

# Life of Christ

By

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A GATS Textbook for  
Life of Christ I (Certificate Level)  
and Life of Christ II (Diploma)



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**NOTE to GATS Teachers and  
Bible School Administrators**

This textbook is designed to serve for both  
Life of Christ I and Life of Christ II.

Life of Christ 1 encompasses the  
Introduction through to and including Chapter 6.

Life of Christ II encompasses  
Chapter 7 through Chapter 13.

**Sponsor's Page:**  
**First Pentecostal Church**  
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We dedicate this book to faithful saints of First Pentecostal Church of Belleville, Ontario, who sacrificially gave and still give to support world missions.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Robertson's Section 1

Gospel	Written to	Showing Him to Be	Message	Key Word	Sacrifice
Mark	Romans	Man of Action	Jesus as Servant	Straightway	Bullock or Ox
Matthew	Jews	Man of Authority	Jesus as Messiah-King	Fulfilled	Turtle, Doves, or Pigeons
Luke	Greeks	Man of Wisdom	Jesus as Ideal Man	Son of Man	Goat
John	General	God in Flesh	Jesus as Son of God	Believe	Lamb

## THE MESSIANIC HOPE OF ISRAEL

From the beginning, Israel's prophets had foretold the coming of Messiah who would bring in a new day. God promised Eve that her seed would bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). Genesis 9:27 states God would dwell in the tents of Shem. Genesis 22:18 indicates the Messiah would spring from the seed of Abraham. Jacob foretold the Messiah would be of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10). Moses said He would be a prophet like unto himself (Deuteronomy 18:18).

Later it became known that Messiah would spring from Jesse, and many Psalms described Him (e.g., Psalms 22; 110), revealing the nature of His kingdom. Isaiah described the Suffering Servant in chapters 40-46 as the One who would make propitiation —appeasement or the means by which reconciliation of God and humankind is attained —for the sins of His people. This would be the mighty God becoming priest and intercessor for His people. Other prophets stated He would be born in Bethlehem, would have a forerunner, and would appear suddenly in the Temple (Micah 5:2; Malachi 3:1; 4:5).

Israel's mistaken messianic hope was for a temporal king. They wanted someone to throw off the yoke of Roman imperialism and reestablish the throne of David. Even the apostles asked just prior to the Ascension, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Later these same men declared the messiahship of Jesus and interpreted His life, purpose, and death in light of the Old Testament Scriptures.

## PURPOSE

The object of this study is to unveil, as far as possible, the wonderful picture of the divine Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ—both His humanity and His deity. The Gospels give four titles to Jesus: Son of David, Son of Abraham, Son of Man, and Son of God. All of these titles are essential. As Son of David, He has title to David's throne. As Son of Abraham, He has right to the land of Palestine and everything included in the Royal Grant of Abraham. As Son of Man, He has claim to the earth and the world. As Son of God, He is the heir of all things.

The goal of this book is to provide a basic text for the study of the life of Christ to be used worldwide in the OVERSEAS MINISTRIES and Global Association of Theological Studies training courses. To do so the authors have striven for simplicity and clarity, while presenting the material chronologically as based on *The Harmony of the Gospels* by A.T. Robertson. Those desiring an in-depth, exegetical study should refer to *Christ of the Gospels* by J.W. Shepard, *Jesus the Messiah* by Alfred Edersheim, and *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* by J. Dwight Pentecost. The bibliography lists other helpful books.

## THE FOUR GOSPELS

Our knowledge of Jesus comes from many sources; both pagan literature and Josephus, the Jewish historian, mention Him. Josephus was afraid to say too much about Jesus, as he could say only good things and thereby condemn his own people. He even apologized for the Crucifixion and laid the blame to the harsh judgment of the Sadducees. Likewise, Christian sources, such as the Epistles and the writings of the church fathers, teach us much about Jesus. Of course, the four Gospels are the principal sources of information.

The first three Gospels are called the "Synoptics," meaning they are much alike in content, order, and statements. For example, in comparing Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find they agree on the general order of events, as well as content. Mark wrote his Gospel first; thus, his book served as a chronological framework for Matthew and Luke, the results of which are listed below.

1. Three-fourths of Matthew is a duplication of Mark, and eleven-twelfths of Mark is reproduced in Matthew, in the same or slightly different form.
2. Three-fourths of Mark is also found in Luke.
3. Altogether, matter particular to Mark constitutes less than one chapter: Mark 4:26-29; 14:51-52.
4. Of eighty-eight incidents, the Synoptics have seventy-one in common.
5. The general plan and order of the three Synoptics are the same.

However, even with the similarities, there are differences between the Synoptics:

1. Seventeen incidents are included in only one or two of the Gospels.
2. Slight differences occur in the narratives of the same event and the order of the temptation of Jesus.
3. There are a few verbal differences in parallel accounts.

The fourth Gospel, John, is apologetic and not primarily biographical.

Why four Gospels? During the time of Christ, there were three great national groups involved in world affairs: Romans, Greeks, and Jews. Each of these three groups had its own solution for the ills of the world. The four Gospels were written to these three groups, informing them that Jesus Christ has the only remedy. As indicated by the chart at the beginning of this introduction, Mark's audience was the Romans who liked action; Matthew wrote to the Jews who longed for Messiah to fulfill Old Testament prophecy; and Luke penned his account of the One full of wisdom for the Greeks who desired the ideal man. John's account has universal appeal, showing the deity of Jesus.

However, perhaps surprisingly, the four Gospels are not given as books of salvation. Instead, their purpose is to reveal the great price Jesus paid to purchase a church. This revelation contains several important events.

1. The birth and ministry of John the Baptist
2. The birth of Jesus
3. The life of Jesus
4. The ministry of Jesus
5. The calling of His disciples
6. His miracles
7. His sufferings
8. His death, burial, and resurrection
9. His ascension

Yet, we do not find in the Gospels any church established, anyone receiving the Holy Ghost, or anyone saved in the New Testament church. Why? Because the church was purchased on Calvary by the shed blood of Christ. (See Hebrews 9:16-17; 9:22.)

Even though the Bible consists of many parts, it is yet a complete whole. The key to its construction is the One who called Himself the "Son of Man" and who His ablest apostle called "the Lord from heaven" (I Corinthians 15:47). Any attempt to study the Bible without respect to Him must result in confusion. He is its principal unifier. He is its secret of power! Jesus is the way that man must travel to a deeper consciousness and understanding of the mystery of life. Modern Christianity has laid much stress on service and especially on method, thereby losing motive, power, and vision. Jesus Christ can lead us into a deeper experience of the sublime! He will usher us into the presence of the living God—if we will let Him.

### **The Gospel According to Mark**

Being written before AD 65 in Rome, the Gospel of Mark is recognized as the oldest of the four. It probably most closely represents the actual course and order in the incidents of the life of Jesus and served as a chronological framework for the other Gospel writers. It is the simplest and shortest of the four, but it is rich in detail and dramatic presentation while being graphic and

animated in style. Mark vividly portrayed the powerful deeds and the looks and gestures of Jesus in the common language of the people.

Mark's purpose in writing was preeminently practical; he wrote to impress the pragmatic Romans. Consequently, he made few references to the Old Testament, frequently explained Jewish words and customs (Mark 3:17; 5:41; 7:3, 11, 34; 14:12; 15:42), and often chose Latin words, such as *legion* and *centurion*.

Mark's Gospel was admirably fitted to the Roman citizen, a man of action, as the whole tone of the book reflects Peter's energetic and impulsive nature. The volume has been commonly called "Peter's Gospel." His influence can be seen in the following points.

1. The many graphic details that indicate an eyewitness
2. The nervous energy of the narrative, characteristic of Peter's temperament
3. Two passages (Mark 9:5-6; 11:21) that directly reflect Peter's own thoughts
4. The fact that Mark wrote both from the standpoint of the Twelve, and more frequently than Matthew, from the standpoint of the three honored apostles, one of whom was Peter
5. The omission of some things creditable to Peter (Matthew 16:16-19) and the inclusion of other things not creditable (Mark 8:33; 14:30, 68-72), indicating Peter's influence

There are some indications that Mark did not write his Gospel until after Peter's death. In fact, it was possibly the loss of Peter that prompted Mark's writing, for it was written not long after the terrible persecution began under Nero when Christians were being crucified in mockery of the punishment of Jesus. Some were sewn in skins of wild beasts and mad dogs were turned loose on them in the arena. Others were burned as torches for Nero's pleasure. When we read this Gospel with this bloody background in mind, we see why Mark stressed the sufferings of Jesus and why he gave prominence to his Lord's passion.

The portrait Mark painted of Christ is that of the Servant. As the average Roman reader would care little for doctrine or teaching, but a great deal for action, he emphasized the deeds of the Lord, not His words, citing nineteen miracles but only four parables. Mark also described the activities of Jesus and the opposition He met from the beginning, which increased until the tragic end. Eleven times the Lord retired temporarily from the center of attention to escape the fury of His enemies. Likewise, Mark told of the growing enthusiasm and faith of many in spite of this opposition.

The key verse of Mark is 10:45. The plan of the book is chronological, geographical, and topical. Its message portrays Jesus as the Servant. Although it is crowded with incidents, we can identify five divisions.

1. *The Arrival and Identity of the Servant (Mark 1:1-11).*  
There is no genealogy, no mention of His birth and infancy. Important as these events are, they would be out of place in a description of a servant.
2. *The Fidelity of the Servant (Mark 1:12-13).*



Only in this book is it recorded that in His temptation Jesus “was with the wild beasts.” (Note I Samuel 17:34-36.) Even in His temptation, the Servant was loyal.

3. *The Servant at Work (Mark 1:14-13:37).*
4. *The Servant Obedient to Death (Mark 14:1-15:47).*
5. *The Risen and Glorified One Still a Servant (Mark 16:1-20).*

The crucified Servant arose! His resurrection can be viewed in the light of service. Note the force and significance of “and Peter” in verse 7. Observe verse 20 where He is still the Worker, working in cooperation with His servants (Hebrews 2:1-4).

The Gospel According to Mark is “what the eye saw.” In it, we see the Jesus of public ministry answering the needs of men by His mighty deeds. Nevertheless, there is more to know of Jesus, and we can find it chiefly in the two Gospels that tell, in addition to what the eye saw, “what the ear heard.”

### **The Gospel According to Matthew**

Matthew’s Gospel was the second of the four written. It is placed first in the New Testament because it links Jesus with Old Testament Law, Prophecy, and Wisdom. This book has been called “the most important book of Christendom,” as it was the most widely read Gospel in the early church. Had it not been for his authorship of this book, Matthew would have been one of the least known of the apostles, for after his call, the Gospels do not record a single word or act of his.

Matthew wrote his Gospel primarily for the Jews. He sought to prove to them that Jesus was the Messiah foretold in Hebrew Scriptures. “*Fulfilled*” is a characteristic word as the writer made no less than sixty references to the Old Testament writings that are fulfilled in Christ.

Matthew 1:1 and 27:37 are key verses in this book. Key words and phrases include *kingdom*, used fifty-five times; *kingdom of heaven*, mentioned thirty-two times; and *Son of David*, used seven times. The words and phrases are in keeping with Matthew’s desire to portray Jesus as the King, the royal seed for whom Israel waited. Matthew also presented Jesus as the Teacher and emphasized His prophetic and miraculous power.

Matthew’s aim was to show that the kingdom of Heaven as proclaimed by Jesus was not something new but a fulfillment of an old hope—Jesus, the Son of David, was the true Messiah. He and His kingdom were first offered to the Jews for their acceptance with warning of the consequences if they chose to reject Him. The events leading up to the Passion are narrated to show that in the face of this warning, the Jews deliberately rejected both the Messiah and His kingdom.

It has been suggested that the immediate purpose of this Gospel was to save the faith of Jewish Christians at a particular crisis, possibly the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. That was a time of fiery trials for the Jewish Christians. All the signs of the Lord’s coming had occurred, yet He had not returned. Was it possible they had deceived themselves and He was not the Messiah?

Matthew’s Gospel is an appeal to all waverers in the faith to trust the King; He might indeed tarry, but He is nevertheless all that the Christians thought Him to be. He is Israel’s hope and the fulfillment of her prophecies: the true seed of Abraham, the One greater than Moses, the true Son of David, and the final Judge of His people and of the world. The trials of His people were His

trials extended in time. His people's controversies with the Pharisees were a continuation of His controversies. Matthew urged them to stand fast as He had stood fast!

There are nine basic sections in this book.

1. *The King's Birth (Matthew 1:1-2:23).*  
The Lord Jesus Christ is the last in Jewish history whose descent from the royal line of David can be fully and clearly established.
2. *The King's Forerunner (Matthew 3:1-17).*
3. *The King's Testing (Matthew 4:1-11).*  
Jesus met and vanquished the tempter, refusing to gain the kingdom in any way other than God's divine plan. The first Adam fell in Eden, surrounded by creature comfort; the Second Adam conquered in the wilderness, His body weakened by long abstinence.
4. *The King's Proclamation (Matthew 4:12-25).*  
The kingdom of God consists of all who submit themselves to Him, and the entrance into that kingdom is by the new birth (John 3). The kingdom of Heaven is the visible establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.
5. *The King's Laws (Matthew 5:1-7:29).*
6. *The King's Ministry (Matthew 8:1-11:19).*  
The King actively worked, healed, and taught among His people Israel.
7. *The King's Rejection (Matthew 11:20-20:34).*  
Jesus prophesied concerning the establishment of the church. He gave Peter the keys to the kingdom; in no other place in the Bible did God give so much authority to man.
8. *The King's Entry (Matthew 21:1-25:46).*  
The King officially entered His capital. His people gave Him a final and public rejection.
9. *The King's Death and Resurrection (Matthew 26:1-28:20).*  
Jesus was slain because He declared Himself King. The rending of the veil in the Temple preceded the rending of the heart of Christ. Yet, the King arose triumphant over death and commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and proclaim His kingdom.

