with the kind of tax, but the image on the coin with which the tax was paid. That was problematic for these reasons:

1. The coin had a graven image in direct violation of the second commandment (Ex. 20:4). The images and text of ancient coinage always reflected the ideology of the pagan ruling class.
2. To add insult to injury, the image was of the emperor whom many considered to be deified, or soon would be deified.
3. The image on the coin represented the military and economic authority of the Romans, but the Jews believed that they – God’s people – should control the military and economy. (It must be noted that in the century (c. 165 – 63 B.C.) when they did control both, the Jewish leaders were as bad as any pagan monarch.)

The image of Caesar with an inscription that deified him as a god was so offensive that many refused to carry it, for they believed holding ownership would be equal to agreeing with the inscription. It was deemed by some Pharisees to be a violation of the second commandment to own one – and as such, anyone who had a denarius was said to be “unrighteous.” Therefore, in an attempt to appease the Jews, the Romans minted some coins without the image of Caesar.



13.04.02A. ROMAN DENARIUS. The Roman silver coin that offended the Jews has a portrait of Tiberius Caesar with the inscription “TI CAESAR DIVI AUG F AUGUSTUS,” meaning “Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.” A denarius was the minimum daily income needed to sustain a small family.

There are two ironies with this account.

1. The Pharisees who challenged Jesus obviously had a coin with the portrait of Tiberius Caesar, a violation of their own strict standard of righteousness.

2. The Roman silver denarius with the portrait of Tiberius Caesar was not acceptable in the temple. However, the Tyrian silver shekel that had the image of the god Murduk was accepted because it was minted of the finest grade of silver.

Jesus once again spoke clearly concerning the Kingdom of God and affirmed that He was neither a supporter of Rome nor a Zealot against Rome. Neither those who desired to accuse Him of being a traitor nor those who were looking for a military viceroy would find their answer in Him, but only those who were seeking God would find Him. This statement, while in response to a monetary issue, had implications for all aspects of life; they spoke of coins and taxes but Jesus wanted His listeners to apply all aspects of life to the Kingdom of God.

Coinage had significant influences upon people for the following reasons:

1. It identified the king and his authority over a certain region and people. Whenever a king conquered an area, one of his first priorities was to mint new coins with his image. When the Zealots seized Jerusalem (A.D. 132-135), they immediately minted their own coins, which was the ancient method of declaring their independence and rulership.
2. The power of the king was valid wherever the coins were used.
3. A times the coins were considered the personal property of the king since these had his name and image stamped on them.

13.04.06

Matthew 23:1-12 (See also Mk. 12:38-40; Lk. 20:45-47) Self-Righteousness of the Religious Leaders Condemned

¹ Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples: ² “The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses. ³ Therefore do whatever they tell you, and observe it. But don’t do what they do, because they don’t practice what they teach. ⁴ They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves aren’t willing to lift a finger to move them.

It is amazing that for all the criticism Jesus gave the Pharisees, He did support what they taught about the Torah (Old Testament).



13.04.06.A. THE SEAT OF MOSES. This stone seat was the honored place for any teacher in the synagogue, as he was recognized as speaking for Moses. Photograph by the author.

The phrase, “**chair of Moses,**” was once thought to be a figure of speech representing the authority of the one who spoke as Moses when explaining the reading of the law. However, then archaeologists discovered such a seat while digging at Chorazin, and it is now understood that every synagogue had one. After the seat was discovered, scholars debated whether Jesus recognized the authority of the Pharisees. It was generally situated by the main entrance, which faced Jerusalem. There was also a flat stone in front of the Seat of Moses which was known as the *Bema*, and it was upon this stone that the Torah was read and the explanation followed afterward when the reader was seated in the Seat of Moses.

“**Therefore do whatever they tell you, and observe it. But don’t do what they do.**” Most of the Jewish people obeyed codes of conduct and religion according to the Pharisees, even though they did not formally belong to the Pharisees. The Pharisaic elite and scribes taught the Mosaic laws, but did not live by them. Jesus singled them out because most of the Pharisees were conscious and honest leaders of their local synagogues. They lived godly lives according to the laws of the Torah. Whenever Jesus confronted the Pharisees, as in this case, He confronted the aristocratic leadership. Here Jesus underscored, for His fellow Jews, the importance of living according to the biblical laws. Note that Jesus frequently condemned the Jewish leadership, but not the common people.

It is amazing that Christian commentaries *never* mention that some Pharisees were in support of the disciples when they were attacked by the religious leaders. Seldom do these commentaries mention quotations from the Mishnah or Talmud that also criticized the Sadducees and those aristocratic Pharisees. Nor do they mention that Jesus told His people to obey the teachings of the Pharisees (Mt. 23:3). Could it be that, except for the corrupt lifestyles of a few powerful Pharisaic leaders, the Pharisees as a whole were relatively close theologically to Jesus? Could some commentaries have an anti-Jewish bias?

13.04.06.Q1

How close was Jesus to being a Pharisee, or, how close were the Pharisees to being Followers of Jesus (Mt. 23:2-3)?

In light of the context of this chapter, this seems to be an inappropriate question. Throughout church history the Pharisees have all been painted with the wide brush of corruption and hypocrisy. As was mentioned previously, there were many good and righteous Pharisees who loved their people as much as they loved God. The leading Pharisees who held the reins of power and wealth in Jerusalem were the ones who constantly confronted Jesus and plotted His death (although were hidden at the time of His crucifixion).

Finally, for those readers who believe that Jesus and the Pharisees were always polar opposites, notice the following examples of “togetherness” of Jesus, early Christians, and the common Pharisees:

1. In Luke 13:31 the Pharisees warned Jesus that Herod Antipas wanted to kill Him.
2. In Matthew 23:2-3 Jesus said that whatever the Pharisees teach, they should do.
3. Gamaliel argued in defense of Peter and the apostles in the book of Acts.
4. Furthermore, it was the Pharisees who protested to the high priest when James was martyred.
5. In Acts 21, many who were devout to the Torah (meaning Pharisees) became His followers.

“They enlarge their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels.” The scribes and Pharisees literally interpreted the passages of Exodus 13:9, 16 and Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18 and applied the four sections of the Mosaic instruction to their garments. Nearly all Jewish men practiced this tradition, especially at times of prayer, as many orthodox Jewish men do today, but the religious leaders enlarged their phylacteries and tassels to show off their religious stature. Unfortunately, many Christians today cannot imagine Him wearing these religious ornaments. As an orthodox Jew, Jesus would have worn ordinary phylacteries and tassels in the temple and synagogue.

A *Phylactery* known in Hebrew as a *tephillin*, was a leather box worn on the forehead and right arm. The phylactery worn on the forehead had four sections with a section of the law in each compartment. The phylactery worn on the arm had only one compartment with a verse written on a single slip of leather or papyrus, written in four columns with seven lines each. These traditions became so sacred, that some believed that God also wore the same *tephillin*. These objects of religious ritual were worn in the Second Temple Period, and orthodox Jewish men continue to wear them today. The custom of wearing phylacteries may have originated in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, but by the first century it was an accepted practice. It is unknown if these were worn during the First Temple Period.



13.04.06.D. MAN WEARING A PHYLACTERY. This man, meditating at the Western Wall, is wearing a *phylactery* on his forehead and another on his left arm. The skull cap did not exist in the first century and is the result of anti-Semitism in Europe after the Reformation. Photograph by the author.

14.01.07

Matthew 25:1-13 The Wise and Foolish Virgins

¹ “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like 10 virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were sensible.

14.01.07.Q1

Who or what do the Five Foolish Virgins of Matthew 25:1-13 Represent?

Throughout church history, the imagery of the wise and foolish virgins has been problematic since virgins are considered synonymous with the pure unspotted bride of Christ. Consequently, there are multiple interpretations of this parable. At issue, the foolish virgins have a most unhappy ending; a stark contrast to the bright eternal future the bride of Christ is to enjoy.

The primary problem is that five virgins lacked sufficient oil. But the focus is not the lamp, torch, or even the bride since she is not mentioned. In first century, oil was such a frequently used commodity that no one would ever forget it, much less five young bridesmaids. This was a matter of willful neglect. The primary message is, as with the parable of the talents preceding it, that the believer should always be ready for the return of Christ (v. 44). People are held responsible for their actions. The foolish virgins (bridesmaids) allowed their lamps to run out of oil, but believers ought not to be lacking in their responsibilities to the faith. Those who had sufficient oil symbolize believers with a pure heart and righteous standing with our Lord. They will be admitted into Christ's millennial kingdom. Those who had insufficient oil symbolize the unprepared or unsaved individuals who desired to enter, but were excluded. It is a parable of separation. All the virgins are believers, but some are prepared to meet their Lord, and others are ill prepared because of having interests and pleasures in the world more than in Christ. The essential point is that Jesus will return for a bride who is faithful, obedient, and watching for His return.

At this point, an explanation of the first century Jewish wedding is necessary, especially since the imagery of a wedding was used several times in the teachings of Jesus. Weddings and the feasts that followed were major social events. It was at a wedding where Jesus performed His first miracle, turning water into wine. It is through wedding imagery that He spoke of the future. Therefore, to understand the messianic prophecies, it is important to understand the cultural setting of a first century Jewish wedding. In this case, there can be little question that the wedding banquet narrative gives a hint of the coming messianic banquet in which Jesus will be the central figure and His saints will be the guests.

In the first century, marriages were frequently, but not always, arranged by the fathers. It was common for a girl to be betrothed as early as twelve and a boy at age thirteen. However, a young man had the option of selecting any bride of his own choosing. The formality began when he came to her home and presented a formal, legally binding contract known as a *katuvah*. This covenant stated the marriage proposal and the sum of money the groom would pay to the bride's parents to have her as his wife. The purpose was to insure the understanding that she was not free but was precious and costly to him. If the terms of the contract were accepted by both families, it was signed at the synagogue and the couple celebrated by sharing a cup of wine together. Only then was the covenant sealed and they were considered betrothed.

The couple was considered husband and wife, although the marriage was not consummated until after the wedding. If either one died prior to the wedding, the surviving partner while still a virgin, would be known as a widow or widower. If the betrothal was broken other than by death, the bride would receive a divorce decree. If she were found to be unfaithful, technically, she could be put to death, but the practice was seldom instituted. During this time she would wear a veil whenever in public to affirm to any other possible suitors that she had made a commitment. When Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy, his consideration of a quiet divorce reflected his sense of mercy and kindness, when, in fact, he could have legally demanded her death, as well as a refund of his money paid at the signing of the marriage contract.

The wedding was generally held in the following year. During this time, the bride prepared herself for her new home, whereas the bridegroom would build the house itself. Frequently, this structure was simply another room added onto the existing home of the father of the bridegroom. The young bridegroom constructed it, no doubt with the help of family and friends. His father then declared its completion. It was during the one-year period of Mary's betrothal that Jesus was born.