The third Gospel has been called “the most beautiful book that has ever been written” and was penned by Luke, the beloved physician, who was probably a Greek. Perhaps the best introduction to this book would be the author’s own preface.

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed (Luke 1:1-4).

Luke is the universal Gospel, describing Jesus as the Savior of all men, the Seeker of the lost among all peoples, the One through whom all flesh shall see the salvation of God. In this Gospel we learn that Jesus declared He came “to preach the gospel to the poor” (Luke 4:18), we observe His association with publicans and sinners, and we hear His charge to the Twelve to preach repentance and remission of sins in His name “among all nations” (Luke 24:47).

In Luke’s Gospel we find several parables that strike a universal note: “The Good Samaritan,” “The Lost Coin,” “The Lost Sheep,” and “The Prodigal Son,” as well as the accounts of the “The Pharisee and the Publican” and “The Rich Man and Lazarus.” This Gospel sets forth most clearly Jesus’ way of life. It distinctly points out the characteristics of the Christian life such as self-denial and prayer. There are more references to prayer in this Gospel than any other. Luke most explicitly portrayed Jesus setting forth the terms of discipleship (Luke 14:26-27, 33).

Luke is preeminently the Gospel for the young. It tells about the infancy and boyhood of Jesus; it contains more words about young men than any other Gospel. In one sense, it is also the Gospel for women as it gives more prominence to women than the other three books. Only Luke tells in detail about the motherhood of Elisabeth and Mary, about Anna, the aged prophetess, and of the ministering women who sympathized with Jesus on His way to the cross.

Nevertheless, the most characteristic mark of this book is the message of Luke’s writings. Out of the four books, no other has made so clear that the gospel is the good news of God’s love, for in Luke we find the three parables of restoration: “The Lost Coin,” “The Lost Sheep,” and “The Prodigal Son.” They present a picture of God’s love that is found nowhere else in Scripture. Jesus taught that God anticipates the needs of His children (Luke 12:30), that He is concerned about the small details of our lives (Luke 12:7), that He responds quickly to our cry for help (Luke 11:9-13), and that He is kind even to the unthankful and merciful to the sinner (Luke 6:35).

The message of Luke is a clue that it was written primarily to the Greeks. The Roman idea of perfect manliness differed from that of the Grecian idea. The Romans felt it to be their mission to govern man; the Greeks considered it their responsibility to educate, elevate, and perfect man. The Roman ideal possessed military glory and governmental authority; the Grecian ideal embodied wisdom and beauty. Luke’s Gospel presents Jesus as the perfect man, the ideal man, the One who more than met the highest requirements of the Greeks. While he spoke of the deity of Christ, Luke emphasized Christ’s perfect manhood. The Son of Man’s character, as revealed in the Gospel, is intensely human. He is the Son of Man as well as the Son of God.

The key verse is Luke 23:47: “Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.”

Luke can be divided into five parts.

1. *The Man Made Like Unto His Brethren (Luke 1:1-3:38; Hebrews 2:17).*  
Christ is one with us in His descent from Adam, the fountainhead of humanity. He is one with us in the common human relationships, with all their attendant duties and responsibilities (for instance, the first two chapters deal with cousins of Mary), and one with us in our shame and the link of baptism.
2. *The Man Tempted Like as We Are (Hebrews 4:15; Luke 4:1-13).*  
Luke views the temptation from the standpoint of man. The devil challenged the first Adam; the Second Adam challenged Satan. The devil ruined the first man; Jesus Christ spoiled the devil. The story of the first Adam ended in defeat; the story of the Last Adam ended in victory.
3. *The Man Touched with the Feelings of Our Infirmities (Hebrews 4:15; Luke 4:14-19:28).*  
Luke pictured Jesus as a man to which every man can relate.
  - (a) The Man with cosmopolitan interests, giving those incidents that show His interest in the whole human race, not merely the Jews
  - (b) The Man of wisdom as shown by His teaching
  - (c) The Man of ability
  - (d) The Man full of human sympathy for those fallen, despised, bereaved, despondent, and diseased
  - (e) The Man of prayer
  - (f) The Man of society
  - (g) The Man of beauty and glory
4. *The Man as Our Kinsman-Redeemer (Luke 19:28-23:56).*  
When He wept over Jerusalem, Jesus showed His compassion, patriotism, and sorrow over the pending destruction of the city. This became even more evident as He fulfilled the type of the Kinsman-Redeemer. (See Leviticus 25:47-55; Ruth 2:1-23; 3:10-18; 4:1-10.)
5. *The Man Still as Man in Resurrection, Ascension, and Glory (Luke 24:1-53).*  
As a man, Jesus walked to Emmaus with two men. As a man, He ate in the upper room, displaying His still perfect humanity. Why? Because salvation only comes through the man Christ Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke begins and ends with rejoicing, all in connection with Jesus!

**The Gospel According to John**

The Gospel of John, the fourth Gospel, gives Jesus' revelation of Himself to the world and more intimately to His disciples. Written and published at Ephesus at the request of Andrew and the Asiatic bishops, the apologetic Gospel targeted certain prevalent errors concerning the deity of Christ.

The key word is *believe*. In this Gospel, John presented Jesus Christ as the One whom we are to believe; in John's Epistles, Jesus is the One whom we should love; and in the Revelation, the One for whom we are to wait. What are we to believe? That Jesus is the mighty God (John 8:24; 14:11).

The key verse is John 20:31: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

Note two peculiarities of this Gospel. First, the word *Jew* is used over sixty times; but it appears only once in Matthew, twice in Mark, and twice in Luke. Likewise, in contrast to the other books, John contains only eight of the Lord's miracles, all of which show the power of the Lord's Word and of His Word alone.

The portrait John drew of Christ is that of "God manifested in the flesh," "the only begotten of the Father." John showed what it is that convinces men and women of all classes and positions that Jesus is God!

John may be divided into five sections.

1. *Jesus, God Manifested in, the Flesh, Becoming the Son of God in Redemption (John 1:1-14).*

This book begins similar to Genesis.

2. *Jesus, Revealed as Son of God, the Mighty God, by His Deeds and Words (John 1:15-12:50).*

John pointed out what convinced men of Jesus' deity:

- (a) John the Baptist discovered Jesus' deity through baptism (John 1:33).
- (b) Nathaniel was convinced by His omniscience (John 1:48-49).
- (c) The disciples were convinced by His first miracle of turning water into wine (John 2:11).
- (d) Many Jews acknowledged Him as divine by His cleansing of the Temple and performance of many miracles (John 2:23).
- (e) Jesus revealed Himself as deity to Nicodemus (John 3:13-16).
- (f) John the Baptist gave four remarkable testimonies concerning Jesus (John 3:22-36).
- (g) Jesus revealed Himself as deity to the Samaritan woman (John 4:26).
- (h) The Samaritans accepted Him as divine (John 4:41-42).
- (i) The nobleman was convinced that Jesus was divine when he found His word was as effectual as His presence (John 4:53).
- (j) Opposition came because He called God "Father" (John 5:17-18).
- (k) Many were convinced of His divinity by the miracles of the loaves (John 6:14).

- (l) Note: By John 6:35; 8:12, 58; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, Jesus declared Himself to be the complete revelation of the great I AM of the Old Testament.
  - (m) Jesus revealed Himself as divine to the healed man (John 9:35-38).
  - (n) Martha's confession and the raising of Lazarus (John 11:27).
  - (o) Jesus is at last acknowledged openly as divine by Jew and Gentile (John 12:12-19).
  - (p) Note who sent Him (John 12:44-45).
3. *Jesus, the Son of God, the Mighty God Revealing Himself More Fully to His Own (John 13:1-17:26).*  
Jesus manifested Himself more fully to His disciples so their convictions as to His deity were deepened. (See Matthew 11:27; John 14:8-9.)
4. *Jesus, the Son of God, Slain (John 18:1-19:42).*  
Note the effect of one brief flash of His divinity in John 18:6. At the time of His trial before Pilate in John 19:7, we see Jesus was slain not only because He declared Himself King, but because He claimed to be Israel's one God!
5. *Jesus, His Claim to Deity Fully Established by His Resurrection (John 20:1-21:25).*  
May we all respond as did Thomas, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Christ spoke of God as "the Father" over one hundred times in this book. The relationship is quite different in the New Testament than in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the only time *father* is capitalized is in Isaiah 9:6. Throughout the New Testament, the term is capitalized. What a contrast between the father of Creation and the Father of Redemption! May we recognize our new relationship with God in the New Testament church.

## Chapter 1

# THE BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF CHRIST JESUS

### Robertson's Sections 2-19

The birth of Jesus was an advent. The eternal God came into the world on a special mission as the living Word.

## THE LOGOS

In the Bible, a “mystery” is a truth God reveals, which is beyond the power of natural reason to find or comprehend. It is a truth known only through faith or revelation; it is incomprehensible to human reasoning. In the New Testament, a “mystery” signifies a distinguishing feature that was a secret from the world until an appointed time. The great mystery revealed through Christ is “God was manifest in the flesh!” (See John 1:1, 14; I Timothy 3:16.)

In his Gospel, John took us back before the beginning of Creation to show who Jesus is. He used the terminology of the philosophers. They had settled upon the term *Logos*, as “that which comprehended the first principle and the prime cause of everything.” This was in keeping with the Greeks who argued that behind each thing there must be a thought that they called *Logos*. Although the Jews accepted this philosophy, they went a step further. They said, “It is true that behind everything there is a thought, but behind every thought there must be a thinker!” It was in this sense that John used the Greek philosophers’ *Logos*. “In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God” (John 1:1).

John then moved on to the whole point of the argument and declared that the Logos, the thought, was made flesh and dwelt among us. And we beheld His glory. To better clarify it, we could substitute the word *plan* for *Word, Logos, or thought*, and form a paraphrase: “In the beginning was the *Plan*, and the *Plan* was with God, and the *Plan* was that God would be made flesh and dwell among us and we would behold His glory.” John was simply saying that God, the mighty God, the eternal Spirit, clothed Himself in flesh and came to earth in human form, allowing people to see Him with their own eyes and talk with Him. His name is Jesus! (See I John 1:1.)

## THE GENEALOGIES

The genealogies of Jesus are introduced into the brief Gospel narratives for three reasons: to show His royal descent from David; to show Him as the Messiah of Hebrew prophecy; to show

His wider human relation with the whole race, going back to the beginning. It is worthwhile to compare the genealogies listed by Matthew and Luke.

Writing for the Jews, Matthew was naturally interested in citing the fact that Jesus was of the royal seed. He therefore traced the family tree from Joseph, the husband of Mary, to David and back to Abraham, the father of the Hebrew race. Matthew used Joseph's ancestry because regal descent was always through the father's side.

The genealogy in Matthew stands at the beginning of the Gospel to validate Jesus' royal Hebrew origin before Matthew introduced any other facts about His life. Matthew listed the successive births as they came. Yet, he did not merely copy the records but selected the names with a purpose. Similarly, contrary to Jewish custom, he named four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Three of these women were guilty of gross sin and two were foreigners. The names of these women identify Christ with the female gender, with national and racial groups, and with sinful humanity as its Savior. Some of the men listed were also notorious sinners.

The heredity of Jesus is a bond of hope for the sinful human race. He lived without sin in spite of His hereditary handicaps. As a man, He had to struggle against evil tendencies like every other human. And He overcame! Matthew's narrative and selective genealogy punctured the pride of Jesus' Jewish brethren—these proud Pharisaic brethren had recently declared Jesus as unworthy and meriting death. Yet, He was superior to the best of the forefathers, even of the royal line!

Luke showed that Jesus belonged to the whole human race. Although Jesus was reputed to be the son of Joseph, He was not. Luke therefore traced the genealogy through Mary. In writing for the Gentiles, Luke pointed out that Jesus was the ideal man, a son of Adam, created by God.

The genealogy in Luke comes as an interlude after the account of the birth and infancy of Jesus and John's ministry, serving as an introduction to the saving ministry of the Christ. Luke focused our attention upon Jesus, the Person of supreme importance in the narrative and the Savior of the whole race, with which He is identified by the genealogy. Luke gave the natural bloodline of Jesus through Mary and her father, Heli, to King David—through his son Nathan—to Adam, the son of God.

Through both genealogies, the virgin birth is safeguarded. Matthew stated, "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (Matthew 1:16). Luke penned, "Jesus . . . being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph" (Luke 3:23).

An interesting aside is found in Matthew 1:12 and Jeremiah 22:28-30. One of the judgments pronounced upon King Jehoiakim (Jechonias) was that "no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah." Matthew Henry commented that the phrase, "Jeconiah begat Salathiel," simply means that the former king bequeathed his claim of the government to Salathiel.<sup>1</sup> Note that in Luke 3:27 Salathiel is listed as the son of Neri of the house of Nathan; thus at the death of Jehoiakim, the legal right to David's throne apparently passed from Solomon's heirs to Nathan's.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark did not attach great importance to the family tree of the Messiah. He was mainly concerned with the practical outcome of the life of Jesus as the Roman



reader would not consider the genealogy important. The great works of Jesus would show Him to be the mighty God, the Son of God, and that was the main issue. Matthew, on the other hand, defined Jesus' place in the Hebrew race and the wider messianic hope. John dealt with the philosophical world and defined the place of Jesus in the cosmic scheme, going back into the eternities to explain who Jesus is, how He was, and that He is their Creator and Redeemer. Luke associated Him with the whole race without regard to racial, national, sexual, or social division.

## **THE ANNUNCIATIONS**

Three announcements heralded the Messiah's coming.

### **The Annunciation to Zacharias of the Birth of John**

(Luke 1:5-25)

The annunciation to Zacharias of the impending birth of his son took place in the time of Herod the Great, who died in 4 BC. Sufficient time had elapsed since the return from Babylon for the priesthood to be well organized. By that time, there were approximately twenty thousand priests, divided into twenty-four courses. Each course had duty for eight days, all joining in on the Sabbath. About fifty priests ministered every day. Zacharias belonged to the eighth course, which Abijah led. Twice each year he went to Jerusalem to participate for one week in the sacred task of the service of the Temple. The offering of the incense was considered the highest duty and could be exercised only once in a lifetime. The lot had fallen at last on Zacharias for this honored task.

Offering the incense would be the zenith of his priestly life. At the instant of intense expectation, as the cloud of incense—the symbol of the accepted prayer—began to rise, the angel Gabriel appeared. He did not appear on the left of the throne of glory where Jewish angelology would have placed him; instead, he was at the right of the altar. Because Jewish tradition states that one who sees God will not live, Zacharias was terrified. The angel, however, declaring that the priest's prayer had been answered, quieted his fears and instructed the priest to name his son John, meaning "the Lord is gracious." The angel further proclaimed there would be gladness and joy in the quiet home of Zacharias and Elisabeth and many would rejoice at the birth of the child.

The angel also explained the character and work of the future son to the astounded father-to-be. The child would be great before the Lord, a lifetime Nazarite as Samuel had been, dedicated to the life of temperance and filled with the Holy Ghost from birth. John would bring about a great religious revival, turning many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. He would be the forerunner of the Messiah, going forth "in the spirit and power of Elias" to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children in a revival of love and religion in the home. Rebellious sinners would be persuaded to live right, thus preparing a people for the salvation that the Messiah would bring. As a sign of confirmation because the priest doubted the angel's words, Zacharias would be speechless until the child was born.

### **The Annunciation to Mary of the Birth of Jesus**

(Luke 1:26-38)

Mary was a virgin espoused to Joseph—both were descendants of King David—when the angel Gabriel appeared unto her, saying, “Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28). She was highly favored above all other women in being chosen as the mother of the Lord and Savior. As much as we admire her, we must not pray to her nor worship her in any way. The mother merits honor, but Jesus merits all our worship.

Gabriel then explained that Mary would conceive of the Holy Ghost and deliver a son, whom she must call Jesus. Jesus is another form of “Jehoshua” or “Joshua,” a name meaning “Jehovah-Savior.” In the Old Testament, Joshua had saved Israel from her enemies; but Jesus would save them from their sins. Gabriel’s statement takes on added significance when coupled with Isaiah 12:2, “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.” Who was Jesus? He was Jehovah of the Old Testament, incarnated in flesh, becoming our Savior.

As Mary listened in awe to the angel, he described the promised Christ child. He would be great in character and deed and acknowledged as the Son of God. He would fulfill the messianic hope and would ascend to the throne of David, to rule over the house of Jacob forever. There would be no national limit or temporal end to His kingdom.

As a sign, Gabriel related to Mary that her barren cousin Elisabeth was with child. Mary arose and went to visit the aged Elisabeth. Upon her arrival and salutation, Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost and, with a loud voice in spiritual ecstasy, pronounced a blessing upon her visitor and the promised Child.

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? . . . And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord (Luke 1:42-45).

This song of Elisabeth became the first of the New Testament hymns. In it, she praised Mary for her faith and assured her the angel’s promise would be fulfilled.

In response, Mary was filled with great joy, which she expressed in one of the most beautiful hymns of all centuries. Mary praised God for His great goodness to her individually in permitting her to become the mother of the Messiah.

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever (Luke 1:46-55).

Mary stayed with Elisabeth for about three months and then returned home. About this same time, Elisabeth delivered her son.

On the eighth day at the time of circumcision when the child was to be named, Zacharias declared that the child would be called John. Immediately his dumbness departed and he burst forth into a hymn. The first stanza refers to the birth of John; the other four refer with thanksgiving and praise to the approaching birth of Jesus and the salvation He would bring.

### **The Annunciation to Joseph**

(Matthew 1:18-25)

The genealogies in both Matthew and Luke state that Jesus was not the physical son of Joseph although many supposed him to be. In the annunciation to Joseph, the character of Jesus' birth was explicitly declared in such a way as to leave no doubt of His parentage.

This announcement to Joseph was necessary. Joseph, torn between his love for his espoused wife and her apparent infidelity, was planning to put Mary away privately. The angel of the Lord, however, appeared to Joseph in a dream.

Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:20-21).

Contained within the angel's message is a plain statement of the miraculous conception. Although Jesus Christ had a human mother, His father was the Holy Ghost, for only thus could Jesus Christ be both divine and human, the God-man. Consequently, the angelic explanation amplified the meaning of *Emmanuel*, "God with us." How was God with us? Incarnated in human flesh.

Matthew interpreted Jesus' birth and name as a fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. Jesus was not a mere pledge of divine deliverance promised in the prophecy, but He was, in reality, a divine Savior. The name Emmanuel (God with us) was realized in a fuller sense in Jesus than Isaiah could possibly comprehend. The real significance of the birth is that He was God manifested or incarnated in flesh, the God-man! In one person, Jesus Christ is many things.

Both God and man  
Both mortal and immortal  
Both visible and invisible  
Both limited and unlimited

Without a doubt, He is God manifested in the flesh!

## **THE BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF JESUS**

The four Gospels omit many biographical facts about Jesus Christ. There is a reason for this. The Gospels were written to reveal God manifested in flesh. Height, weight, hair coloring, and physical features were unimportant to their goal. For example, Mark was more interested in the personality and works of Jesus than the place and manner of His birth. Luke desired to give a more complete account of His life and added the beautiful narrative of His lineage, His birth, and the announcement to the humble Judean shepherds. He also included the testimonies of divinely chosen witnesses who gave the interpretation and worldwide significance of Jesus' birth. Similarly, Matthew's primary purpose was to link the person of the Messiah with the ancient prophecy. He gave his own independent account that added universal interest, introducing the Magi, the flight into Egypt, and the return to Nazareth in fulfillment of God's plan revealed in prophecy.

### **The Virgin Birth**

Undoubtedly, the most important fact concerning the birth of Jesus is His virgin birth. This fact is attested throughout the Scriptures. Isaiah prophesied, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). As mentioned earlier, the truth of the virgin birth is protected through the genealogies. Despite attacks, the fact remains that Jesus Christ was conceived of a virgin by a miracle of the Holy Ghost. Who were the parents of Jesus Christ? According to the Scriptures, His Father was the Holy Ghost and His mother was Mary (Matthew 1:20).

### **Time and Place of Birth**

It is difficult to fix with more than approximate accuracy the exact date of Jesus' birth. It, after all, is not fundamentally important. God apparently planned that the exact day should not be known because of the tendency to worship holy days and places. It is possible, however, to approximate the time of Christ's birth. There are a number of reasons to believe Jesus was born in 5 BC.

1. Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. This was scheduled for 8 BC, but it is known that this numbering was taken in Egypt in 6 BC and very likely was conducted the following year in Palestine.
2. Herod died in 4 BC, but he was alive at the birth of Christ.
3. John began his ministry in the fifteenth year of Tiberius's reign at the age of thirty, making his birth occur in 5 BC. Very likely John was born in the spring of 5 BC and Jesus was born six months later in the fall of the same year.
4. We do not know the day and the month of Jesus' birth. It occurred, however, while the flocks were still in open pasture. Therefore, it had to be late summer or early fall, probably no later than October.

It is extremely doubtful that the birth of Jesus occurred on December 25. (Edersheim voices a contrary opinion in *Jesus the Messiah*.<sup>2</sup>) This day was the date of the Roman pagan feast of Saturnalia, a time given to revelry and debauchery. It was also a season of goodwill when it

was not pious to engage in war, when friends gave gifts to one another, and when slaves were given a holiday.

It is certain that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a village located six miles south of Jerusalem. This was a beautiful town surrounded by vine-covered terraces and fruit trees. Near this town, Rachel died in childbirth. This was the town of Boaz, Ruth, and David. In accordance with the census ordered by Augustus, each person had to return to his ancestral home. Consequently, Mary and Joseph, both of Davidic descent, journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This was in keeping with the prophecy of Micah.

But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).

When Joseph and Mary reached Bethlehem, they found the town crowded with the many people who had come to be counted and taxed. All accommodations were taken. The only space available for the weary couple was the inn's open courtyard where the animals were housed. It was in this humble stable that Mary gave birth to the Messiah and laid Him in a manger. Yet the weary travelers may have preferred this humble setting to the din and revelry of the crowded inn.

### **The Shepherds**

On the plains east of Bethlehem, shepherds were keeping watch over their sheep. Their solitude erupted in wonder and awe as an angel suddenly stood before them and a great light shone around them. The angel calmed their fears with the joyous news, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). This was the first divine message to Israel in over four hundred years. How like God to send it to humble shepherds! The shepherds' everyday sheep tending made them unclean, preventing them from observing the customary laws of ceremonial purification. Thus, their fellow Jews despised them.

The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem where they found Joseph and Mary with the newborn child. No one had ministered to Mary; she herself had wrapped the baby in swaddling clothes and laid Him in the manger. The shepherds then revealed the message of the angels. All were astonished at these things, but Mary treasured what she had heard in her heart.

### **Presentation in the Temple**

The Mosaic law was strictly observed in the life of the infant Jesus. For example, He was circumcised the eighth day according to the requirements of the covenant (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3; Luke 2:21). This rite and His physical lineage made Jesus eligible to fulfill all the promises God had made to Abraham (Galatians 3:16). At that time, He was also named and became a "Son . . . under the law" (Galatians 4:4).

On the forty-first day, also in keeping with the Law, the parents brought Jesus to the Temple. This trip served two purposes. First, Mary had to be redeemed from legal and ceremonial uncleanness in order to be fully restored to her family and community. Second, Mary's firstborn had to be redeemed from priestly service. Mary's gift of two young doves indicated the humble circumstances of the family. The price of Jesus' redemption was five shekels (about four dollars).

As Mary and Joseph entered the Temple, they encountered Simeon. Simeon was "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (Luke 2:25-26). Simeon took the child from His mother's arms, blessed God, and prayed.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel (Luke 2:29-32).

Simeon then blessed Joseph and Mary and prophesied unto her.

Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed (Luke 2:34-35).

While others saw Jesus as a temporal Messiah-King, Simeon saw Him as the suffering Redeemer.

In that instant Anna, an aged prophetess who was about eighty-four years old, entered the Temple and "gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for the redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).

### **The Wise Men**

Jewish prophecy (e.g., Isaiah 60:1-61:3), indicated that the coming Messiah would transcend the racial and religious confines of Judaism and would be a blessing to the Gentiles. Even Simeon referred to Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles." Consequently, many outside of Israel longed for the coming King as noted by Farrar in *Life of Christ, vol. I*:

We are informed by Tacitus, by Suetonius, and by Josephus, that there prevailed throughout the entire East at this time an intense conviction, derived from ancient prophecies, that ere long a powerful monarch would arise in Judea, and gain dominion over the world.<sup>3</sup>

Gripped with this conviction, the wise men came to worship the Christ child.

The wise men were probably priest-sages from Persia, Arabia, or Babylonia. The idea that they were kings may result from an interpretation of Isaiah 60:3. They came to Judea because they had seen His star in the east and wanted to worship the newborn King. No one knows how many

men came to honor the Christ child, although the number three has been suggested because of the three gifts.

Their inquiries in Jerusalem concerning the location of the new King struck terror in Herod's heart. Insecure in his claim to the throne, Herod was heartless and cruel to all who opposed him. He even had Mariamne, his beloved wife and a princess of the Hasmonean House, and his favorite sons killed because he thought they were plotting against him. When the news of the Magi's inquiries reached Herod, he immediately called for the scribes and priests who informed him that the prophets indicated the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also (Matthew 2:7-8).

The wise men found Mary and the Christ child in a house in Bethlehem. (Apparently Joseph and Mary had decided to stay in the city of David instead of returning to Nazareth following the birth of Jesus at the time of the taxation. Perhaps Joseph was trying to shield Mary from the hometown gossip concerning the conception.) The wise men entered and fell down in worship to the Infant. Then they presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Outwardly, the gifts represented choice commodities of their home-land. Spiritually, however, they symbolized the royalty (gold), the humanity (myrrh, a spice used in embalming), and the divinity (frankincense) of the Child. Yet, while we emphasize these gifts, we must not overlook the first gift the wise men gave—themselves in worship.