As the house was being finished, the preparation of the wedding feast was in process. The feast would last between three and seven days, depending on the financial resources of the families. Weddings always required a large quantity of food and wine. Middle Eastern hospitality in ancient times, as today, demanded that only the best be presented to guests. When everything was completed in detail, the father gave permission to his son to "capture" or "kidnap" his bride. It was a game and, to add to the suspense of the event, the "capture" usually occurred at night.

"All became drowsy and fell asleep." The word *sleep* often suggests death, but not in this case. In this parable the terms *drowsy* and *sleep* simply emphasize that the delay would be for a long period of time.

"The door was shut." At this point Jesus takes the cultural norm and adds a profound twist. When there was a wedding, the door was *never* shut. The late comer was always invited to join the festivities. But when Jesus said **"the door was shut,"** He captured everyone's attention. For those in the church who are "left behind," repentance is not possible after His coming.

This is clearly a statement of rejection imagery, and the foolish virgins will have no part of the Messianic Banquet. The wedding feast of this parable depicts the future messianic wedding banquet in heaven (Isa. 25:6-8; Mt. 8:11; 22:1-14; Lk. 12:37; 14:15-24; 15:23-24; 22:36; Acts 10:41) that, some say, will occur during the same period while the earth is experiencing the Great Tribulation. The point of the parable is that every believer has to be fully prepared; fully obedient and committed to Jesus; fully at work for the Kingdom of God. This is not a statement of legalism, but of a lifestyle of dedication to His honor and glory.

14.02.22.Q1

Concerning the number of Rooster Crows, how does Matthew 26:34 Reconcile with Mark 14:30?

Matthew recorded that before the rooster crowed Peter would deny Jesus three times and Mark said the denial would come before the rooster crowed twice. Again, this is a matter of interpretation. The disciples were not at all concerned how often the so-called rooster crowed, especially when several crows in succession were considered a single crow. At issue is the phrase, “**before the rooster crows.**” Some Bibles use the more accurate phrase, “cock crow,” or “rooster crow.” But as already been hinted, it probably was not a rooster that crowed! The phrase has two possible interpretations.

1. Jesus could have referred to a literal rooster crowing early in the morning. But the Oral Law clearly indicated that chickens were not permitted inside the Holy City. The Oral Law states,

They may not rear fowls in Jerusalem because of the Hallowed Things, nor may priests rear them anywhere in the land of Israel because of the laws concerning clean foods.

Mishnah, *Baba Kamma* 7.7

A rooster crowing outside the city walls might have been heard inside the city. However, this is highly unlikely.

2. Jesus, most likely, referred to the “rooster crow” as the trumpet blast that signaled the end of the third watch (3:00 a.m.) and the changing of military guard throughout the city. That trumpet call was known in Latin *gallicinium* which means *cock crow*, and in Greek as *alektorophonia*. The first “cock crow” was the midnight trumpet blast at the end of the second watch, and the second “cock crow” was at the end of the third watch (3:00 a.m.).

Most scholars believe that Jesus was referring to the third watch trumpet blast because

1. The 3:00 a.m. trumpet blast *alektorophonia* is earlier than a natural rooster’s call
2. This call permitted time for the illegal judicial proceedings to occur.

Two priests stood at the upper gate ... with two trumpets in their hands. At the cock crow they blew a sustained, a quavering and another sustained blast. When they reached the tenth step they again blew a sustained, a quavering and another sustained blast. When they reached the Court of the Women they again blew a sustained, a

quavering and another sustained blast.

Mishnah, *Sukkah* 5.4

Concerning the differences between Matthew and Mark, Mark evidently referred to the two trumpets that blew while Mathew probably referred to the number of trumpet blasts. It is a logical matter of perspective. Later, three trumpet blasts marked the end of the fourth watch (6:00 a.m.) and the beginning of a new work day.

15.01.01

John 15:1-8 Imagery of Vine and Branches

¹ **“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vineyard keeper.**

While salvation through Christ Jesus is free, if one is truly saved there will be clear evidence of that salvation. In this passage Jesus used the analogy of a vine branch to a believer. There are four interpretations of the unfruitful branches in verse 2:

1. They represent Christians who turned away from their faith and, therefore, lost their salvation.
2. The unfruitful branches represent the plans and events of a believer’s life that God changes (or prunes), so that person will become a more productive servant.
3. They represent people who said they were believers, but they were never truly born again.
4. They represent believers who were unfruitful in their lives and were disciplined by means of death.

The first and second viewpoints are traditional ones while the third and fourth viewpoints arose out of Calvinism. While this is obviously a theological subject, it must be noted that James said that believers are not saved by works, but good works are proof of genuine faith (James 2:17). The proverbial “bottom line” is that Jesus loves every believer to the point that He will administer discipline or correction when needed.

Cast of Characters

True Vine = Jesus

Branches = His people who are “in Him.”

Jesus again expressed spiritual ideas with Hebraic pictures, as in this phrase, **“I am the true vine.”** To this day, the grapevine remains a symbol of Israel as it did in the Hebrew Bible (Ps.

80:8-16; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21). The imagery was one in which God was the vine trunk and the Jews were the branches that received life from that trunk. Israel had been the vine, into which all people had to connect to worship God. But when Jesus said, “I am the vine,” He clearly stated that He was the only way to God the Father and eternal life in heaven. In essence Jesus said that He was God. Statements of this nature were extremely difficult for the disciples to accept, and impossible for anyone else to accept because all rabbinic teachings said that a man could not be God nor could God be a man. In essence, they could not comprehend the deity of Jesus. This is more than a symbolic identification with a vine; it is also a reflection of the famous “I am” statements of God that were given by Moses. In essence, the seven “I am” statements of John’s gospel have a double meaning.

15.01.03

John 15:18-16:4 Jesus Warns of their Persecution

“If the world hates you, understand that it hated Me before it hated you.

“If the world hates you.” The word *world*, as John used it, means a *human society organizing itself without God*. The goals of life and worldviews of those who do not know God will always be vastly different from those who love Him and are committed to His calling and lifestyle.

Later in verse 20 Jesus said, **“If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”** He gave clear warning that persecution would be coming upon the disciples, instigated by the same religious leaders who were persecuting Him. This prophecy was fulfilled as Jewish anti-Semitism rose, traditional Jews rising up against Judeo-Christian Jews. In one of the synagogue prayers was the “Twelfth Benediction,” It was a pointed statement concerning heretics, including the Nazarenes, meaning those who followed Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus warned His disciples of pending persecution. He presented four reasons why men would hate and try to kill them.

1. Before they came to faith, the believers were a part of the world, but when they accepted Christ, they came out of the world. For this reason they were hated (Jn. 15:19).
2. Jesus has a special relationship with those who are dedicated to Him, for which they are persecuted (Jn. 15:14, 20).
3. The world does not know the Father (Jn. 15:21) and, therefore, does not know Jesus.
4. Finally, the Word of God condemns the world, since those of the world choose not to accept Him, and, therefore, they hate all those who did accept Him (Jn. 15:22).

If there was ever a prophetic warning that was to be fulfilled quickly, this was it. The Romans believed all religions were ancient and, therefore, placed them under a legal protection. They even went out of their way as not to offend the Jews, whose religion certainly confused them

more than any other. That is, until Jesus came. The followers of Jesus believed that God had done a new work – and that, obviously, was not ancient. So in Roman thinking, Christianity was not a religion, but a superstition, and superstitions had to be removed from the Roman society. That gave grounds for government sponsored persecution.

Other reasons why early Christians were persecuted were numerous. Note the following examples of the popular myths that were said of them:

1. They were disloyal to the Roman Empire at the best and insurrectionists at worst because they refused to claim that “Caesar is Lord.”
2. Christians were said to be cannibals because they continued to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus. Even though Jesus was long past crucified and buried (and ascended), superstitious people were easily convinced this accusation was true.
3. Since the early church had a weekly fellowship meal called the *Agape* (Love Feast) and they greeted each other with a *kiss of love*, also known as a *holy kiss*, believers were accused of practicing immorality. This was an astounding accusation in light of the lifestyle of the pagans who had few, if any, objections to immorality.
4. Early Christians were said to be incendiaries because they believed that when Jesus returns He will bring fire and destruction upon the earth.
5. Christians were destructive to families, because converts to the new religion broke up families and marriages. Of all the charges, this one was noteworthy because often children became believers and the parents didn’t; or the wife became a follower of Jesus and the husband didn’t, and therefore, left her. In essence, Jesus was right when He said He didn’t come to bring peace, but to bring the sword (Mt. 10:34).

Many of the reasons Christians were persecuted are the same reasons many are persecuted today. Believers must realize that if the world rejected Jesus, then the world will also reject His followers.

15.02.06.Q1

Why would Judas have *wanted* to betray Jesus (Mk. 14:43-45)?

The possible reasons are as follows:

1. Judas may have become disillusioned with Jesus as the messiah, since He was obviously not the expected military-messiah who would overthrow the Romans. Ironically, if the Jews would have accepted Jesus as their Messiah, then the one-world government of the Romans would have been overthrown.

2. Judas had witnessed Jesus perform many miracles and never considered the possibility that the real Messiah would die on a Roman cross. This would be especially true, since it was well known that anyone who died on a tree was cursed.

3. Some have argued that Judas betrayed Jesus out of greed. Suppose Jesus did not rise from the grave. Judas would then have clout and status with the religious leaders beyond anything he had experienced in his life. Thirty pieces of silver would not have been worth the effort, but status among the religious leaders would have been priceless.

15.02.08.Q1

Was it Peter's Intention to cut off the Servant's Head (Jn. 18:10)?

NO! The passage reads, **“then Simon Peter ... cut off his right ear.”** Was this a sign of the rebellion that the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and the soldiers so greatly feared? Absolutely not! Had that been the case, the disciples would have been slaughtered immediately, along with Jesus. The Romans and Sadducees had absolutely no compassion for anyone who might stir a rebellion. The healing saved the life of Peter, who, at that moment, was obviously not a highly favored Jew in the eyes of the arresting soldiers.

Had Jesus ridden into Jerusalem on a horse, or if they sang nationalistic songs such as *A Psalm of Solomon, with Song, the King*, which had phrases like “destroy the unrighteous rulers” and “drive out the sinners,” then Jesus and all of His disciples would probably have been immediately killed. But for more than three years the Romans, Hellenistic Jews, Herodians, and the Jewish leaders had been carefully watching Him and the huge crowds that followed. He never hinted at a nationalistic word.

However, if it was not Peter's intention to kill Malchus, what was his intention? Malchus was not an ordinary temple servant, but chief assistant of Caiaphas, the official position known as the *segran hacohaneem*. Since John was an acquaintance of the family of Caiaphas, he would have known the name of the servant. Malchus, most likely, did not lose his entire ear, but only a small portion, such as his ear lobe, because any injury would have had two results:

1. It would have caused great shame for the temple administrator.
2. More importantly, the injury would have disqualified him from any temple service (Lev. 21:18-21). No one with a physical handicap or imperfection was permitted to enter the most sacred area of the temple.