God warned the wise men in a dream that they should not return to Herod, and they departed to their homeland by another way. When Herod realized his plot to locate the Child had failed, he ordered the death of all the children in Bethlehem and the coasts thereof from two years old and under. Estimates of the number of children killed by Herod range broadly from twenty to fourteen thousand. However, since the historian Josephus did not mention this slaughter and since Bethlehem was such a small village, the actual number may have been small.

### **The Flight to Egypt**

God warned Joseph in a dream of the impending slaughter of the children. Joseph arose and took Mary and her baby by night to Egypt. (Note how God provided for this unexpected trip through the gifts of the Magi.) There they stayed until after Herod had died and it was safe for the Child to return. Matthew said this was a fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hosea 11:1).

After Herod had died, an angel again appeared to Joseph and instructed him to return to Israel with his family. Joseph seemingly had planned to resettle in Bethlehem until he learned that Archelaus, Herod's worst son, had ascended to his father's throne. This news terrified Joseph. And "being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matthew 2:22-23).

The Bible is silent concerning the next several years in Christ's life. Undoubtedly, He had a fairly normal Jewish childhood. Luke simply stated, "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). Nevertheless, that He had to conquer hereditary tendencies toward evil was inevitable. He was a human child, subject to all its conditions, yet perfect in them.

Education was basic to every Jewish child. It began in the home as soon as the child could speak with his mother teaching him the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41). Later it was the father's responsibility to teach the Torah, and when the child was six, he began formal education in the synagogue school. Likewise, every father was required to teach his son a craft or skill. Joseph taught Jesus carpentry, for Jesus was called "the Carpenter."

Jesus' curriculum seems to have included linguistic skills. He spoke Aramaic, the common language of Galilee. He also quoted Scripture in Hebrew, a language that was already considered dead. And apparently He was able to converse freely with the centurion whose servant was healed and with the Greeks who sought to interview Him.

The Scriptures indicate that Jesus was not raised as an only child. There would have been no need for Luke to specify that Mary brought forth her firstborn son if Jesus was her only child. Mark 6:3 indicates that Mary and Joseph had four sons and at least two daughters. After His resurrection, two of these brothers, James and Jude, became followers of Christ and penned two of the General Epistles.

### **In the Temple**

The silence of Christ's childhood is broken only once in the Scriptures. When Christ was twelve, He accompanied His parents to Jerusalem to attend the Passover feast. Evidently, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus traveled with a much larger "company" from Nazareth and perhaps the surrounding area. This would have been an exciting time of fellowship and anticipation for the band. Jesus probably experienced the thrill and nervous energy any normal twelve-year-old boy would feel as He thought about seeing the Temple for the first time in His memory.

Only the first two days of the Feast of Passover required personal attendance at the Temple. So-called half-holidays began on the third day, and it was lawful then for the travelers to return to their homes. This may have been the time that Mary and Joseph decided to return to Nazareth.

Mary and Joseph assumed that Jesus was in the great company that journeyed back to Galilee. However, after a day of traveling and discovering that He was not with their kinfolk or acquaintances, they returned to Jerusalem. After three days, they found Him "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers" (Luke 2:46-47).

Mary upbraided her Son, "Why have you thus dealt with us? behold, your father and I have sought you sorrowing."



Jesus' answer perplexed her. "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). This reply was surely not meant as a snide or snippy remark, but it does give an insight to His understanding of His divine mission. Nevertheless, Jesus returned with His earthly parents to Nazareth and "was subject unto them."

The only other commentary given in the Scriptures concerning Jesus' childhood is found in Luke 2:52, "And Jesus increased in wisdom [intellectually] and stature [physically] and in favour with God [spiritually] and man [socially]."

## Chapter 2

# **THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST**

**Robertson's Sections 20-23**

The prophet Isaiah foretold that a forerunner would prepare the way for the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3-5). This herald would come in the spirit of Elijah, turning the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers (Malachi 4:5; Matthew 11:14). This forerunner was John the Baptist.

## HIS TIMES

Luke pinpointed the arrival of the Baptist to be in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. The time was ripe for John's appearance.

1. Rome had reached her zenith under Augustus and was now on the decline as an empire that held sway over the world.
2. Epicureanism ("pleasure, based on self-control, moderation, and honorable behavior, is the proper end of man's effort") and Stoicism ("virtue is the highest good and men should be free from passion and unmoved by life's happenings") vied for supremacy of man's thoughts. The first led to sensuality, the second to pride, and both to despair.
3. All religions were tolerated, but none could satisfy.
4. Slavery abounded and indescribable cruelty everywhere marked their treatment.
5. Might was substituted for right and justice fled the land.
6. The people had degenerate tastes as exemplified by the butchery in the arenas.
7. Charity disappeared.
8. Honest labor was looked upon with contempt.

Although the Jews continued to cling to their monotheistic religion, Judaism had lost much of its power. The Roman procurators of Judea had changed the high priest four times even though this position was to be held for a lifetime. Annas was deposed from the high priesthood after nine years and various successors were tried until his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who was willing to be a puppet of Roman tyranny, succeeded to the office. Annas, through astuteness and political influence, however, remained the power behind the throne and continued to preside over the Sanhedrin. He had inherited the office of high priest by heredity and Israel regarded him as the rightful holder of that office.

The overall religious conditions in Palestine were low. There was little sincere religion. The externals had been multiplied and the Spirit had been quenched. The Pharisees emphasized separateness but not true holiness. The scribes professed great devotion to the Scriptures, but emphasized traditionalism. The Sadducees praised morality, but preferred lives of comfort and self-indulgence and did not believe in a life after death.

## HIS PERSON

Against the background of these conditions, John's arrival shocked the complacency of the day. As if appearing out of nowhere, he arrived near the mouth of the Jordan River in the wilderness of Judea dressed in camel's hair with a leather girdle about his loins. His diet consisted of locust and wild honey. His demeanor was straightforward and blunt.

Little is known about John prior to his startling appearance. As with the childhood and early adulthood of Christ, the Bible is silent concerning John's formative years. Being of priestly lineage, he was probably educated to follow in his father's footsteps. And as the son of a priest, he probably began his ministry at the age of thirty.

## HIS MISSION

John's mission was that of the forerunner of the Messiah. This term refers to the heralds who ran before royalty, preparing their way by calling for the people to clear away rubble and obstructions and to repair the roadway so the royal procession could pass in safety and comfort. Such was the work of John. He prepared the way for the Messiah by calling for the people to remove the rubble and obstructions of sin from their lives, to tear down the high places, and to fill in the low so the King could appear.

By the very nature of his appearance and methods, John drew attention to himself. However, this was not his intention. As the forerunner, he was preparing the way for the Messiah. Over and over again he pointed to him "that cometh after me" (Matthew 3:11).

Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:28-30).

John was well aware of his mission and sought constantly to fulfill it. He was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord."

## HIS MESSAGE

John preached the message of repentance unto the remission of sin. He preached fearlessly to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to see him at the Jordan:

O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:7-12).

To those who asked, “What shall we do?” he replied, “He that has two coats, let him give to him that has none; and to him that has meat, let him do likewise.” To the publicans, He said, “Exact no more than that which is appointed you.” To the soldiers, he admonished, “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.” (See Luke 3:10-14.)

John’s preaching struck at the core of Jewish life, revealing its hypocrisy and sham. While baptism was not a new rite—it had been practiced under the Law for the proselytes—the idea of Jews submitting to immersion to have their sins remitted was totally alien, conflicting with their self-righteousness based on their biological generation. Such a step would be a confession of their sinful state, but such action was necessary because of the coming King.

When the King did appear, John did not hesitate to announce His arrival. As John saw Jesus approaching, he cried, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).



## Chapter 3

# THE BEGINNING OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

Robertson's Sections 24-35

### JESUS' BAPTISM BY JOHN

When Jesus was “about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23), He initiated His public ministry by being baptized by John. Jesus apparently had come from Galilee specifically to be baptized (Matthew 3:13). John did not know Jesus prior to their meeting at the Jordan. Yet, the Baptizer recognized the sinlessness of the One who presented Himself for baptism and tried to deter Him. It had been made very clear that John’s baptism was a sign of confession and repentance with a view to forgiveness of sin. Through the Spirit with which he was filled from birth (Luke 1:15), John knew that as the sinless Lamb, Jesus had no need for remission of sin.

Why then was Jesus baptized? This has been a constant question through the ages. Let us consider a fourfold answer.

First, in reply to John’s reluctance, Jesus said, “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). This could refer to the demand of the Law that those entering into an office, such as the Levitical priesthood (Leviticus 16:4), be ceremonially cleansed by the washing of water.

Second, Jesus was baptized as a sign to John. The Baptizer “bare record” in John 1:33-34.

I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

The immersion and the attending manifestations revealed unto John the identity of the Messiah.

Third, Jesus’ baptism identified Him with the believing remnant of Israel. John’s preaching had given men faith in his message and the promise of God. This group was bound together by the sign of John’s baptism. And consequently, Jesus came to John to identify Himself with this group and the coming kingdom of God and not with the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, or Zealots.

And fourth, Jesus was baptized to identify Himself with sinners. They came to John to confess their sins and their faith in the coming Savior who would redeem them from their sins. Similarly, the Savior identified Himself with sinners, as indicated by Dwight Pentecost in *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*.

Jesus Christ came to identify Himself with sinners so that through that identification He might become their substitute. Paul stated in II Corinthians 5:21, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Just as it was necessary for Israel to be identified with the scapegoat and the scapegoat to be identified with Israel through the laying on of hands, so Jesus Christ identified Himself with sinners so that they might be identified with Him when He gave Himself as a substitute for their sins.<sup>4</sup>

### **Misconceptions Concerning the Baptism of Jesus**

Several misconceptions arise concerning the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan. It would be worthwhile to consider three of them here.

**Misconception 1:** “A trinity of divine persons is taught here.”

When Jesus was baptized, John “saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16-17). Some imagine that this manifestation teaches a trinity of divine persons. However, what happened at the baptism was not arranged to teach any doctrine concerning the Godhead. No one that day heard or saw anything concerning the dove-like form or the voice except John. This was a private and infallible sign to John whereby he could identify the Messiah (John 1:33).

**Misconception 2:** “Jesus became the fullness of the Godhead bodily at His baptism.”

Some teach that the Spirit descending like a dove was a sign of Jesus receiving the Holy Ghost. However, the “dove” alighting was purely symbolical. There was never a time when Jesus did not have the Holy Ghost, and that without measure, for *He was the Holy Ghost embodied*. (See John 14:16-21.) (John the Baptist was “full of the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb.” Dare we say less about Jesus?)

We must remember that Jesus was the God-man. God became flesh.

But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (Galatians 4:4-5).

What was the Son? It was that “Holy Thing”—that physical thing, that fleshly thing—born of Mary. Jesus, in His dual nature, was both fully God and fully man. He was the flesh of God and the Spirit of God in one being.

**Misconception 3:** “All the persons of the Trinity are, for the first time in the New Testament, seen together at the baptism. The voice of the Father is added as a separate seal of His ministry, after the descent of the Holy Spirit.”

Those who teach the above concept claim that the voice heard “demands personality.” Yet, did the voice emanating from Balaam’s mule indicate personality? Jesus said the rocks and mountains would cry out in praise to Him if the people withheld their praise. Would this mean that the rocks would have personality? The truth is that Jesus whom John baptized is also the omnipresent, eternal God who was responsible for the voice. This is not a matter of Jesus “throwing His voice” as a ventriloquist; it was an audible expression by the One who cannot be contained—quantitatively—in one finite human body.

## THE TEMPTATION

Following His baptism, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. The word *tempt* means “to test or try one’s character.” During His forty days in the bleak and barren mountain of Quarantania, the traditional site of the temptation, which rises out of the Judean Plain some fifteen hundred feet above the Jordan Valley, Jesus prayed and fasted while being tempted of the devil. It was at the end of this period that the Bible states Jesus hungered and Satan appeared unto Him.

### The First Temptation

The first temptation capitalized on Christ’s physical hunger pangs—which in themselves were a natural and sinless outgrowth of fasting. Satan said, “If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it become bread.” (The phrase “If thou be the Son of God” can also be translated “Since thou art the Son of God” and was not designed to instill doubt as to Christ’s relationship with the Father but to emphasize it.)

On the surface, this temptation is another version of the modern yet age-old philosophy that says, “Man’s highest good comes from gratifying his desires and happiness comes from satisfying his fleshly appetites.” By it Satan appealed to Christ to exercise His power as the Son of God and gratify His own needs. This would have been easy for Jesus to do.

On a deeper level, however, Satan appealed to Christ to put His own human desire above the will of God. To yield to His own lust of the flesh would have been to abandon the will of God and substitute His own, deeming that gratification of His appetite was more important than obedience to the will of God. Consider the following quotation from G. Campbell Morgan’s *The Crises of the Christ*.