Peter was not the first to have vented his anger in this manner; he merely acted out a cultural custom. The first century historian Josephus preserved a similar account that occurred during the early reign of Herod the Great, when Hyrcanus II desired to become the high priest against the wishes of one called Antigonus. So Antigonus “disqualified” his rival from service in the office

of priesthood.

Antigonus himself also bit off Hyrcanus's ears with his own teeth, as he fell down upon his knees to him so that he might never be able, upon any mutation of affairs, to take the high priesthood again; for the high priests that officiated were to be complete and without blemish.

Josephus, *Wars* 1.13.9 (270)

“Malchus.” Malchus was a personal servant of the high priest, Caiaphas. His name was derived from the Hebrew word *melech*, meaning *king*. The event is quite interesting, as the “servant king” was pierced and healed by the Servant King who died and then was pierced.

Ironically, just as Israel had rejected Jesus, they no longer desired to hear Him, they had their hearing, or “ears” cut off. As such Malchus, was a “king” of the high priest who was responsible for leading the charge to have Jesus crucified, was symbolic of national Israel. At times, even the smallest events in the life of Jesus, have incredible depth of meaning.

15.03.01.Q1

What 25 Rules of Justice were Broken by the Sanhedrin when the High Court Condemned Jesus to Death?

The religious aristocrats had no shortage of reasons to execute Jesus. In their desperate process to have Jesus executed, they violated a host of oral laws of jurisprudence, as recorded in the tractate “Sanhedrin” of the *Mishnah*. Note the following violations:

1. There was to be no arrest by ecclesiastical authorities that was influenced by a bribe (Ex. 23:8).
2. There was to be no trial after sunset (after three stars appear in the sky).
3. No judges were permitted in the arrest of the accused, so as to keep judges unbiased.
4. No trials were to be held before the morning sacrifice.
5. No trials were to be held on the Sabbath or on the eve of the Sabbath.
6. All trials were to be public. Secrecy of any form was forbidden.
7. Trials were to be held only in the Hall of Judgment (Chamber of Hewn Stone).
8. Judges were not to argue for a conviction of the accused.
9. Every accused person was to have at least one defender.

10. Capital cases had to be tried over a minimum of two days.
11. The high priest (Caiaphas) was not permitted to tear his clothing.
12. Charges against the accused could not originate with the judges.
13. Once a trial began, no additional charges could be added to the original charge.
14. The charge of blasphemy was applicable if the accused applied the Name of God (YHWH) to himself or if the defendant pronounced the name of God.
15. The accused could not be condemned by his testimony alone, but had to be in perfect agreement with two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6).
16. Judges were not permitted to question the accused, only the witnesses.
17. If a guilty verdict was to be pronounced, it had to be given on the day following the trial.
18. The condemned was not permitted to be executed on the same day as his sentence was pronounced. (Since Herod the Great decreed that the authority of capital punishment be removed from the Sanhedrin – except for Gentiles who entered the holy areas of the temple – this exception was in force prior to Herod's decree.)
19. Any judge who had a personal interest or conflict with the accused had to remove himself from the judicial process.
20. Among the judges, the youngest had to vote first as not to be influenced or persuaded by the older and more experienced judges.
21. No *Baal-Rib*, or legal counsel, was appointed to defend Jesus.
22. No witnesses were called to defend Jesus.
23. The proper procedure for a trial was,
 - a. First the accusation
 - b. Then the defense
24. A defendant could not be beaten, tortured, or scourged prior to the trial.
25. Judges were to be kind and humane to the defendant.

Concerning any final decision of the Sanhedrin:

1. If a trial was concluded with a favorable verdict, it could be concluded on the same day

as it began.

2. If an unfavorable verdict was given then it must be concluded on the following day.
3. No announcement was to be given at night.

These rules were intended to protect the accused and prevent any possible error of an inaccurate verdict. Therefore, no such trial could legally have been held on the day prior to a Sabbath or festival. The three Jewish trials of Jesus would fail on every count, and be uniquely different from any other.

15.03.08.Q1

What were the Reasons the Jewish Leaders Accused Jesus of Blasphemy?

There were a number of reasons, some more serious than others. But when combined, these provided a strong argument for their rejection of Him. The reasons are:

1. Jesus forgave sin, and as such, He claimed to be God because only God can forgive sin.
2. He spoke with His own authority. Rabbis often spoke on the authority of one or more other rabbis, but Jesus spoke as if He was the final authority.
3. Jesus said that His miracles were signs of Divine power. While the Jewish leaders believed that the messianic miracles that Jesus performed were certain identifiers of the messiah, they rejected them and Him.
4. Jesus referred to God as *Abba*, or *Abba Father*, just as He probably used the endearment term *imma* for *mamma*. They could not accept any person refer to God in such an affectionate manner.
5. Whereas previous prophets warned the people of God's judgment, Jesus said they would be judged on how they responded to His words. This in effect, was a statement that He was God.
6. At times Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of God. Since a son was seen equal to his father, the words of Jesus were understood that He was equal to God.
7. Jesus supposedly said that He would destroy the temple (He didn't say this, but His accusers claimed that He did). Twice before Jesus had cleansed the temple and the merchants quickly went back to business as usual. They could hardly tolerate the cleansings, but the words of destruction were too much for them.

There can be no question that those who rejected Him did so for very profound reasons – reasons

that believers understood, especially after the resurrection, and reasons they died for.

15.03.12.Q1

How does One Explain the obvious Disagreement Concerning the Suicide of Judas as Recorded in Matthew 27:5 and Acts 1:18?

Matthew 27:5 records that Judas hanged himself, while in Acts 1:18 he fell forward (headlong) and his bowels spilled upon the ground. Some have attempted to explain that the traitor first hung himself from a tree and when the rope broke, he fell forward on the ground, causing his stomach to open. While this makes common sense to the modern reader, it is highly doubtful. Others have stated that Matthew emphasized the remorse of Judas while Luke, in the book of Acts, emphasized the judgment of God. This may be true, but it fails to satisfactorily answer the question.

The ancients used several methods of execution: stoning, crucifixion, burning, death by lions or gladiators, or impalement upon a sharpened stake which was commonly used by the Assyrians, who were the cruelest and most feared people of antiquity. The method almost never heard of was death by hanging with the use of a rope (a possible exception was Haman in the book of Esther). Of all these, impaling oneself upon an impaling stick could have been the choice of death, resulting from an impulsive decision demanding immediate results, considering the emotional turmoil of Judas. By definition, a cross is an upright stake upon which one could be hung, bound, or impaled. Papias, an early Church father who supported this, said that Judas hung himself upon an impaling stick. If such a horrific death were completed, then Matthew 27:5 would not contradict Acts 1:18. The Code of Hammurabi (1754 B.C.) states that if an upper class woman causes the death of her husband, she shall be impaled upon a stake (see example 15.03.12.B below). The stake of Hammurabi and the Assyrians evolved into the post with a cross beam of the first century. In fact, the word for *stake* was also used for *cross*.

The phrase “hung on a tree” is more accurately translated as “impaled on a stick,” or “impaled on a pole.” If Judas impaled himself, then there is no disagreement between the accounts in Matthew and Acts.



15.03.12.A. RELIEF CARVING OF ASSYRIANS IMPALING ISRAELITES. In 701 B.C., the Assyrians impaled live Israelites on poles during an attack on Lachish, one of forty-six cities conquered by the Assyrian King Sennacherib. The impaling pole is believed to have been the predecessor to the cross. It is also possible that when Judas “hung” himself, he probably impaled himself and, thus, hung on the impaling pole. If so, this would reconcile the two different biblical accounts of his death. Photo courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Judas had evil in his heart, but still shared the Passover and first communion with Jesus and fellow disciples. His suicide ought to bring incredible awareness to every believer of the importance of resolving conflicts, anger, or resentment before taking part in communion. Failure to do so could bring judgment on one’s self. It brought a curse according to the words of the Apostle Paul, because...

²⁷ Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy way will be guilty of sin against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ So a man should examine himself; in this way he should eat the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29

When Judas realized he was guilty of a horrific crime, he condemned himself in accordance with the Mosaic Law.

²² “If anyone is found guilty of an offense deserving the death penalty and is executed, and you hang his body on a tree, ²³ you are not to leave his corpse on the tree overnight but are to bury him that day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse. You must not defile the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23

15.03.12.Q4

How is the Discrepancy between Matthew 27:6 and Acts 1:18 Explained?

Matthew 27:6 states, **“It’s not lawful to put it into the temple treasury, since it is blood money.”** The apparent discrepancy is that in Matthew’s account, it was not legal for the priests to purchase anything for the temple using “blood money,” so they purchased the potter’s field which was not owned by the temple. However, in Acts 1:18 Luke clearly said that Judas purchased the potter’s field with the reward of iniquity or sin. He wrote to a Gentile audience and indicated the original source of the funds. Matthew however, wrote to a Jewish audience and wanted to make sure his readers understood that the priest actually did something right this time.

15.04.08

Mark 15:11; Jn. 18:40; Lk. 23:18-19; Mt. 27:20-21 Crowd demands Barabbas

Lk. ¹⁸ Then they all cried out together

“Then they all cried out together.” Unfortunately, throughout most of church history, the prevailing opinion has been that *all* the Jewish people cried out against Jesus. Really? This demands some serious thought! Were those whom Jesus healed and raised from the dead now demanding that Pilate crucify Him? At this point only the Sadducees and possibly the elders and scribes were before Pilate. Luke 19:47-48 states that the chief priests were unable to stop Jesus because *all* the people were very attentive to Him. On another occasion *all* the people listened to him *gladly* (Mk. 12:37).

If there was a change in public sentiment, it is not recorded in the Bible. The *only* reason the trials were held at night was Jesus was extremely popular and a day trial would certainly have caused a riot. Why would the rejoicing crowds who witnessed Jesus perform dozens, if not hundreds of healings and raise Lazarus from the dead, suddenly want to see Him crucified? As is explained below, the term *all* refers only to the small crowd that was before Pilate, not to every Jew in the land.

15.04.08.Q1

Does the Word “all” mean the entire Jewish Community; every Jew in the Land?

Those who believe that the word “all” refers to every Jew in the land may have difficulty explaining why, in John 8:30, so many put “their faith in Him” but only twenty-nine verses later the same group wanted to stone Him. If this were the case, then a major event that caused the change in public opinion was never recorded in biblical, Jewish, or secular history – and that is highly unlikely.

Yet, later, in Matthew 27:22, the gospel writer said, “They all answered.” Throughout church history, this phrase has often been used to condemn all the Jews because of a single word: *all*. Even today, many well-meaning Christians believe *all* the Jews of Israel condemned Jesus to die. One must ask what had occurred between the time Jesus rode into Jerusalem when everyone praised Him and anticipated He would deliver them from the brutal Romans, and now, when He was standing before Pilate. What could possibly have caused the radical transformation of public opinion, which escaped not only the gospels but also all of the extra-biblical Jewish writings? The answer is – absolutely nothing! If anything had occurred that would have changed public opinion, the gospel writers would certainly have written about it. Clearly not *all* the Jews were against Jesus, but only *all* those Jews who stood before Pilate.