As has been already emphasized, Jesus was led by the Spirit, driven by the Spirit, to and in the wilderness, and in that fact there was great significance. In the life of every being wholly devoted to the will of God, there is nothing accidental. Every detail of arrangement is in the Divine plan, and cannot be interfered with without changing the result, and interfering with the purpose. The circumstance of hunger was not only within the Divine knowledge, it was a part of the Divine plan. The circumstance of hunger was incidental, but not accidental. It was not an unexpected contingency. It was a part of the Divine program.<sup>5</sup>



Had Christ yielded to the temptation to satisfy His own fleshly desires, He would have thwarted the will of God. Any “rights” we may possess as children of God never supersede our responsibility to submit to His will—even if submission demands denying our own natural and, in themselves, sinless desires.

Christ, however, withstood the temptation. “He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). In quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, the Son was fully aware of His Father’s ability to provide the food He needed and was content to trust in that provision. Spiritual life and growth does not come by fulfilling carnal desires, but from surrendering to the will of God. Dr. Pentecost emphasized Christ’s obedience.

Christ showed Himself to be in obedience to the will of God, and for Him that will was revealed in the Word of God. He recognized that the highest good is not to satisfy or gratify but to obey.<sup>6</sup>

And Christ also showed that man in his physical weakness is stronger when submitted to divine will than the forces of evil that may oppose him.

### **The Second Temptation**

Matthew and Luke reverse the order of the second and third temptations. The “then” of Matthew 4:5 seems to indicate that his chronology is the more exacting. It was during this trial that Satan took Jesus—no one fully knows whether Jesus was taken literally or mentally—to the pinnacle of the Temple and commanded, “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Matthew 4:6).

In the first temptation Satan asked Jesus to exercise His rights as the Son of God and rebel against divine authority—to exercise independence. This time Satan asked Jesus to force the Father to protect Him in a great display of faith. Actually, Jesus was asked to test His Father, and the one who puts another to a test is putting himself in a higher position.

Think of the drama of Jesus leaping from such a height in view of the populace of Jerusalem and being miraculously saved by divine intervention. Would not the rescue prove to the Jews that He was the Messiah? Would not the jump demonstrate His unsurpassed faith in God? And would not the entire scene appeal to the *pride of life* as a show of one’s spirituality?

But Jesus did not choose the course offered by Satan. Instead, He turned to the Word of God and replied, “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Matthew 4:7). This quotation from Deuteronomy 6:16 illustrates that Jesus was still submitted to the complete will of the Father. The action suggested by Satan would not have shown the Son’s trust and faith in the Father, but rather His presumption. Furthermore, such an act in obedience to Satan would have removed Him from the promise of protection from God.

### **The Third Temptation**

In the third temptation, Satan took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed Him the splendor and majesty of all the kingdoms of the world. He would give this all to Jesus, if the Son of God would only bow down and worship him.

Christ did not dispute Satan's right to the kingdoms of the world; later He even referred to him as the "prince of this world." However, He also knew that Psalm 2 had already promised the Son the uttermost part of the world for His inheritance. In reality Satan was appealing to the *lust of the eyes* and offering a shortcut to world dominion, a road that would bypass the suffering and sacrifice of Calvary. All that Jesus would have to do would be to worship Satan.

Jesus replied, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). This answer from Deuteronomy 6:13 is vitally important when one considers the connection Jesus made between worship and service. The two acts go together. We cannot worship someone we do not serve. Satan only requested Jesus to bow down and worship. Jesus, however, went beyond the satanic enticement to the heart of the temptation: If Jesus Christ would reject the will of the Father and serve Satan, then Satan would allow Jesus to inherit the kingdoms of this world.

Following this last rebuke, Luke wrote, "When the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season" (Luke 4:13). Christ had been victorious during this time of testing. Yet throughout His life there would be echoes of these temptations. For example, His brothers suggested that He show Himself as proof of His deity. The Jews, likewise, sought to make Him an earthly king when He had come to be their eternal spiritual ruler. And Pilate questioned, "Are you then a king?" No wonder Peter cautioned the Christians to be vigilant because the devil seeks to devour whom he may.

We know that God cannot sin or be tempted to sin. Since Jesus was both God and man, however, some have asked if the temptation in the wilderness was real. Could the man Jesus Christ have yielded to the temptation and sinned as any mortal? Did He have to make moral decisions in view of temptation such as you and I do? The answer has to be a resounding, "Yes, in His humanity He could have sinned." Otherwise, the writer of Hebrews could not have stated that He was "tempted like as we are" if the possibility to sin did not exist. Without the potential to sin there could be no temptation, just exposure to sin.

Yet, Jesus was tempted. In his first epistle to the church, John identified the root of all temptation.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (I John 2:15-16). The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are the sources of all temptation. Each one had its role in the temptation of Jesus in the Judean wilderness. First, Jesus was asked to satisfy the lust of His flesh with bread. Second, He was subjected to the pride of life. Third, He had to contend with the lust of the eyes. Therefore, He was subjected to the total realm of temptation.

He was subject to sin, but each time He overcame. The author of the Book of Hebrews recorded that Jesus was victorious over the spectrum of all temptation.

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

The child of God can find great comfort in knowing that even in a physically weakened condition, Christ, in His humanity, chose to live a sinless life by submitting Himself continually to the will of the Father. Regardless of the avenue of attack, Satan was tempting Jesus to rebel against the will of the Father. The secret to victory is always to resist the devil and to submit even more fully to God's will. (See James 4:7.) Temptation is never a sin unless one yields to it.

## MANIFESTATION OF THE MESSIAH

The manifestation of the Messiah to Israel was through the twofold testimony of John the Baptist, the testimony of the first disciples, the first miracle, and the first cleansing of the Temple. The Greek word *Christ*, in the terminology of the Jews, was the word *Messiah*. In these opening scenes, not only is the character of the Messiah revealed, but so is the program of His future work.

### John's Twofold Testimony

The first part of John the Baptist's testimony concerning Christ transpired as the result of the Sanhedrin. Because of the popular response to John's ministry and its influence, the Jewish religious leaders sent a committee of Pharisees to ascertain the veracity of what John claimed. Immediately John confessed, "I am not the Christ" (John 1:20). The messianic expectation was so high in Israel in those days that many came to offer themselves as Messiah to the nation. John did not want to be identified with these imposters.

However, since the powerful impact of John's preaching could not be ignored, the Pharisees continued their interrogation. "Who are you then? Are you Elijah?" The Old Testament had closed with a prophecy that God would send the prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and dreadful day. The Jews understood this to mean that Elijah would be resurrected or reincarnated to be the Messiah's forerunner. John answered that he was not Elijah. This denial did not conflict with Christ's affirmation that John was a fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy (Matthew 11:14; 17:12) or with the angel's words to Zacharias concerning John's ministry (Luke 1:17). Instead, John was denying that he was a fulfillment of the Jews' misinterpretation.

The Pharisees next asked if John was Moses, the prophet foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15. Again he answered negatively. "Who then are you?" queried the Jewish leaders. "We must give an answer to them that sent us. What do you say of yourself?"

John replied, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias" (John 1:23). This response clearly linked John with the messianic promise; nevertheless, it focused on his message rather than his office. John simply stated that he

had not come to spearhead a new popular movement. Instead, he had come to herald the Savior's coming.

The Pharisees who were standing near—and the majority of those around John—were not looking for a spiritual answer such as his. Missing the significance of John's answer, the Pharisees said, "If you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor Moses, then why do you baptize?" The fact that John was immersing was more important to them than his message. They were incensed that John would even hint in his preaching that they in their self-righteousness and strict observance of the letter of the Law would need to publicly acknowledge defilement and submit to baptism in the Jordan.

John did not give a direct answer to their query. Instead, he stated, "I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose" (John 1:26-27). This was a clear announcement to the spiritually perceptive that the Messiah was come. Tragically, the religious leaders of Israel failed to grasp its meaning.

The next day as John was standing with two of his disciples, he saw Jesus walking toward him and identified Him as the Messiah.

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost (John 1:29-33).

John identified Jesus as the Messiah and saw in Him the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the sinless Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (Isaiah 53). The Messiah's ministry would be universally inclusive, not just exclusive to Jews.

### **The Testimony of the First Disciples**

On the day following John's declaration of the Messiah, he again saw Jesus walking and said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36). The two disciples standing with John heard his testimony and turned to follow Jesus. Jesus noticed the pair and said, "What seek ye?" (John 1:38).

“Rabbi, where do you dwell?” they countered. This was not just a casual question concerning Jesus’ residence. The term “Rabbi” was a title of highest respect given by the Jews to those who interpreted the Law to them. From the word *Lawgiver* in Genesis 49:10, it can be concluded the Messiah would be able to interpret the Law to the nations so they could understand what God expected of His covenant people. Their question was actually an appeal to be placed under the tutelage of Christ. This desire was immediately granted.

After spending the day with Jesus, Andrew and John, the disciples of the Baptizer, were convinced that Jesus was everything their former leader claimed. Andrew sought his brother, Simon Bar-jona, and said, “We have found the Messiah,” and took him to Jesus.

Jesus greeted Simon by stating, “Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas” (John 1:42). The Aramaic “Cephas” and the Greek “Peter” both mean “stone.” By nature, Peter was bold, brash, energetic, impulsive, and often unstable. Through His divine omniscience, Jesus foresaw Peter transformed by the Holy Ghost into a “rock”: stable, steadfast, and unmovable.

The following day Jesus left Judea to return to Galilee. The first person He met there was Philip. Philip responded immediately to the invitation, “Follow me.”

Philip went to Nathanael. “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph,” proclaimed Philip. Nathanael, showing the disdain the small Galilean village held in Jewish thought, answered, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip wisely responded, “Come and see.”

Christ knew the turmoil raging within Nathanael and greeted him with warmth and perception, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” Nathanael was startled by this greeting. “How do you know me?” he asked. Jesus’ insight into Nathanael’s person troubled him. How could this stranger know his character? “Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee,” (John 1:48) came the divine reply. To Nathanael, this answer conveyed a deeper meaning, revealing that this Jesus could discern the innermost thoughts and hopes of a man.

Immediately Nathanael confessed Jesus as the Messiah and cried, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.” Jesus answered, “Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:50-51).

The Messiah was come; His kingdom was growing.

### **The First Miracle**

On the third day following His conversation with Nathanael, there was a marriage in Cana, a small village about four miles northwest of Nazareth. Cana was the hometown of Nathanael, and it is possible that Jesus and His disciples were guests in his home. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was already in the village.

It appears that Mary was either a close friend or a relative of the bridegroom's family. Her relationship to the family probably accounted for an invitation being extended to Jesus. However, Dr. Pentecost suggested that the invitation may not have included the disciples.

Because of Jesus' relationship to her [Mary], He had been included in the invitation, but the singular form of the Greek verb underlying "invited" in verse two seems to indicate that the invitation was given to Jesus and not directly to the disciples. It was unlikely that the bridegroom knew of the five who had so recently associated themselves with Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

Depending upon the resources of the bridegroom, a Jewish wedding feast could last up to a week. During the extended festivities at Cana the guests depleted the wine. This was an embarrassing disgrace to the bridal couple as custom demanded lavish hospitality. Learning of the situation, Mary said to Jesus, "They have no wine" (John 2:3). Was this a gentle rebuke because of the inclusion of unexpected guests? Was she referring to the custom of the guests bringing wine to be contributed to the feast? (Conforming to this tradition would have been difficult for the band, having traveled from Judea and just newly arrived in Cana.) Or was she trying to force a display of messianic power?

Jesus' answer seems to imply the latter. He said, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:4). He was not showing disrespect by addressing His mother as "woman." Instead, He employed the same term He would use while hanging on the cross and transferring the care of Mary to John. Yet, the answer was a firm indication that her maternal influence did not extend into His work as the Messiah. He had been a dutiful son, but now human kinship must be subordinated to the relationship in the Spirit.

Any apparent hardness disappears when we realize that Jesus did not refuse His mother's request. As Shepard points out in *Christ of the Gospels*, Jesus told Mary that the hour of His greater manifestation as the Messiah had not yet come.<sup>8</sup> He was giving her a confirmation of her hope and a promise for the future. Consequently, she turned to the servants and commanded, "Whatsoever He says unto you, do it." She had great faith in her Son.

The instructions were simple. Near the gallery where the reception was held stood six large pots that were used in the Jewish rites of purification. Jesus commanded that these pots, each of which could hold twenty to thirty gallons, be filled to the brim with water. Then He ordered the servants to draw a cupful from the pots and carry the beverage to the overseer of the feast. The governor of the feast was astounded when he tasted the wine. Not knowing the source of the vintage, he said to the bridegroom, "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10).

Before moving on, let us consider Shepard's view about the nature of the miraculous vintage.

Jesus made real wine out of the water. But there was a great difference between Palestinian wine of that time and the alcoholic mixtures which today go under the name wine. Their simple vintage was taken with three parts water and would correspond more or less to our grape juice. It would be worse than blasphemy to suppose, because Jesus made wine,

that He justifies the drinking usage of modern society with its bars, strong drinks, and resulting evils.<sup>9</sup>

John concluded his narrative of the water becoming wine by stating in John 2:11, “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.” This verse plainly shows the results of Jesus’ first miracle and lays to rest all of the apocryphal stories of His childhood miracles.

This first miracle teaches several lessons.