Consider this train of thought: Did His mother Mary condemn her Son? She was Jewish. How about the disciples? They were also Jewish. What about the hundreds of people He healed and the thousands He fed? And why would all of them have condemned Him to the cross? The common opinion that *all* the Jews of Israel condemned Jesus is obviously not well thought out. The thousands who loved Him were busy with their Passover observances and were probably wondering if He would make an announcement at the temple about being the messiah. They certainly would never have believed He would be tried illegally at night. Yet the very purpose of the night trials was to keep the public ignorant until Jesus was convicted. Therefore, those who responded to Pilate were *not* the same people who praised Jesus when He entered Jerusalem.

That raises the obvious question: Who were *all* the people who demanded the death of Jesus? It was Caiaphas and his small group of temple power brokers who were willing to go to any length to insure that Jesus would not overthrow their positions as the religious establishment.

Because this is an important point, extra detail is hereby given. The word *all* does not always mean exclusively every person, but the definition can include a majority of people who are at a specific place at a specific time. Even though most of the New Testament was written in Greek, the writers were Jews who thought and expressed their ideas like other Jewish people. In Hebrew, the word *kol*, meaning *all* does not always mean every single entity or person, but rather, the majority.

A biblical example of the use of *all* in this sense is found in the account of Saul when he fought the Amalekites. In a battle recorded in 1 Samuel 15:7-8, 20, Saul “totally destroyed with a

sword” *all* the Amalekites, yet later they appeared again in 1 Samuel 27:8, 30:1,18, in 2 Samuel 8:12, and in 1 Chronicles 4:43. Did the Scripture writers make a mistake when they said Saul totally destroyed all the Amalekites? No. Saul killed all the Amalekites who were on the battlefield, but not the entire people group. Ironically, eventually one of them killed Saul (2 Sam. 1:8-10). Incidentally, Scripture centuries later recorded that the evil Haman was an Agagite (Esther 3:1) but Josephus said he was part of a clan within the larger tribe of Amalekites.

To modern readers, the gospel writers seem to have been a bit loose with the word *all*. Matthew (26:56) and Mark (14:50), both said that *all* the disciples fled when Jesus was crucified. Yet among the last words of Jesus were His instruction to Mary, His mother, who would live out the rest of her life under the care of John. Both stood before Jesus as He died upon the cross. So clearly, the word *all* means a *vast majority*, and not *every single person*. The gospel writers were not loose with their vocabulary; they just had a broader definition to it.

Another thought to consider is this: the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 speaks of those who are “in” Jesus as He is “in” God the Father. But that prayer would not make any sense if *all* the Jews were shouting for His crucifixion. Without question, that prayer would be considerably different.

Those who were before Pilate were, at most, a few hundred accusers from the temple leadership. This is supported in the New Testament (Acts 2:23, 36; 1 Thess. 2:14-15) and the Babylonian Talmud. However, the clearest support for this is from Josephus, who stated that,

Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.3.3 (64)

The term “**principal men**” clearly refers to the Jewish leaders of the temple elite – namely the Sadducees and the family of Caiaphas. Josephus made a point of saying that only a few selected leaders were responsible for the crucifixion, not *all* the Jews. In addition, Luke made a point to record that Joseph of Arimathea was a believer and, although he was member of the Sanhedrin, he did not agree to the plan and action to execute Jesus (Lk. 23:50-51). So clearly, not all members of the high court wanted Jesus dead. Furthermore, if anyone would have understood the times and the environment of this major religious event, it would have been Josephus. Concerning Jesus, he added that,

Those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.3.3 (64)

Finally, in His high priestly prayer of John 17, Jesus prayed for Himself (vv. 1-5), then for His disciples (vv. 6-19), and finally for all believers (vv. 20-26). Noteworthy, is the fact that He does

not forgive them because they did not commit the sin of demanding that He be crucified – they are “in Him.” They were unaware that the religious leaders tried Jesus in an illegal system of trials until the sun rose and He was on His way to the cross. Then it was too late.

“‘Barabbas,’ they answered.” The Jewish leaders responded to Pilate’s offer by demanding the release of Barabbas to insure the death of Jesus. It was Barabbas who was a notorious criminal (Mt. 27:16), robber (Jn. 18:40), murderer (Lk. 23:19), and, worst of all, an insurrectionist (Mk. 15:7). These qualities were typical of the Zealots of the day, who fought against the Romans whenever possible. However, the word for “robber” in John 18:40 would be better translated as “rebel.” According to Roman law, rebels were crucified whereas robbers were imprisoned or scourged but never crucified. The Romans crushed insurrections without care for the loss of innocent life.

Herein is another amazing irony: It was Barabbas (Heb. *Bar-Abbas*) whose name meant *son of the father*, or *son of the master*. The Jews chose a counterfeit *son of the father* instead of the true *Son of the Father*. Barabbas was released while Jesus, who was innocent, who raised the dead, and who is the true Son of the Father, died for the sins of Barabbas and everyone else. Furthermore, the early Syrian and Armenian gospel manuscripts record his name as Jesus Barabbas. Barabbas is a metaphor for the crucifixion experience. If those early transcripts are true, then the obvious question is why the name “Jesus” was dropped for the biblical record? The theory is that because the common name of Jesus became so highly honored, no church father desired it to be associated with one who was a killer and Zealot, and therefore, it was dropped. Barabbas was guilty of being anti-Roman in a manner similar to what Jesus was accused of, yet Jesus willingly and peacefully died on the cross that was prepared for the “son of the father.”

Since every male child is a “son of the father,” there is the obvious question of who would give their son such a name. The answer lies in the Jewish culture. In ancient times the local rabbi was seen as the spiritual father and, out of kindness and respect, he was at times called “Father.” This would have been evidenced by the letter “s” at the end of the name, “Barabbas.” Therefore, there is a high probability that Barabbas was the son of a rabbi – a rebellious young man, who brought much shame to his father by,

1. Not following in his father’s footsteps and becoming a rabbi, and
2. Rebelling against the religious system, and
3. By becoming a freedom-fighting Zealot.

Simply said, Barabbas was a son who rebelled against his father and the religious code. In later years, the Zealots started two rebellions of phenomenal significance:

1. The conflict that resulted in the Roman destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, and
2. The insurrection led by Simon bar Kokhba that caused all Jews and Christians to be

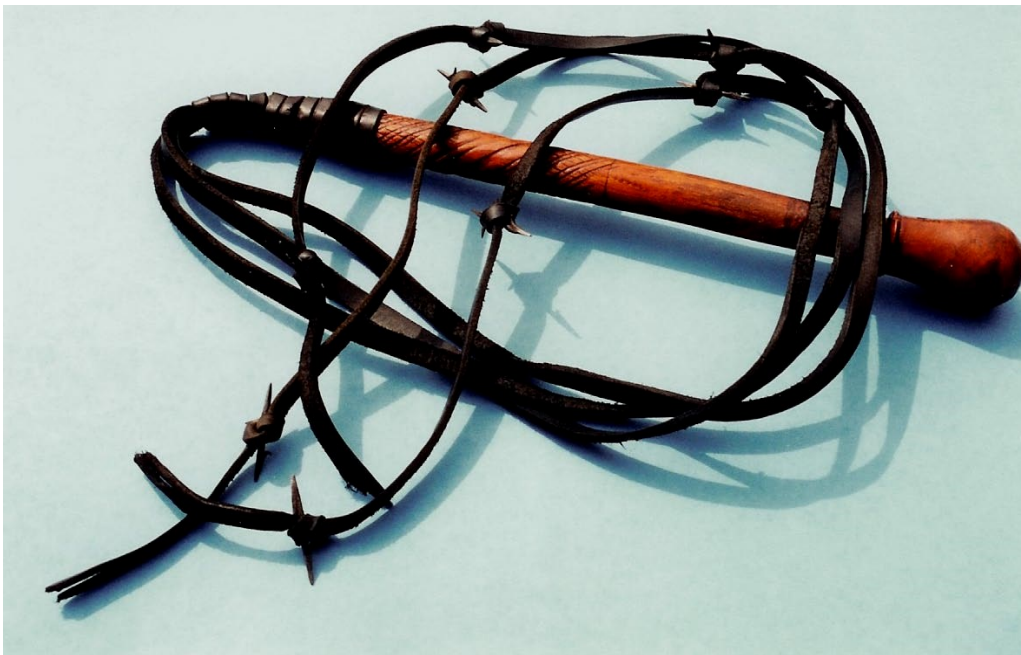
exiled from Jerusalem in A.D. 135. The city was destroyed both times.

Finally, Barabbas most certainly looked upon Jesus as the one who saved his life. However, he was just as guilty as were the other two rebels (sometimes called thieves) who were crucified with Jesus. The probability is almost certain that Barabbas and the two thieves had previously fought the Romans together. Romans often executed entire groups of rebels at the same time. Therefore, Barabbas not only saw the one who saved his life, but also saw his two friends die for the same sins of which he was guilty.

Floggings or Scourgings

There were two kinds of floggings: Jewish and Roman.

1. The Jews flogged a criminal only 39 times (Deut. 25:1-3). When the Jews scourged the Apostle Paul five times, he survived because he received 39 stripes each time. These were not floggings unto death. It is often said by some modern commentators that when scourging Jesus, the lictors took alternate turns thirteen times for a maximum of thirty-nine stripes (forty minus one; cf Deut. 25:1-3). When the Apostle Paul was scourged by the Jews, he was whipped thirty-nine times (2 Cor. 11:24). However, the limit and method of stripes was in accordance with Jewish law. Two-thirds of the lashes were to be placed on the back and one-third on the front. All striking took place with the recipient bent over a post or stretched out between two pillars.
2. The Romans, however, had no limit to their floggings and a prisoner would often die under the scourge (see 16.01.02.A). When they flogged Jesus, Isaiah's prediction was fulfilled when said that He no longer resembled a man.



16.01.02.A. A RECONSTRUCTED ROMAN FLOGGING WHIP WITH IRON BARBS.

A whip with iron spurs was an instrument of immense brutality. It consisted of a turned wooden handle with three long leather thongs, each with three or more knots. In each knot was a bone or iron barb. The objective was to scourge the prisoner and have barbs and bone hooks tear into flesh. Jesus would have been whipped many times with a flogging/scourging whip like this one. It should be noted that the Romans did not have any limitation to scourging. The restriction of thirty-nine lashes was the legal limit observed only when Jews scourged (without the spurs) other Jews. Reproduced by Thomas C. Moore. Photograph by the author.

16.01.14

Luke 23:39-43 Thief asks Remembrance

A portion of verse 43 reads, **And He said to him, “I assure you: Today you will be with Me in paradise.”**

“I assure you: Today you will be with Me in paradise.” This second of the last testaments Jesus gave on the cross and it is the promise of eternal life to one who was condemned to die. There is a strong possibility that both revolutionaries knew Jesus or knew of Him, before their appointed executions. In fact, Jesus became so popular, that there was not a person who had not heard of Him. The primary reason for this opinion is that the one thief simply addressed Jesus by His name. Furthermore, he had knowledge of the kingdom Jesus preached as did the other criminal, but the second one never asked about it, although he seems to have had sufficient knowledge to reject it.

One of them recognized his spiritual condition, his need for forgiveness, and appealed to Jesus for mercy. To comprehend the holiness of God in light of one's state of being (i.e. a sinner) results in a plea for mercy. Jesus is not a respecter of persons, but He is a respecter of motives and attitudes. The request of the thief was accepted and he was forgiven while the other maintained his hardened heart and attitude.

How interesting is this scene with the two dying revolutionary Zealots, one on either side of Him. This scene reflects those of future generations when some will accept Him and others will reject Him. Jesus said two would be grinding corn, and one would be gone and the other left; two would be in the field, one would be gone, and the other left. So it was as He was dying on the cross.

16.01.14.Q1

Did Jesus take the Repentant Thief to Heaven on the Day They Died (Lk. 23:43)?

The passage in Luke 23:43 has been problematic because Jesus said He would take the repentant thief to paradise “today,” but it is well known that Jesus did not ascend to heaven until forty-three days later. Like many others, this writer once believed that paradise was the same place as heaven. It isn’t. Consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The former was in a world of torment while Lazarus was in paradise – but not in heaven. Paradise was a holding area that had two areas:

1. One for those going to heaven
2. Another for the damned

The word *paradise* is also known as “Abraham’s bosom” to which Jesus referred to in Luke 16. The Apostle Paul also made a reference to it in Ephesians 4:8 when he said that Jesus led “captivity captive” – those in paradise destined for heaven. When the plan of salvation was completed, the captives went to heaven and therefore, there is no problem or conflict with Jesus having said, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”

Godly saints of the Old Testament period went to paradise, not heaven, because their sins were **covered** by sacrificial animals (Heb. 10:1-4) but **not removed** by the blood of Jesus. No one can enter heaven with covered sins. Jesus paid the price for all pre-cross sins. Since no one could/can enter heaven without the blood of Jesus *removing* their sins, the saints of the Old Testament era stayed in Paradise, a/k/a Abraham’s Bosom, Hades, until Jesus paid the price of their sins. But when Jesus died, He went to Paradise with the last “new” saint of the Old Testament era – the Zealot – and proclaimed the gospel. Only His death could accomplish the removal of the pre-cross sins. From there the fellowship of Old Testament saints were then taken to their heavenly abode.

The classic example is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus found in Luke 16:19-31. It is the story of the rich man who died and was in torment while Lazarus was on the other side of a great gulf – in paradise – from where he would eventually go to heaven. Sometimes paradise is called “Hades,” especially the section of torment. Jesus is the triumphant Lord of heaven and hell (Rev. 1:18; Phil. 2:10) and has ultimate power over death (1 Pet. 3:19).

The Apostle Peter, in his first letter, said that Jesus preached to those who had died. Obviously, they were unaware of future events and had not heard of the gospel until Jesus shared it with them. Peter stated:

For this reason the gospel was also preached to those who are now dead, so that, although they might be judged by men in the fleshly realm, they might live by God in the spiritual realm.

1 Peter 4:6

The Apostles Creed on the end of line 4 states “He Jesus descended into hell.” An earlier form

of the Apostles Creed formed the basic structure of the Nicene Creed, which led to the fifth century Athanasian Creed, which states that “Christ suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead.” Because of His descent into hell and rise to life, He conquered sin and death, and more importantly, Jesus took the keys of Satan’s authority.

This does not indicate that those who died can still be saved, nor should one pray to or for the dead. Rather, it states that Jesus went to those who had died and told them of Himself. That is why Ignatius said,

He descended, indeed, into Hades alone, but He arose accompanied by a multitude; and rent asunder that means of separation which had existed from the beginning of the world, and cast down its partition-wall.

Ignatius, Letter to the Tralhans

17.01.01.Q1

What Strange and Miraculous Events Occurred when Jesus Died that are not Recorded in the Bible?

Just as the ministry life of Jesus was full of wonder, so was His death – an event that everyone quickly discovered – was orchestrated by God. The Jewish leaders refused to acknowledge that these events could have been related to Jesus, but an explanation had to be given. Therefore, Jewish legends say that these occurred after Simeon the Just died.

Phenomena 1: The Temple Doors Open

When Jesus died, the temple doors opened on their own accord and sacrifices ended exactly forty years later. These doors were huge – seventy cubits high and twenty wide – and obviously quite heavy. According to Josephus, no less than twenty men (Levites) were needed to open and close each one. No wonder that Jewish writers noted the unusual event in the Talmud:

Forty years before the destruction of the temple, its doors opened of their own accord. Jochanan, son of Saccai, rebuked them, saying, O temple, why did you open of your own accord? Ah! I perceive that your end is at hand; for it is written: “Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars.”

Babylonian Talmud, Zechariah 11:1

The mystery of the doors opening by themselves and the fire that followed was also recorded elsewhere in the Babylonian Talmud. Furthermore, the account was related to two prophetic passages, Isaiah 10:34 and Zechariah 11:1, by a first century rabbi. These two verses do not mention the word “temple,” but the name “Lebanon” which was synonymous with the word “temple” for more than a thousand years. The reason for the connection was that the interior of

Solomon's temple was paneled with Lebanon cedars. But there's more: The phrase "O Lebanon" is actually a Hebrew word play. The phrase had become a cryptic name for the temple, since its root letters formed the Hebrew word "whiten" and it was at the "white temple" where the sins of the people were "whitened." The interior of the temple was paneled with cedar wood from Lebanon and the exterior was a bright white limestone.

This mysterious event of the temple doors opening did not escape the pen of Josephus. He said that the doors were so massive that normally twenty men had to struggle to close them, but now they opened on its own accord, giving the ominous warning that enemies would soon enter. Note the incredible account,

Moreover, the eastern gate of the inner court of the temple which was of brass and vastly heavy, and had been, with difficulty, shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor which was made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night. Now those that kept watch in the temple came to the captain of the temple and told him of it; who then came up to see and, without great difficulty was able to shut the gate again.... But the men of learning understood it, that the security of their holy place was dissolved of its own accord, and that the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies.

Josephus, *Wars* 6.5.3 (293-295)

With the fearful thought of coming destruction, another rabbi made this amazing comment,

"Because of the sins of Israel, the Torah (God's Word) would be taken from Israel and given to the Gentiles."

Babylonian Talmud, *Hagigah* 5b

His observation was obviously correct – God's Word (Torah) was taken to the Gentiles. The prediction by the rabbi is amazing. Yet at no time did Jesus ever imply that the Old Testament covenant was broken or discarded because the Jewish leadership rejected Him.

The term *legend* is often defined as a mythical event that is based upon a historical event. As the actual details are transmitted from one person to another, these become enhanced and a *legend* is born. This historical account, as reported by the Roman historian Tacitus is a classic example.

These doors, opening by themselves, must have had a profound effect upon the observers as even Tacitus attempted to describe it. He was not an observer in Jerusalem so therefore, his words reflect the proverbial rumor mill gossips as well as his Greco-Roman religious faith. Nonetheless, he clearly described the opening of the doors and the fear that came with the event. He must have reflected the opinion of many others as well.

Contending hosts were seen meeting in the skies, arms flashed, and suddenly the temple was illumined with fire from the clouds. Of a sudden the doors of the shrine opened and a superhuman voice cried: “The gods are departing”: at the same moment the mighty stir of their going was heard. Few interpreted these omens as fearful; the majority firmly believed that their ancient priestly writings contained the prophecy that this was the very time when the East should grow strong and that men starting from Judea should possess the world.”

Tacitus, *Histories* 5:13

The final comment is not only profound for what it says, but by whom it was said. A friend of Nicodemus (the same who met Jesus at night) by the name of Johanan Ben Zakkai said:

“Oh temple, temple... I know that you shall be destroyed.”

Ben Zakkai was one of the leading rabbis who opposed the corruption of the leading Pharisees and Sadducees. His prediction is amazing...the temple was about to be destroyed and he was right!

Phenomena 2: The Missing Sacrificial Scape-goat

As part of the sacrificial system, every year two identical goats, preferably twins, were chosen. One was sacrificed in the temple and its blood soaked linen was hung on the temple door. In Leviticus 16:20-22, Moses commanded Aaron to place the sins of the people on the head of a goat. That goat became known as the “scapegoat” and was then led into the desert wilderness. There it was taken to the Cliff of Azazel, pushed over the edge, and presumably devoured by wild predators after dying on the rocks below. The words of Moses in Leviticus are presented, followed by the events in the temple, as recorded in the Mishnah.

²⁰ “When he has finished purifying the most holy place, the tent of meeting, and the altar, he is to present the live male goat. ²¹ Aaron will lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the Israelites’ wrongdoings and rebellious acts — all their sins. He is to put them on the goat’s head and send it away into the wilderness by the man appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry on it all their wrongdoings into a desolate land, and he will release it there.

Leviticus 16:20-22

However, after the crucifixion when the scapegoat was pushed over the edge of the cliff, it ran off into the desert where it was eventually captured and killed by the Saracens. But another tradition says that one time the scapegoat returned to Jerusalem. Clearly things did not go very well for the priests as planned. Whatever the situation of the scapegoat, this sacrifice was connected with the next phenomena – the scarlet wool that failed to turn white.

Phenomena 3: The Mystery of the Scarlet Wool

When the goats were presented in the temple, the blood-soaked woolen thread of the sacrificed goat was tied to the temple door. This tradition was based on a passage in the book of Isaiah.

Come, let us discuss this,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are as red as crimson, they will be like wool.

Isaiah 1:18

In the meantime the scapegoat was led out of the temple, over the Mount of Olives, and into the Judean Desert where it was pushed over the Cliff of Azazel as previously mentioned. As the scapegoat was being led away, all eyes in the temple were focused on the wool thread that was tied to the temple door. When the scapegoat – the one which carried the sins of the all the people – died, the strap of crimson wool miraculously became white, obviously indicating that the sins of the people were forgiven. Jewish writings preserved two accounts of this unusual event.

Rabbi Ishmael says: “Didn’t they have another sign also? A thread of crimson wool was tied to the door of the sanctuary and when the he-goat reached the wilderness the thread turned white; for it is written, ‘Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow’” (Isa. 1:18).

Mishnah, Yoma 6.8

However, after the national rejection of Jesus, (“about” 40 years prior to the destruction of the temple) the crimson thread on the temple door never turned white again.