1. The miracle is a revelation of Jesus’ interest in us—the whole of humanity. (Note that neither the bride nor the groom is named.) A wedding transcends the whole human experience and speaks of God’s concern and interest in all of our affairs.
2. The miracle is a sign of the purpose of Jesus’ coming into the world: He came to transform and transfigure. Just as He changed the water into wine, Jesus came to transform sinful lives into righteous lives.
3. The miracle shows Jesus’ method of working. The water became wine with the aid of human hands and divine authority.
4. The miracle shows that He supplies in abundance. When the servants cooperated with Him, there was wine enough to spare.
5. The miracle shows that Jesus saved the best to the last. The New Testament dispensation is the greatest of all ages God has yet given. To receive the Holy Ghost and to be baptized in Jesus’ name is the greatest experience yet offered to mankind.

## CAPERNAUM

Following the wedding feast and accompanied by His mother, His half-brothers, and His disciples, Jesus went to Capernaum and “continued there not many days” (John 2:12). A city of some importance, Capernaum was located on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee. It was where Matthew, a high-ranking government official, made his home and collected taxes. It was also where a Roman centurion lived with a detachment of soldiers (John 4:46). This was the place that was to become Jesus’ headquarters in Galilee.

## EARLY MINISTRY IN JUDEA

### The First Cleansing of the Temple

Being obedient to the Mosaic law, Jesus had attended the annual Passover celebrations in Jerusalem since the year He was twelve and Mary and Joseph had found Him questioning the doctors and scribes in the Temple. It was now time again for the yearly journey to Jerusalem.

A strange sight greeted Jesus as He arrived in the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple. As a “convenience” and “service” to the worshipers, the area had been converted into a livestock market. There were lambs for the paschal sacrifices and the offerings of purification, bullocks for the thank offerings, and doves for the offerings of the poor. Greedy priests who had devised a system to fill their coffers superintended the sale of these animals. In exchange for providing animals that met the high standard necessary for sacrifice, the priests would often charge five to six times the just price. (Of course, the Jews were not compelled to buy directly from the cattle market in the Temple. They could bring an animal from their herds or flocks or they could purchase one from the shepherds near Jerusalem. But then the animal would have to be inspected by someone qualified and duly appointed—for a high fee.)

Coupled with the graft and corruption of the animal market, the priests also ran a money market. Each Jew and proselyte—women, minors, and slaves exempted—were required to pay a yearly Temple tax of one half-shekel. A month prior to Passover, collection booths were set up in every town. Ten days later these were erected in the court of the Temple to ensure collection of the tax, by force if necessary. Many of the Jews coming to Jerusalem for Passover were from foreign countries and therefore had “unclean” money. This foreign currency had to be exchanged for “clean” coin at the Temple money market before these Jews could pay their taxes or buy the animals for sacrifice. The priests usually charged an exchange rate of twelve percent.

Incensed by the abuse of the poor and the desecration of the Temple, Jesus snatched up some of the loose cords lying on the ground. Fashioning the cords into a whip, Jesus began to cleanse the Temple. Shepard describes the scene.

Assuming the role of a prophet, and asserting symbolically His messianic authority, Jesus snatched up in His wrathful indignation some pieces of cast-away cords lying about the court, and plaiting them together with dexterous hands into a whip—symbol of authority—He flourished it and drove out the sheep and oxen forth from the Temple court. Then quick as a flash He turned upon the moneychangers, poured their money into their receptacles, and overthrew their tables. None dared oppose Him. The popular crowd looked on awe-struck and with a desire to applaud. Turning to those who sold the doves and pigeons shut up in cages, He said: “Take these things hence! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” Jerome said, “A certain fury and starry light shone from His eyes and the majesty of Godhead gleamed in His face.”<sup>10</sup>

This was the first time Jesus cleansed the Temple. He would cleanse it again after the triumphal entry as recorded in the Synoptics.

Those who witnessed the wrath of Jesus interpreted His actions in view of messianic authority. His disciples recalled Psalm 69:9, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” The Jews responded to the onslaught by demanding, “What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?” (John 2:18) They did not question the action or the need for such action. They only questioned His authority to do that which they knew should have been done. Their request for a sign was an echo of an earlier demand by Satan during the temptation on the mountain in Judea.



Jesus responded with the sign of His death and resurrection. He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). No one understood the answer. They reminded Jesus that Herod was enlarging the Temple and it had already been under construction for forty-six years. It would be another thirty to forty years before it was complete. His symbolism was completely lost on the stony hearts of the Jews. It took the infilling of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost to illuminate this truth even to the disciples.

Also hidden within Jesus’ response is a statement revealing who He is. He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). Of course, as mentioned above, Jesus was referring to the temple of His body. But who raised Jesus from the dead? According to Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33, 34; I Corinthians 6:14; and II Corinthians 4:14, God raised Jesus from the dead. Yet, Galatians 1:1 and Ephesians 1:17-20 state it was God the Father while Romans 8:11 indicates the Holy Spirit. Was Jesus confused? Were the writers of the other Scriptures confused? No. The truth remains that Jehovah-Savior, the eternal God and Spirit, raised from the dead the frail, fleshly temple, in which He had been incarnated.

Jesus used the cleansing of the Temple to initiate His ministry in Judea. This unprecedented act instantly caught the attention of the people. This was a public presentation of Himself as the Messiah. Who other than the Messiah had the right to cleanse the Temple?

The religious leaders demanded a sign to show by what authority Jesus drove out the moneychangers and oxen. He gave them the mysterious sign of His death and resurrection. But what He would not do for the Sanhedrin, He did for the common people. He gave them a sign.

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man (John 2:23-25).

The details of the miracles Jesus performed during the Passover week are not included in the Scriptures although knowledge of them was widespread. Because of these signs, many people believed on Jesus. Their belief, however, was shallow, lacking true spiritual depth, for Jesus “did not commit himself unto them.” He knew they were still looking for a temporal Messiah.

### **Nicodemus and the New Birth**

Rising above the spiritual mediocrity of his day, Nicodemus was a devout Jew, a member of the Sanhedrin, and possibly an interpreter and teacher of the Law. Since the miracles convinced Nicodemus that Jesus was from God, he sought an interview with Jesus.

Critics have often criticized Nicodemus for coming to Jesus at night. According to the following points, this criticism may be unjust.

1. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and would have been censured by his colleagues of the Sanhedrin had they known he was visiting Jesus. They were greatly offended by the cleansing of the Temple.
2. Nicodemus chose a time when Jesus would be more accessible for a private conversation. He came, seeking to know for himself the secrets of the miracles and asking Jesus about the coming kingdom, which constituted one of the main themes of the preaching of Jesus and John.

Nicodemus opened the conversation with a confession of Jesus' divine origin. He stated, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God be with him." This was a great confession for a Pharisee to make concerning Jesus. The title "Rabbi" means "teacher" and signifies the reverence or honor accorded one who came to reveal God and His truths to His people.

Jesus' response shows that He knew the uppermost thoughts in Nicodemus' mind. Jesus replied, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). In doing so, Jesus sidestepped the question of when the kingdom of God would be established and centered directly on its nature. The kingdom is a spiritual order, invisible to the eye and not perceived by the senses. Those who enter do so only on the basis of a spiritual new birth. Without this regeneration, no one can see the kingdom of God.

These statements astounded Nicodemus. As a Pharisee, he had preconceived ideas about the kingdom.

1. As descendants of Abraham, the Jews had a hereditary claim to the messianic realm.
2. Participation in the kingdom meant conformity to a moral code and ritual system.
3. Obedience to a complex code of observances and restrictions would result in rewards in the coming kingdom.
4. Gentiles could enter the kingdom only through becoming Jewish proselytes.

These ideas were in direct conflict to what Jesus was teaching about the new birth. Nicodemus could accept the need of a proselyte submitting to baptism, but such a thought was untenable for a natural-born Jew. The very idea was an insult to the Pharisees. Surely the sons of Abraham would never submit to such a requirement.

Born again? "How can these things be?" Nicodemus asked. As a typical Pharisee, he had no concept of spiritual regeneration and made no connection between the disposition of the heart and the rigid outward observances. The Jews had a great zeal for God, but it was not according to knowledge of the spiritual way of salvation. To them the kingdom must come as a reward of meritorious obedience to the requirements of a moral and ceremonial code. Their religion was all external.

Christ continued His discourse.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:14-18).

The *believing* of John 3:16 is the counterpart to the *looking* of Numbers 21:8-9. Again Jesus was calling attention to Himself and His Word. He was asking Nicodemus to believe on Him in order to receive eternal life. The Jews equated having eternal life with entry into the kingdom. Their concept of the kingdom was that of an eternal existence in which one enjoyed the presence of God.

As Christ called attention to Himself, He presented four important facts.

1. God loves the world. This truth diametrically opposed the Pharisaic mentality that said God hates sinners and delights in their death.
2. God demonstrated His love by giving His only begotten Son. This was love translated into action. Love that is expressed only verbally is of little benefit to the one being loved; only when love is tangibly manifested can benefits accrue to the object of affection.
3. The world is under condemnation. This condemnation is the result of Adam's sin, not the coming of Christ into the world.
4. Release from this condemnation comes only through belief in the Son of God. Mankind is already lost; he does not become lost by refusing to believe in Christ. However, he can find salvation only by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some people tend to build their entire doctrine of salvation around John 3:15-18 and interpret *believe* as mere "mental assent." In doing so, they forget that biblical believing leads to action (John 7:38; Mark 16:16). There is no way one can separate the truths of John 3:3-8 from John 3:15-18 without doing injustice to the Word of God, for they are part of the same discourse. Truly believing in the Son of God will lead to experiencing the fullness of the new birth (Acts 2).

While Jesus was ministering in the Judean countryside, John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing in Aenon near Salim "because there was much water there." John's ministry had begun to taper off after his testimony concerning Jesus and the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Multitudes were leaving John and following Christ. The Jews saw in this an opportunity to drive a wedge between Jesus and John. As the two were preaching the same basic doctrines (repentance, baptism, prepare for the coming kingdom), the Jews were afraid that a united effort by the cousins would sweep the nation.

The controversy first arose between the Jews and John's disciples concerning the rites of purification. The Jews sought to discredit John for not following the Jewish traditions regarding cleansing and were trying to plant seeds of jealousy. Vexed by what they heard and in a display of deep loyalty to their master, John's disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him" (John 3:26).

Showing his true humility and understanding of his mission, the Baptist replied, "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. . . . He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:28-30). What the Jews hoped would cause jealousy was a source of joy to John. He knew his role as the forerunner and was pleased to point men to the Messiah. The news that "all men come to him" was evidence that John had done his job well.

Incorporated into John's response was further testimony to the superiority of Jesus. Although John's birth was miraculous, he was born of earthly parents, was of the earth, and spoke of earthly things. Christ, on the other hand, was from above and spoke of heavenly things. "He that cometh from above is above all" (John 3:31).

John knew there would be two responses to the revelation concerning Jesus. Some would receive Him: "He that received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (John 3:33-34). Yet, not everyone would believe Christ. Those that refused would reject at least one of the five truths about Jesus given by John:

1. Christ was from Heaven.
2. He knew the Father.
3. The Father had sent Him.
4. He had the Father's words.
5. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Those that denied Jesus would not receive eternal life, but would have the wrath of God abiding on them.

## **MINISTRY IN SAMARIA**

After about six months of ministering in Judea, Jesus returned north to Galilee. In doing so, He prevented the division between Himself and the disciples of John the Baptist that the Pharisees tried to instigate. He also escaped the political sphere of Herod Antipas who had recently imprisoned John. (John had denounced Herod Antipas' marriage to Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Herod Philip and the daughter of another half-brother, Aristobulus.)

Jesus chose to journey through Samaria on His way to Cana of Galilee. This was the shortest route from the Jerusalem-Jericho area and bypassed Perea, which Herod Antipas ruled. These two facts may account for John's statement that Jesus "must needs go through Samaria" (John 4:4). However, the events that transpired in Samaria seem to be the real reason Jesus chose this course.

### **Origin of the Samaritans**

After the kingdom of Israel, the northern ten tribes, fell to Sargon II in 721 BC, the Israelites—except for the poorest sort—were resettled into other parts of the Assyrian Empire. Peoples from other parts of the empire repopulated the area. These people intermarried with the Israelites to form the Samaritans. As a result, idolatry was mixed with true worship of Jehovah.

When Zerubbabel and Nehemiah were rebuilding Jerusalem, the Samaritans offered assistance. However, the Jews hated the idolatrous worship of Jehovah and refused their help. This refusal was a rebuff to the Samaritans, who began to do everything they could to hinder the reconstruction. The Jews never forgot the interference of the Samaritans and Jewish hatred for their northern neighbors simmered over the years.

The Jews considered the land and the people of Samaria unclean and avoided going through the land. However, Jesus chose to go through Samaria. Jesus and His small band of disciples stopped and rested at Jacob's well, about a mile from Sychar. Jesus waited there while the disciples went into the village to buy provisions.

Once again we catch a glimpse of the humanity of Jesus. He was hungry, thirsty, and weary—just as we often become. Here we can see evidence that God was manifested in the flesh! The Word was made flesh! He shared our human nature and knew by experience all the limitations and infirmities the human body is subject to, except those caused by sin.

### **The Samaritan Woman**

While Jesus waited, a woman came to the well. This woman was a sharp contrast to Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Jew; she was a Samaritan. He was a highly respected member of society; she was an outcast, or nearly so. He was a person of strictest morals; she had lost her virtue. He was a cultured and learned teacher of Israel; she was an ignorant, illiterate woman of the lower class. He was wealthy; she was poor. Nicodemus recognized something of the greatness of Jesus and sought Him out; she saw Him at first as a stranger and foreigner. Nicodemus was a serious, dignified inquirer; she had nothing sedate about her. In spite of the great differences between them, both had the same need of spiritual transformation. Jesus, the great lover of all souls, offered salvation to both equally.

Even though Jesus was weary, He did not allow His physical fatigue to hinder Him from grasping an opportunity to win a soul. Note carefully His approach to this woman, which would result in her salvation.

First, by courteously asking for a drink of water, Jesus captured the woman's attention and established a point of contact. It was necessary for Him to take the initiative; otherwise, the woman would not have spoken to Him. His request appealed to her sympathy, gave her a sense of importance that made her willing to listen to Him, and began to break down the barriers that normally would have separated them—barriers such as nationality, prejudice, ignorance, and the custom that prevented rabbis from talking to women.

Second, having made contact with the woman, Jesus continued to use her natural curiosity as a means of showing her need. This caused conviction. Notice in verse 9, she challenged Him.

She as much as said, “You Jews ordinarily cross to the other side of the street when you see us coming, but it is a different story when you need a favor.”

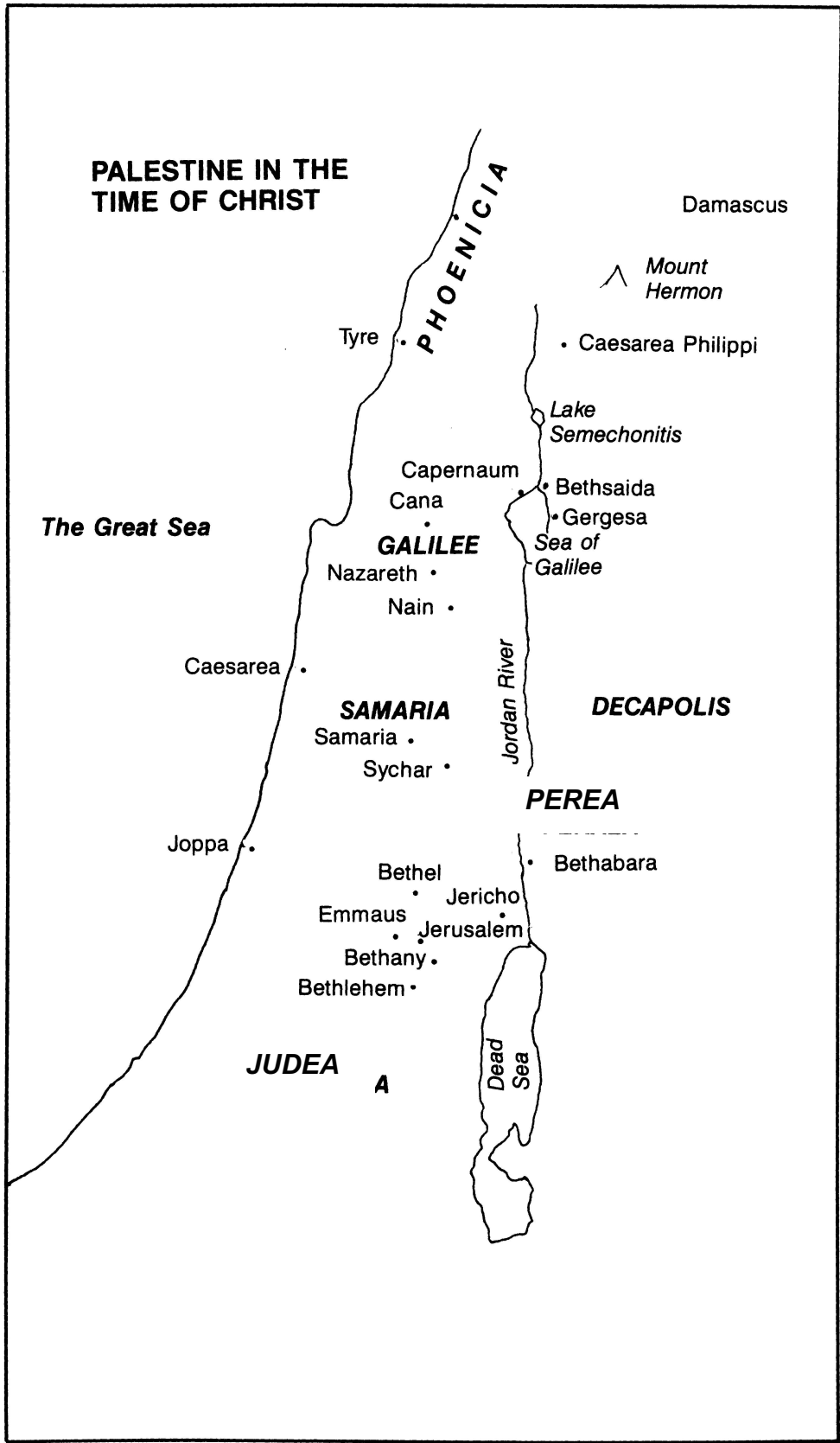
In verse 10, Jesus turned the conversation to spiritual things. This aroused her interest. Jesus led the woman along by awakening a longing for what He had to offer. He used a simple illustration (verses 13-14) to make it clear that the water He meant was different from the water in Jacob’s well. Note her eager request in verse 15. She wanted that water! Her request gave Jesus an opening to lay down the terms on which she could receive it.

Finally, Jesus awakened her conscience by putting His finger on the cause of the woman’s unhappiness. Her new life must begin on the basis of truth and honesty. She must face her sin and her past, and the rubbish of her old life must be cleared away. (Sin cannot be forgotten or ignored. It must be dealt with and cleansed away.)

As if symbolic of the fact that she had forgotten the unsatisfying water of the old life, the Samaritan woman left her old water pot and rushed to the city in demonstration of the genuineness of her conversion. In the joy of her discovery of living water, she became an enthusiastic witness. Her life was changed; she had a new standard of values. “Come see a man who has restored my dignity as a woman,” she invited.

The woman’s testimony and invitation brought results. All who came to see were convinced. This led to the evangelization of Sychar.

**PALESTINE IN THE  
TIME OF CHRIST**



Damascus

▲ *Mount  
Hermon*

• Caesarea Philippi

○ *Lake  
Semechonitis*

Capernaum

Cana

**GALILEE**

Nazareth •

Nain •

• Bethsaida

• Gergesa

*Sea of  
Galilee*

**The Great Sea**

Caesarea •

**SAMARIA**

Samaria •

Sychar •

**DECAPOLIS**

*Jordan River*

**PEREA**

Joppa •

Bethel

• Jericho

• Emmaus

• Jerusalem

Bethany •

Bethlehem •

• Bethabara

*Dead  
Sea*

**JUDEA**

**A**

## Chapter 4

# THE GALILEAN MINISTRY PART I

### Robertson's Sections 36-48

After spending two days in Samaria, Jesus resumed His journey to Galilee. Jesus was a preacher and His theme was repentance and the kingdom of Heaven. Because of the current expectation with reference to the coming Messiah, He was very careful to explain that His kingdom was not an earthly domain. Mark stated that Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God to men. Whereas "Repent" was the central point of John the Baptist, the stern, wilderness preacher, "Good news" keynoted the ministry of Jesus.

### RETURN TO CANA

The first place Jesus visited upon His return to Galilee was Cana. His earlier visit to this small village was on the occasion of the wedding feast shortly after His baptism and the forty days of temptation in the wilderness. It was at that marriage celebration that Jesus performed His first miracle and turned water into wine. This second visit occurred more than a year later.

Jesus initiated His work of healing in Cana. A nobleman, perhaps an officer in the service of Herod Antipas, had a little boy in Capernaum who had been wasting away with a continuous fever. He heard that Jesus had returned to Galilee from Judea. In his desperation, he came to Jesus, begging Him to go and heal his son.

Jesus did not grant the request at first. His fame as a healer had gone before Him, but few people were giving heed to His message of salvation. It is important to remember that Jesus Christ came into the world to be the supreme sacrifice in order to save men from their sins. While healing was a part of His ministry, it was not His major thrust. Jesus wanted those who were whole to respond to Him as well as those who were sick. Thus Jesus at first rebuffed the nobleman, saying, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4:48).

The nobleman again put forth his agonizing cry, "Sir, come down ere my child die" (John 4:49). His appeal showed that he was not merely seeking a sign; the sorrow in his heart compelled him to humble himself before his only source of hope. Such a prayer never meets with refusal when offered to Jesus! "Go your way; your son lives," Jesus said.

The words of Jesus were enough. The man turned and retraced his steps to Capernaum. As he arrived home the next day, a joyous servant met him, stating, "Your son is alive!" The father then asked when the child began to improve. "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him,"



the servant answered. This was the same hour that Jesus had said the child would live. The nobleman and his household believed in Jesus as a result of this great miracle.

## REJECTION IN NAZARETH

After preaching for some time in various places in Galilee, Jesus came to His hometown of Nazareth and entered the synagogue. In keeping with the custom of the synagogue service, Jesus stood to read. He then opened the book of the prophets and began reading from Isaiah.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19). (See also Isaiah 61:1-2.)

Then, with all eyes fastened upon Him, Jesus sat down to teach in the role of a rabbi. With clarity and simplicity, He stated, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

The people who witnessed this wondered at His teaching. To them He was just the son of a carpenter. “How does He dare proclaim Himself to be the Messiah? If He is who He claims, let Him prove it with signs and wonders,” they thought.

Striking at their self-righteousness and Jewish conceit, Jesus pointed out that God in His sovereignty had chosen in times past to bless Gentiles while bypassing the unbelieving Jews. He cited the examples of the widow of Zarephath during the time of Elijah and leprous Naaman during the time of Elisha. The people’s rage generated by Jesus’ statements identified them with apostate, unbelieving Israel, and they sought to kill Him. They tried to crowd Him out of the synagogue and down the street until He would be forced off the forty-foot cliff at the edge of the city. If He died of “natural means”—falling off a cliff—they would be free from the guilt of murder. Jesus, however, passed through the midst of them and went on His way.

Shepard indicates that Jesus had probably moved His mother Mary and her younger children to Capernaum previous to His rejection in Nazareth.<sup>11</sup> Now that His hometown had rejected Him, He relocated His headquarters in Capernaum. Matthew saw this move as a fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2. Capernaum was also the home of Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, and Matthew.

## THE CALL OF THE FIRST FOUR DISCIPLES

It appears that the six disciples that had followed Jesus during His early ministry in Judea and Samaria had returned to their previous activities and daily living. They had been convinced He was the Messiah, yet there is no evidence that they were with Him during the rejection in Nazareth. It seems that Jesus ministered alone during these early days in Galilee.

Jesus’ public ministry in Capernaum received wide attention. Luke stated that “the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God” (Luke 5:1). As they crowded around Him by the Lake of Galilee, Jesus saw two ships. He entered one, requested the owner, Simon, to row out a short

distance from the shore, sat down, and began to teach. (Custom called for a rabbi to be seated when he taught.)

After Jesus concluded His lesson, He told Simon to let down the nets. Simon was a professional fisherman and knew it was the wrong time of day to go fishing. Weary and tired, he replied, “Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net” (Luke 5:5). When he obeyed the divine command, they caught such a great amount of fish that the nets began to tear. Quickly they called to James and John, the sons of Zebedee, to help them. Soon both boats were loaded with so many fish that they began to sink.

The reality of the divinity of Jesus Christ once again confronted the impetuous Simon. He fell at the feet of Jesus and cried, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). To realize that he was in the very presence of the holy God manifested in flesh caused Simon to recognize his own unworthiness and bow low in humility and repentance. May we ever follow his example.

Jesus saw Simon’s heart and said, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men” (Luke 5:10). Mark recorded that Jesus said, “Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). Immediately Simon and his brother Andrew left their nets and followed the call of Christ.

A short distance away James and John were mending their nets in anticipation of tomorrow’s catch. Jesus extended the call to them. They too left their lucrative fishing business to become students at the feet of the Master.

The immediate and total response of these four fishermen/businessmen is an example we all should follow. They did not weigh their decision on the economic scales of the future. They did not try the winds of popularity of the moment. They did not consider the possibility of personal gain or advancement. They simply recognized that they had found the Messiah and yielded all to follow Him. Just to be able to walk with Him and learn from Him meant everything to these men. They knew that He who had turned the water into wine, healed the nobleman’s son, and supplied the overabundance of fish would care for them. May the Lord help us to have their same faith and commitment.

Jesus’ invitation was more than just an appeal from a rabbi seeking to gather followers. Other teachers could espouse new doctrines and excite the emotions, but only the Creator of men could declare, “I will make you.” What a difference there was between the unlearned fishermen who plied the waters of the Sea of Galilee and the staunch apostles who boldly stood before the Sanhedrin and fearlessly proclaimed the goodness of Christ. The change was made by the infilling of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus called flawed fishermen to follow Him while seeing what they would become as they were indwelt by His Spirit.