Our rabbis taught that throughout the forty years that Shim’on the Tzaddik served, ... the scarlet cloth would become white. From then on it would sometimes become white and sometimes not.... Throughout the last forty years before the temple was destroyed... the scarlet cloth never turned white.

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 39a-39b

Great caution was taken to avoid any association of these phenomena and the death of Jesus in Jewish writings. Prior to the death of Jesus, all the sins of the people were atoned by the Old Covenant’s sacrificial system. Upon His death and resurrection, however, their sins were no longer removed by sacrifices, even though the sacrificial system continued.

While some scholars apply this passage to the temple destruction of 586 B.C., Jewish commentaries also apply it to the destruction of A.D. 70. This interpretation originated with Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, the last survivor of the Great Sanhedrin and who boldly escaped the Roman siege as the temple burned and thousands were massacred. A friend of the Sanhedrin teacher Nicodemus (the same who met Jesus) by the name of Johanan Ben Zakkai said:

Our rabbis taught: during the last forty years before the destruction of the temple the lot for the Lord did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-colored strap become white; nor did the westernmost light shine; and the doors of the *Hekal* would open by themselves, until Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai rebuked them, saying *Hekal, Hekal*, why wilt thou be the alarmer thyself? I know about thee that thou wilt be destroyed, for Zechariah ben Ido has already prophesied concerning thee: *Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars*.

Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 39b

This brief narrative in the Talmud is not the only one with in such observations. Similar omens of judgment (that God had forsaken His temple) are found also in *2 Baruch* 6:7 and in the *Testament of Levi* 10:3. This miracle occurred annually at *Yom Kippur* in the temple until the year Jesus died. The death and resurrection of Jesus rendered the temple obsolete. Its destruction was a sure event on a divine timetable.

Phenomena 4: Difficulties with the Servant Lamp

Once, when Jesus was in the temple area at the Feast of Lights, He said that He was the light of the world. Scholars believe this conversation occurred by the menorah called the “Servant Lamp.” Amazingly, after His death there was great difficulty in lighting the Servant Lamp, and once it was lit, it did not always remain lit. Fresh olive oil and new wicks did not help. Rabbis began to write that God was demonstrating His anger with Israel while foreshadowing the destruction of the temple, but they were careful not to mention the name “Jesus.”

Forty years before the destruction of the temple, the Servant Lamp refused to light.

Jerusalem Talmud, *Yoma* 43:3

The Jewish leaders had difficulty explaining why the Servant Lamp no longer shone in the temple area. No one dared to connect it with the crucifixion of Jesus, so the reason was placed upon the death of Simeon the Just/Righteous. In the Talmud is the following statement:

All the time that Simeon the Righteous was alive, the western lamp would burn well. When Simeon the Righteous died, sometimes it would flicker out, and sometimes it would burn.

Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 6.3

But there is a serious problem with Jewish reckoning: Simeon the Righteous, a/k/a Simon the Just, is said to be the high priest Simon II who lived around the year 200 B.C., and was succeeded by Onias III. However, there are another half dozen religious leaders who could have had the honorary title of “the Righteous” or “the Just,” and knowing who the Talmudic writers meant is unclear – and maybe it was intended to be that way.

Later, when the Romans came in A.D. 70, the first century historian described how they removed the menorah. It was eventually taken to Rome where, it is believed, it remains today in the Vatican.

But for those that were taken in the temple of Jerusalem, they made the greatest figure of them all; that is, the golden table, of the weight of many talents; the candlestick also, that was made of gold, though its construction were now changed from that which we made use of; for its middle shaft was fixed upon a basis, and the small branches were produced out of it to a great length, having the likeness of a trident in their position, and had every one a socket made of brass for a lamp at the tops of them. These lamps were in number seven, and represented the dignity of the number seven among the Jews.

Josephus, *Wars* 7.5.5 (149)

Why did the Servant Lamp not retain its flame? It was because Jesus functioned both as the Servant and the Light of the world, which national Israel rejected.

Phenomena 5: The fire wood that would not burn

For more than five centuries, ever since the second temple was built, when the fire upon the altar was lit in the morning, two logs were sufficient to keep it burning all day long. However, after the crucifixion of Jesus, the fire would at times go out, even with additional firewood.

Phenomena 6: The Shewbread that “failed.”

The rituals of the second temple were well established. Just as the altar fires were kept burning for centuries, so likewise every morning a blessing was placed over the temple showbread that was divided among the priests and eaten until they were all filled. However, after the crucifixion of Jesus, the priests remained hungry.

These six strange events were not connected with the death and resurrection of Jesus, but with the death of Simeon the Just. The religious leaders refused to acknowledge what they knew beyond any shadow of doubt – that Jesus was their Messiah.

Summary statement: Finally, a summary statement of four of these events is found in the Babylonian Talmud. It says,

It has been taught: Forty years before the destruction of the temple the western light went out, the crimson thread remained crimson, and the lot for the Lord always came up in the left hand. They would close the gates of the temple by night and get up in the morning and find them wide open. Said to the temple Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, “O temple, why do you frighten us? We know that you will end up

destroyed. For it has been said, “Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars!” (Zech. 11:1).

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 6.3

17.02.01.Q1

Does Luke 23:1 Conflict with 23:51?

The first verse of Chapter 23 indicates that the entire court voted against Jesus whereas verse 51 states that Joseph of Arimathea did not consent to their decision. This is not a matter of conflict, but indicates that he was not present during the trial. The Sanhedrin was composed of seventy members, plus the high priest who was also the president. For a capital crime, only twenty-three members plus the president had to serve as judges. In this case the court judges were hand selected by Caiaphas to agree with his decision. Joseph of Arimathea was among those absent.

18.01.06.Q1

Why did John Hesitate when He came to the Tomb?

John, the disciple, was a kinsman of the high priest Caiaphas (Acts 4:6). Many scholars have said that to enter a tomb that contained a body would have defiled him because he was an orthodox Jew. Some have argued that the John of Acts 4:6 may not have been this disciple, but the fact that he did not enter the tomb until he realized it was empty, strongly suggests that he was a member of the priesthood family, which was required to observe the laws of defilement. But the question remains as to whether entering any tomb would have defiled him, even if did not have a body.

18.01.14.Q1

Does Luke 24:41 Oppose John 20:19?

In Luke’s narrative the disciples *would not* believe whereas in John’s narrative they *could not* believe for the joy they had. Luke 24:36 and John 20:19 both agreed that the disciples were talking when Jesus suddenly stood among them. Furthermore, in Luke 24:37-39 and John 20:19-21 Jesus revealed Himself to his disciples. Luke 24:41 is not unbelief of faith or doctrine, but the disciples were awestruck at what had happened and they had difficulty perceiving the reality of the moment: the resurrection of Jesus. The gospel writer used the same terminology as would be common today, if an event would seem unbelievable. The two passages agree.

18.01.17

John 21:1-14 Later at the Sea of Galilee: Jesus Appears to Disciples

“Simon Peter got up and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish — 153 of them.” In the preceding paragraph a number of fishermen attempted to haul in a net full of fish but failed in the task. It was only after Simon Peter became involved that he, as a leader, accomplished what had been an impossible task. He did not do this single-handedly, for he certainly was not a first-century Samson. Here he is shown to be a leader of fishermen, who did the impossible, and later he would be a fisher of men in the Roman Empire, who would do the impossible.

The number “153” has been the subject of numerous discussions. Since the meaning of numbers has played a significant role in the gospels, it is only natural that church fathers have attempted to discover the meaning of the 153 fish. All attempts at discovery involved mathematics, which was not needed in other Hebraic interpretations. Several examples are as follows:

1. It was suggested by some early church leaders that 153 represents the number of nations who would receive the gospel. However, the Greek word for nations is *ethnos*, from which the English word *ethnic* is derived. Since there are more than 6,000 ethnic people groups today, this interpretation is hardly accurate. Furthermore, since this was written to a Jewish audience, they believed there were 70 nations or ethnic groups. If the fish represented nations, the number caught should have been 70, not 153.
2. Origen thought the number might represent the Trinity (for example: $3 \times 50 + 3 = 153$).
3. Another church father said it was the number of the disciples squared (144) plus the trinity squared (9).
4. Jerome, however, was not about to be caught in such foolishness; he said the number represented the various kinds of fish in the sea. Maybe he would have been better at mathematics.
5. The number of people who were healed or touched in some way in the gospels is 153. However, this opinion seems highly improbable since the gospels clearly imply that those to whom Jesus ministered were in the thousands.

The true meaning of the number 153 is hidden in the Hebraic and numeral system. As has been stated previously, letters were assigned numerical values in a manner similar to Roman numerals (i.e. V=5, X=10, etc.). All mathematical calculations, census registrations, and business accounting was done with letters by the Greeks, Romans, Jews, and numerous other cultures. The Hebrew term for this alpha-numeric system is “gemetria.” The number 153 could only have been written with Hebrew letters which form the phrase *b’nai haElohim*, meaning “sons of God.” Below is the phrase written in English, below that it is written twice in Hebrew, below that are the corresponding numeric values, followed by the names of the letters.

“Sons of God”

b'nai haElohim

בני האלהים

$$40 + 10 + 5 + 30 + 1 + 5 + (\text{space}) 10 + 50 + 2 = 153$$

$$\text{Mem} + \text{yodh} + \text{heh} + \text{lah-med} + \text{ah-leph} + \text{heh} + (\text{space}) \text{yod} + \text{nun} + \text{beth} = 153$$

18.01.17.A ILLUSTRATION OF THE INTERPRETATION OF NUMBER 153

Equally important is that previously Jesus told Peter in Luke 5:10b, “From now on you will be catching people.” Since the time Jesus made that statement, Peter denied Him three times and three times Jesus reinstated Peter. The miraculous catching of 153 fish was a confirmation of the calling in Luke 5:10b. Not only would be Peter catching “good fish,” but those fish/people, would become “sons of God.” This is a powerful message of encouragement for those whom God has called, who for some reason, strayed from their faith, but was restored. Jesus said that His calling remains.

It is nearly impossible to find this interpretation in any Gentile-Christian commentary. This demonstrates that some of today’s biblical interpretations are clearly based on Christian tradition and assumptions and not on a study of Jewish roots and culture. This alpha-numeric style was also used by the Apostle John in Revelation 13:17-18, where he revealed the “number” that identified the coming beast, a/k/a the Antichrist. That number in the Greek alphabet is 666. However, various letter combinations can be used to compose the number.

Finally and most important, this passage reveals the incredible love and willingness God has for His children who made wrong decisions or committed a sin that resulted in horrific consequences. This narrative was, no doubt, placed in the Bible for people like this author, and others, who have questioned if God could really forgive and restore them. On the other hand, *not* to accept God’s forgiveness is to declare that God’s forgiveness is not sufficient, and therefore, the individual places himself above God.

18.03.00

Closing Comments

Jesus never intended to be the founder of a new religious faith. He came to redeem His people from the curse of sin that always leads to death. The authenticity of His life was realized by the

fulfillment of hundreds of Old Testament prophecies. The hope of the Jewish people was now reality (Acts 2:16; 3:18, 24; 10:43). He became exalted as Lord, not by His death, but by His resurrection from death (Acts 2:33-36; 3:13; 4:11). He was aware, however, because of the Jewish rejection of the fulfillment of the Old Testament, a new faith would be developed. To those who placed their faith and hope in Him, Jesus gave the Holy Spirit as a Comforter and His Presence (Acts 2:17-22, 32, 44). He shall return as reigning judge and Savior (Acts 3:20 ff.; 10:42; 17:31), but in the meantime there is a daily appeal to lost souls to come to repentance and to live godly lives, filled with His Presence in the form of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 10:43). May you continue to be faithful to Him, and then one day you will hear these words, “Well done my good and faithful servant.”

Glossary

Selected Definitions of important terms and phrases used in this eBook

02.01.06

Essenes. The origin of the Essenes has been a subject of debate among scholars, as some believe the group broke from the early Pharisees about the time of the Maccabean Revolt. They were a highly orthodox religious group who believed the temple and been completely corrupted by the Sadducees and Pharisees. The Essene group that lived in Qumran near the Dead Sea is known for having written the Dead Sea Scrolls. These scrolls, discovered between 1947 and 1956, include documents concerning religious life and portions of all but one of the Old Testament books. The biblical books clearly demonstrate that our Bible today is an accurate copy of those found in the Essene caves.

02.01.10

Hellenism / Hellenists. The Hellenists were Jewish people who abandoned the laws of Judaism and accepted the Greek culture, known as “Hellenism.” They believed the laws of Moses prevented them from enjoying the full pleasures of life promoted by the Greeks and, later by the Romans. For example, young men at times desired to participate in the public baths or play in the Greek games to obtain the perfect body. But since the athletic games were played in the nude, they were embarrassed and could not assimilate into the Greek-Roman community. Since the Gentiles believed circumcision was disgusting, some Jewish men endured a surgical procedure known as *epispasm*, in which the marks of circumcision were removed. They could then participate in the Greek games and not be identified as being Jewish. For that reason orthodox Jews accused them of abandoning the holy covenant.

Hellenists were almost indistinguishable from their Greek neighbors. During the Maccabean Revolt they fought with the Greeks of Syria against the Hassidim and Hasmonean family. By the time of Jesus, their religious allegiance was with the Romans and Sadducees; and in fact, the Sadducees were Hellenistic.

02.01.11

Herodians. The Herodians were a small political non-religious group, sometimes known as the Boethusians, after Boethus, whose daughter Mariamne was one of the ten wives of Herod the Great, but some scholars believe they were a group within the Sadducees (Acts 4:1; 23:12-14). They were Roman sympathizers and individuals of prestigious status in the royal court, who always promoted their so-called “rightful” claims to the Jewish throne. They were neither Roman agents nor servants, but Jews who were either secular or Sadducees. They are mentioned three times in the gospels as opponents to Jesus (Mt. 22:16; Mk. 3:6, 12:13). The entire group was wiped out during the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

02.01.14

Pharisees. The Pharisees were the dominant Jewish party that consisted of a number of religious sects, from the early second century B.C. Understandably, the name *Pharisee* comes from the Hebrew *perushim*, *perusin* or *perusim* meaning *pious ones*, *separated*, or *detached*. Some scholars believe they evolved from the previous Hassidean movement because the Pharisees were known for seven major characteristics:

1. Separation. They considered themselves *the separated ones*, who emphasized strict adherence to the Mosaic laws pertaining to purity, Sabbath observance, prayer, tithing, and separation from anyone who was Hellenistic. There were four levels of Pharisees, and the upper echelon is referred to in this e-Book as the “leading Pharisees.” They were so extremely legalistic, pious, and self-righteous that they even avoided the *am ha-aretz*, meaning *the common people*.
2. Legalism. Due to the encroachment of Greek values into Jewish life, the Pharisees promoted the legalistic observance of Jewish laws on both the national and personal level. An example was recorded by the first century historian Josephus who noted that at one time more than six thousand of them refused to take the oath of allegiance to Caesar or Herod. They were willing to lay down their lives for their religious laws. They considered themselves to be the honored ones who were called to practice and honor the Priestly Code of Ezra, with an emphasis on the Oral Laws.
3. They were social and cultural liberals.

4. They were religious conservatives.
5. Most of them hated Rome, with the leading Pharisees being a possible exception. They believed that if they could not fortify their cities against the Roman occupiers, they would fortify their laws to keep the Greco-Roman culture out of Judaism and their personal lives.
6. They tried to be spiritual while the Sadducees tried to maintain their religious bureaucracy.
7. Most Pharisees were sincere, honest synagogue leaders who cared for their people, while the leading echelon were the ones with whom Jesus had multiple conflicts.
8. Many Pharisees were also scribes, judges, magistrates, teachers, rabbis, and priests. The people willingly put all power and authority into the hands of their rabbis, as orthodox Jews still do today. In fact, twice scribes are referred to as the “scribes of the Pharisees” (Mk. 2:16; Acts 23:9).

The Pharisees believed they had three obligations to strictly observe to find favor with God:

1. Tithing, known as *Neeman*. This was on *all* earnings.
2. Observance of all Levitical laws on ritual purity known as *Chabher*.
3. The practice of purity, which included separation from people considered to be “impure.”

There were many sects within the broad group of “Pharisees,” but among them were two major theological schools that had major influences in the culture. Furthermore, some discussions Jesus had with “the Pharisees” were the result of disputes between these two schools.

1. Beit Hillel (House or School of Hillel)
2. Beit Shammai (House or School of Shammai)

Named after their founding rabbis, these schools of theology held opposing opinions on how certain written and oral commandments were to be practiced. Their varied opinions are preserved in the *Mishnah*. The Pharisees, whom Jesus addressed, were the Oral Law traditionalists who had become aristocratic and powerfully similar to the Sadducees, whom they greatly disliked. The religious ideology of the Pharisees ranged widely as some were

condemned by both Jesus and by some of their own leaders in the third century (A.D.). For example, the School of Shammai held it was unlawful to comfort the sick or visit the mourner on the Sabbath, but the School of Hillel permitted it.

The leading Pharisees were usually synonymous with the teachers of the Law (Mt. 3:7; 15:1; Mk. 2: 16, 24; Lk. 11:38) which is why it can be difficult to distinguish them from the scribes. While most leading Pharisees considered themselves scribes, not all scribes considered themselves Pharisees. They were scholars of the biblical text. Whenever Jesus confronted them, He confronted the aristocratic leadership. Most of the Jewish people obeyed codes of conduct and religion according to the Pharisees, even though they did not formally belong to this religious sect. While some aristocratic Pharisees, such as the Herodians, were comfortable with the Romans, and Josephus said that a majority was fiercely patriotic and hated the foreign yoke with an impassioned bitterness.

The upper echelon consisted of men who had become religiously and politically corrupt and were under constant rebuke by Christ. They held the Oral Law in higher esteem than the written Mosaic Law. However, not all were evil. It should be noted that among these religious leaders were Simon, who made a banquet for Jesus (Lk. 7:37), and others who warned Jesus of Herod's attempt to kill Him (Lk. 13:31). They are often referred to in this manuscript as the "leading Pharisees," the "Pharisee elitists," or "the aristocrats of the Pharisees," as opposed to the common Pharisees, many of whom became followers of Jesus. The Pharisees were by no means a homogeneous group.

The Apostle Paul proudly maintained his status as a righteous Pharisee (Phil. 3:5; Acts 22) and, as a Pharisee, he was a messenger of God to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:16). It should be noted that among the Pharisees were those who were devoted to Jesus, and they were probably followers of Hillel. Those who planned evil against Him were probably of Shammai and the aristocratic followers of Hillel.

In summary, the Pharisees (compare to 02.01.16 "Sadducees") were,

1. In strong opposition to Hellenism
2. Had great disdain for the Romans
3. Generally middle class although the leadership was aristocratic
4. Theologically progressive, but within the Pharisee sect there was a diversity of opinions
5. Believed in the entire Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)
6. Affirmed the resurrection of the soul and heaven

7. Held a mythological belief that Abraham was seated at the gates of hell waiting to make sure no Jew would enter. To have been born a Jew meant automatic rights to the eternal Messianic Kingdom.

8. Believed in a final judgment for non-Jews, angels, etc.

9. Some Pharisees affiliated with the common people and sought converts (except for the leadership). However, the leading Pharisees had great disdain for them and separated themselves from them. This may be why Jesus referred to the common people as “sheep without a shepherd” (Mt. 9:36). Yet, in spite of this, many people sided with the Pharisees.

10. Estimated to be over 6,000 in number who belonged to a *chebher* or *chabher*, which was their *association* or *fraternity*.

11. Believed that man has control of his decisions and actions, but that God ultimately controls all things.

12. They believed that their Oral Law (also known as the Mishnah) superseded the authority of the Old Testament. Jesus referred to them as “hypocrites” because, while they made the laws a heavy burden for the common people, they created loopholes for themselves. Theologically speaking, the leading Pharisees canonized their own interpretation of the Law.

13. Under the umbrella term of *Pharisee*, there were many religious sects. The two most notable were the theological School of Hillel and School of Shammai. By the time Jesus was in His ministry, the Sadducees controlled the temple, but the Pharisees controlled the synagogues. Many were led by Rabbi Hillel who won the hearts of the people.

14. In judicial matters, the Pharisees were kinder, more merciful, and more lenient than the Sadducees, with the possible exception of the Pharisaic School of Shammai.

15. In the book of Acts, Luke speaks frequently of the Pharisees and always in a positive manner. This is profoundly different from the Pharisees who repeatedly plotted to kill Jesus in the gospels, and then stepped aside and let the Sadducees do their dirty work.

As previously stated, the influx of Hellenism had disastrous consequences upon the Jewish people. While the Sadducees endorsed many Hellenistic elements, the Pharisees saw themselves as the restorers of the Law. Yet within the Pharisaic world there were many divisions and

theological opinions. Amazingly, while they are justly criticized for their legalistic harshness, they should be noted for their kind and responsible landmark decisions. These include:

1. Concerning the punishment for a crime, the Pharisees interpreted the phrase “an eye for an eye” (Ex. 21:24; Deut. 19:21) metaphorically, and permitted compensation or punishment in the form of a financial settlement (see Deut. 22:29). However, the Sadducees demanded exact compliance.
2. They ordered for husbands to pay support for their wives after a divorce. This lowered the divorce rate. This is noteworthy, because Joseph considered a divorce which would have been expensive, as opposed to accusing Mary of adultery which would have cost him nothing and saved his family honor.
3. The promotion of education for both boys and girls, (see “Education” 02.03.04).
4. Required education for boys to the age of sixteen.
5. If the brother-in-law of a widow refused her the Levirate marriage rights (Deut. 25:5-9), the Pharisees permitted her to spit on the ground in front of him while the Sadducees demanded she spit in his face.
6. If an animal died, the Pharisees said that the owner may use the carcass for any purpose except for food (Lev. 7:24), but the Sadducees said any use results in the strict penalties of uncleanness.
7. The final example of harshness is that the Sadducees demanded that false witnesses be put to death while the Pharisees permitted punishment by eighty scourgings. The irony is that the Sadducees acquired false witnesses to testify against Jesus.

The Pharisees have been criticized and condemned for their actions against Jesus. However, it was the *leading Pharisees* who were against Jesus, because as other Pharisees came to faith in Him, they warned Him of impending danger. The Pharisees, like the Essenes, were a very legalistic religious sect. An example of legalism is found in 02.01.06.Q1 that describes the entrance procedure for new Essene members. Scholars are examining these requirements for the probability that very similar procedures existed for new Pharisee candidates.

02.01.16

Sadducees. The Sadducees appeared on the scene after the elimination of the Greek Antiochus IV Epiphanes from power in Israel (ten northern tribes) and Judea (two southern tribes). They were the descendants of the Hasmonean rulers who ruled Judea (163 – 63 B.C.) after the

Maccabean revolt. Members of this religious sect were, in fact, the ruling aristocratic political-religious party in Jerusalem and close friends of the Herodian family and the Romans. They held prominent positions in the city. More importantly, they controlled the Sanhedrin and the temple. It was through this political relationship that they were able to attain control of the Sanhedrin, the temple, the priesthood, throughout the life of Christ until the Romans destroyed them in A.D. 70. Control of the temple afforded them an incredibly lavish lifestyle, unimaginable even for ancient times as shown by the glass artifact shown below (02.01.16.A).

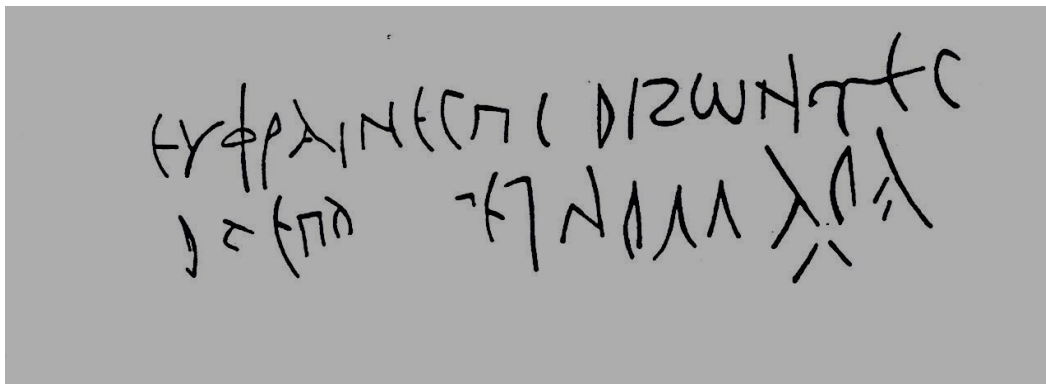
The origin of the name “Sadducee” is somewhat mysterious. The once-held belief that the name was derived from Zadok, a high priest in Solomon’s court has some serious etymological difficulties. Recent scholarship suggests that the name could refer to the “righteous ones” because it emphasizes religious purity and because the Sadducees are direct descendants of the Hasmoneans. Some scholars believe the name “Boethusians” was just another name for a group within the Sadducees (Acts 4:1; 23:12-14), because the House of Boethus was a highly influential family. These two opinions could very well be in agreement with each other, as at times specific details are less clear than is desired. Nonetheless, they were ruthless and did whatever was necessary to protect their position and status. The Essenes referred to them as the “wicked priests” in their Dead Sea Scrolls. There are five major aspects to the powerful Sadducees:

1. They were social conservatives.
2. They were supporters of the Romans, and in fact, the high priest Caiaphas was a Roman appointment.
3. They were liberal in their theology. In fact, so liberal that some have said they gave only lip service to the Torah.
4. Their greatest condemnation was that they were Hellenistic; they enjoyed the Greek lifestyle but covered it with Jewish traditions.
5. While the Pharisees controlled the local synagogues, the Sadducees controlled the temple and all its wealth; the Pharisees tried to be spiritual while the Sadducees tried to maintain their religious bureaucracy. Because of their theological and ritualistic differences, there was constant tension in the temple. Josephus said that the Sadducees had to submit to the Pharisees’ method of performing ceremonial rituals, celebrations, and processions or the masses would not have tolerated them. An example is found in the Mishnah: in the tractate *Sukkah*, are the directions for the Feast of Tabernacles ritual. That includes the procedure of the water libation that was be poured into one of two bowls located to the right at the top of the altar ramp. However, one time King Alexander

Jannaeus (reigned 105-79 B.C.) poured the libation over his feet and all the people threw their citrons at him. The Talmud identifies the offender as a Sadducee (or *Boethusian*). In response, he called his soldiers and several thousand were massacred that day. While this took place a century before Jesus, the Pharisees did not forget this or any other events of persecution by the Sadducees.

6. In terms of judicial actions, they were extremely harsh and rude, especially when compared to the Pharisees who were far more forgiving and compassionate.

Regardless of the evil passion of many in the temple, it should be noted that many Levites, priests, and chief priests were godly men, and not members of the Sadducees or corrupted leading Pharisees. By cleansing this area of the temple, Jesus demonstrated His Messianic authority, to which neither the Romans nor the Sadducees offered a strong challenge. The reason was that the cleansing was not so much an act of reformation or purification, but a symbolic gesture of pending judgment. In doing this, He not only displayed His divine intention, but also confirmed the words of judgment spoken by the Old Testament prophets (Jer. 8:10; 14:18; 23:11, 33-34; 32:31-32; 34:18-19; Lam. 4:13; Ezek. 22:26; Zeph. 3:4; Zech. 14:21). The prophetic act that symbolized destruction was also reflective in Jeremiah 4:5-5:31; 7:14; 25:1-38; 26:1-24; Ezekiel 4:1-7:27; and Micah 3:9-12. Witnesses would have connected the cleansing with these prophets.



02.01.16.B. SADDUCEAN TOMB INSCRIPTION. A tomb inscription of a first century A.D. Sadducee that reads, *Enjoy your life*. Illustration courtesy of the Israel Museum.

Clearly, the Sadducees had a well established reputation of corruption. They were the primary instigators and final actors to have the Romans crucify Jesus. In summary, the theological and social positions of the Sadducees (compare to 02.01.14 “Pharisees”) were,

1. Their theology reflected strong influences of Epicurean philosophy and other popular Greek ideas.
2. Wealthy aristocrats; by the early first century A.D., the Sadducees had become an elite social-religious group who controlled the temple and were interested only in their own wealth, power, and welfare.
3. Theologically conservative but giving only lip service to the Old Testament laws, they had no problem accepting Hellenism.
4. Theologically, the Sadducees believed only in the Torah and gave no credibility to any other books of the Hebrew Bible, nor did they give credibility to the Oral Law. They said that books such as Daniel, Ezra, and Esther were “foreign,” implying that they contained imported ideas from the Persians.
5. They denied the resurrection of the soul. By denying the resurrection and immortality in general (Acts 23:8), they also renounced the messianic hope.
6. They denied belief in final judgment, angels, etc.
7. They were separated from the common people who were called the *am-ha-arets*, meaning *the unlearned*. They had no concern for them, nor did they feel obligated to intercede to God for their behalf.
8. Few in number
9. Were very friendly to, and in co-operation with, the Romans
10. They believed that whatever wealth, power, status, and influence they acquired were blessings of God, but they would have to strive for them by whatever means possible.
11. In the book of Acts, Luke said that the Sadducees were the primary opponents of the early Christian Church, not the Pharisees. In fact, many Pharisees came to faith in Christ Jesus in the book of Acts (i.e., Acts 15:5).

Therefore, not only did the Sadducees not believe in an eternity, but in doing so, they denied any messianic hope. That, coupled with their Hellenistic ideals and lifestyle, explains why they sought to destroy the work of Jesus by whatever means possible and were the major oppressors of the early church (Mt. 22:23; Mk. 12:18; Acts 4:5; 23:8). They were arrogant and rude to Jews of other sects and, as Josephus said, to foreigners who came to Jerusalem. When Jesus was before Pilate, it was they who cried, “Let His blood be upon us and our children.” Their wish came true because the Romans killed every one of them with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

02.01.21

Scribes. In the early years of the Old Testament era, scribes were little more than secretaries who functioned as copy writers and performed dictations. But by the beginning of the Inter-Testamental Period, they were generally considered to be scholars of the Mosaic Law (Ezra 7:6; Neh. 8:1), who had excellent writing skills, and by the first century they also functioned as lawyers, teachers of the Law, accountants, secretaries, journalists, historians, librarians, and teachers. It is believed that most were clerks in a small middle-class society, but some rose to wealthy and powerful prominence. The skill of writing became a monopoly for some families which insured wealth for future generations.

Most people were closely aligned to the Pharisees because this religious group controlled the local synagogues, and the people felt comfortable because they had studied the Written and Oral Laws more than any other religious sect. Because Pharisees were usually synonymous with the teachers of the Law, it is at times difficult to distinguish them from the scribes although the scribes generally read Scripture in the synagogue. Not all scribes were Pharisees, but all the Pharisees who were members of the Sanhedrin were also scribes (cf. Mt. 23:7-8). Whenever Jesus criticized them, He did so for the following reasons:

1. They imposed restrictive laws on people which they avoided themselves.
2. They built beautiful monument tombs for the prophets who were sent by God, but whom they killed.
3. They kept knowledge of God's Word essentially for themselves, and made themselves judge and jury of biblical interpretation.
4. They were incredibly prideful in dress, in greetings, and in public places such as the market and synagogue. The leading Pharisees were so self-righteous, that they often bathed after being in public with the common people.

02.01.23

Zealots. The Zealots were not only freedom fighters, but they were extremely hostile to the Romans, Herodians, and the wealthy aristocratic Jews of Jerusalem – namely the Sadducees. Their name was taken from 1 Kings 19:10, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty." Their rallying cry was "No king for Israel but God." They believed it was a sin to pay taxes to a pagan overlord and were determined to fight for their freedom.

Closing Comment

This small publication of the cultural issues that shaped the ministry environment of Jesus is merely an introduction to a much larger study written in English. This booklet is designed to introduce those who are new to the faith and those who have limited resources, to an enhanced understanding of our Lord Jesus and His four gospel books. It is my deepest desire to see this work be translated into as many languages as possible, that everyone worldwide will better understand what a great salvation. May you be greatly blessed as you read this; may you succeed in the performance of your calling to work in His Kingdom of God.