## **DELIVERING THE DEMONIAIC**

Entering into the synagogue of Capernaum with His disciples, Jesus again assumed the role of a rabbi and began to teach. Normally a rabbi would explain the Scriptures by citing interpretations

and ideas handed down through the years by earlier teachers. Jesus did not do this. Instead, He taught as one who held in His own power the authority and right to speak the final word to hungry hearts. The people were awed by His wisdom and sense of power. “How is this possible?” they questioned.

The answer soon manifested itself. In the midst of the synagogue was a man who was possessed by a demon. That is to say, the evil spirit controlled the man’s thinking, speaking, feeling, and actions. The demon cried aloud, “Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God” (Luke 4:34). Jesus rebuked the demon and commanded him to come out of the man. The evil spirit had no choice but to obey. This was the first record of Jesus using His authority over demonic spirits.

Shepard notes that exorcism was not a new thing to the Jews.

There were men professing to be able by the black art to expel demons. They lived apart as ascetics, “macerating themselves, and fasting to secure the fuller aid and inspiration of such evil spirits.” The Jews were not supposed to practice magic; but in this their theory did not accord with their practice. Josephus describes the wisdom, learning, and achievements of Solomon, referring especially to his skill in expelling demons, who caused various diseases (Antiquities 3:25). Under certain circumstances the repetition of magical formulas was declared lawful even on the Sabbath day . . . There was an elaborate system of superstitious demon-ology current in the popular beliefs of the Jews, and as elaborate a system of the magic art of exorcism . . . Exorcists practiced on the credulity and superstition of the people, using mesmeric and sleight-of-hand methods.<sup>12</sup>

Jesus had no need to use the black arts or sleight-of-hand trickery to cast out the demon. As the mighty God in flesh, all He had to do was speak the word and the demon had to flee. The demonstration of His power over the evil spirit made a lasting impression on those in the synagogue and His fame spread throughout the region.

Jesus left the synagogue and went to Simon Peter’s home where Simon’s mother-in-law lay seriously ill. Jesus touched the woman and rebuked the fever. Immediately she regained her strength and began to minister unto them.

The news of Jesus’ miracles had immediate results. As the sun was setting that evening, many who were sick with various illnesses came to Him. He laid His hands upon each of them and healed them. Demons were also cast out and Christ forbade them to speak.

## **THE FIRST PREACHING TOUR WITH THE DISCIPLES**

The next morning, Jesus arose early and went into a desert place to pray. His disciples found Him, and Simon told Him that all men were seeking Him. The crowd wanted more miracles of healing and more signs. Jesus said, “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent” (Luke 4:43). Jesus always put preaching the good news of the kingdom of God first. While He performed miracles, they were always secondary and were used as a means to bring men into the kingdom. It was not Christ’s purpose to become the center of popularity by working

miracles. He came to proclaim the message of the kingdom. Thus He said, “Let us go elsewhere.” This was the beginning of the first of three preaching tours of Jesus in Galilee. On the second He took the twelve disciples and on the third, He sent the Twelve ahead by twos and followed after them.

Little is recorded about this first preaching tour. The only miracle cited during this tour was the healing of a leper. Leprosy is a loathsome, progressive disease that eventually rots the whole body. In New Testament times, whoever had the disease was considered unclean and forbidden to enter walled towns. The leper was required to wear a cloth covering his mouth and beard and to cry out, “Unclean, unclean,” whenever anyone would approach.<sup>13</sup> (See Leviticus 13:47.)

The leper that came to Christ recognized his own uncleanness and unworthiness. As he knelt before Jesus and bowed his face to the ground, he cried, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean” (Matthew 8:2). In simplicity, humility, and reverence, the leper eloquently expressed his faith in Jesus and acknowledged His divine authority. Jewish tradition demanded that one strictly abstain from contact with anyone with leprosy. In response to the man’s plea, however, Jesus stretched forth His hand, touched him, and commanded, “Be thou clean.” Immediately the leprosy vanished.

In keeping with the Mosaic law, Jesus commanded the man to go and show himself to the priests. The Law required that anyone who had leprosy, or who was suspected of having it, should undergo an elaborate cleansing ritual in order to be accepted in society. Without being duly pronounced clean by the priest, the man’s testimony would not be validated. Nevertheless, before a priest could declare a man cleansed, he first had to investigate the means of cleansing. Such an investigation would give testimony to those in religious circles. Consequently, Jesus commanded the man to show himself to the priest to validate the leper’s testimony and to give witness of His power to the priests.

## **PARALYTIC HEALED IN CAPERNAUM**

Jesus returned to Capernaum following His preaching tour of Galilee. When it was known that He had returned, multitudes gathered to hear Him preach. They swarmed the house He was in so that “there was no more room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door.” As Luke noted, Pharisees and doctors of the Law from every town of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem were in the crowd. This is the first record of organized opposition of the scribes and Pharisees in Galilee.

Into this multitude, four men carried a paralytic on a pallet. The men, however, were unable to force their way to Jesus through the press. Instead, they climbed to the roof of the house and made a hole through which they lowered their friend.

In response to this great act of faith, Jesus said, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.” (Rabbinical theology taught that all physical infirmity was a sign of divine displeasure and came as punishment from God for specific sin.) The reaction was immediate. The doctors of the Law were ready to accuse Jesus of blasphemy, a crime and sin punishable by death. “Who can forgive sins but God only?” they reasoned.

Jesus was aware of the scribes' indignation. "Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" (Mark 2:8-9). The answer was obvious. To say, "Thy sins are forgiven" was easier, for it required no demonstration. He continued by saying first to the Pharisees, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins," and then to the paralytic, "I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house" (Mark 2:10-11).

The man immediately arose, picked up the pallet, and passed through the amazed crowd. His actions showed he was not only healed, but he was also infused with power. The healing was instantaneous and complete. By this miracle Christ demonstrated His authority to forgive sin. While the man went home rejoicing, the Pharisees maintained a stony silence. The miracle was a singular answer to their earlier question, yet they refused to acknowledge the truth: Jesus, as God manifested in flesh, could forgive sin.

## **THE CALL OF MATTHEW (LEVI)**

As Jesus was again at the Sea of Galilee, He passed the customs house and saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, "sitting at the receipt of custom." As a tax collector, Levi, also called Matthew, was a Jew hated by his fellow countrymen because of his position. The customhouse officials were direct functionaries of heathen Rome and were known for their frequent abuses and tyrannical spirit. To the Jews, Matthew and his colleagues were in the same class as harlots, gamblers, and thieves. According to rabbinical teaching, there was no hope for men such as Matthew, and they were excluded from all religious fellowship. Like a leper, they were considered unclean and unfit to associate in Jewish society.

Jesus looked beyond Matthew's social standing and saw what he could be. He called to him, "Follow me." Considering the authority of Christ greater than the Roman emperor's, Matthew left all and followed Christ. Matthew made a public declaration of his identification with Christ by hosting a banquet in His honor. Of course, the self-righteous Jews would not accept an invitation. Therefore, the guests consisted of sinners and other tax collectors.

The pious Jews were affronted that the One who claimed to be God would befriend even tainted men such as publicans and sinners. By doing so, He "made Himself of no reputation" as far as the elite society was concerned. In disgust, the Pharisees asked the disciples, "Why does he eat with the sinners?"

Before the disciples could respond, Jesus Himself answered the question: "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). This was an affront to the Jewish mindset that would deny the likes of Matthew a chance to repent. Jesus taught that the door to a new life of restored favor of God was open to all. Jesus offered not only pardon, but forgiveness—full restoration to the circle of divine favor and fellowship.

## **JESUS DEFENDS HIS DISCIPLES**

Again defeated by Jesus' rebuff, the Pharisees attacked through another means. They brought into the battle John's disciples who asked, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?" (Matthew 9:14).

Jesus answered in the form of three parables. A parable has been defined as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." It is a story that is told for the definite purpose of making some truth clear. Therefore, it is an illustration to throw light upon some doctrine. Jesus told the three following parables.

1. *The Sons of the Bride Chamber.*

Jesus brought to mind a wedding feast that begins with the appearance of the bridegroom and is a time of great rejoicing. The disciples and the believers had accepted Jesus as the Messiah or Bridegroom. It was inappropriate that they who had responded to His invitation should give themselves to fasting. There would be time for this after He was taken from them.

2. *The New Patch on an Old Garment.*

An old garment could not be made presentable by just mending it with a new patch. Jesus was teaching that He came to bring something new, not just to reform Judaism.

3. *The New Wine in Old Wineskins.*

New wine could not be placed in old wineskins because the brittle skins would burst as the wine fermented. Likewise, Judaism could not contain the power and life of the gospel of Christ.

## Chapter 5

# THE SABBATH CONTROVERSY

Robertson's Sections 49-63

## THE SABBATH CONTROVERSY IN JERUSALEM

An unnamed feast in Jerusalem, probably the Passover, marked the beginning of the second year of Jesus' ministry. For a year, His miracles and apparent disregard for Jewish traditionalism had infuriated the Pharisees. Even though their antagonism manifested itself in Galilee, it was restrained because of Jesus' great popularity in the north. Now that He was in Jerusalem, the Pharisees had opportunity to assail Him with the full brunt of their hatred.

The occasion for the conflict between Christ and the Pharisees centered on the observance of the Sabbath. Shepard explains the significance of the Sabbath.

There was no institution among the Jews regarded with more veneration and scrupulosity than that of the Sabbath. It was a divinely ordained and beneficent part of the Mosaic economy, designed for the rest of man and for his worship and service to God. Its purpose was to protect the underlings and oppressed in a nation afflicted with greed. Beginning with sunset on Friday, announced by three trumpet blasts from the Temple and synagogue, it ended at sunset on Saturday. All food must be prepared, all vessels washed, all lights kindled, and all tools laid aside. There were restrictions laid down in the Mosaic law; but the Rabbis had elaborated from these a vast array of injunctions and prohibitions, making of the Sabbath law a veritable bondage. Moses said: "Thou shalt not do any work." The Rabbis made out a system of thirty-nine works, which done rendered the offender subject to death by stoning. Derived from these "father-works" were numerous "descendant-works." One of the "father-works" was ploughing; a son of this was "digging." Wearing false teeth was a "descendant" of "carrying a burden." Among the descendants of "reaping" were the "plucking of a head of wheat" or the "pulling out of a grey hair" from one's head. Lengthy rules were formulated about what kinds of knots one might tie on the Sabbath. The camel driver's and the sailor's knots might not be tied or unloosed. Two letters of the alphabet might not be written together. To kindle or extinguish a fire was a great desecration, not being justified even in case of the emergency of sickness. The Sabbath had become a grievous burden by the thousands of such restrictions and rules too numerous to mention.<sup>14</sup>

### Jesus Heals the Paralytic on the Sabbath

It was on such a Sabbath that Jesus encountered a paralytic lying near the pool of Bethesda. For thirty-eight years this man had lain among the "great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered," who waited for an angel to trouble the waters so the first one in the pool could be healed. As he had no one to assist him, the paralytic's hopes of healing were always frustrated. Jesus saw

the man and asked, “Wilt thou be made whole?” (John 5:6). The man’s answer showed his utter hopelessness. But Jesus replied, “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.” Immediately the man was healed and obeyed the command of the Lord.

Those who saw him walking did not rejoice at the miraculous healing or give glory to God. Instead, they accused the man of violating the Sabbath. The former paralytic simply replied, “He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.” He could not, however, identify the miracle worker, for Jesus had withdrawn into the multitude.

Jesus later found the man in the Temple and said unto him, “Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” (John 5:14). The man was apparently offering a sacrifice for his desecration of the Sabbath. From Jesus’ statement, one may conclude that the paralysis was the result of sin. The sin could have been unthankfulness, as there is no record of the man expressing gratitude for his miraculous healing. Further evidence of the man’s unthankfulness is given in his report to the Pharisees stating that Jesus had been the one who had healed him. “And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day” (John 5:16).

The identification of Jesus as the miracle worker led to His being summoned before the Sanhedrin to give account for His disregard for the Sabbath. Jesus replied that His Father continued to work and so did He. This reply infuriated the Pharisees even more. In their opinion, it was bad enough that Jesus violated the Sabbath, but the blasphemy of making Himself equal with God was far worse.

Jesus used this opportunity to give a broader explanation of His relationship to the Father (John 5:19-23) and added insight to His subsequent relationship to mankind (John 5:24-29). Throughout this discourse, Jesus continued to claim deity by claiming the prerogatives of God.

1. The power and right to give life and judgment (verses 21-22).
2. The same right to the worship of men that they gave the Father. The one who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father. The critic who denies the deity of Jesus dishonors the Father, for we find that Father in Jesus (John 1:1, 14).
3. The power to give eternal life to anyone who hears obediently and believes.

Jesus’ claim to deity so enraged His enemies that they plotted to destroy Him. Although they understood His claim to be God, they did not understand He was God manifested in flesh. Nevertheless, Jesus gave several witnesses to substantiate His claim.

1. The witness of John the Baptist (John 5:32-35)
2. The testimony of His Works (John 5:36)
3. The witness of the Father (John 5:37)
4. The witness of the Scriptures (John 5:39)
5. The testimony of Moses (John 5:45-47)

Stubborn unbelief, however, blinded the eyes of His enemies.



The real reason for the rejection was that they were unwilling to come to Jesus to accept life, or in the words of Jesus, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). They had no real love for God in their hearts, but were more willing to accept a false Messiah who came in his own name to receive glory of men. Jesus said, “I am come in my Father’s name.”

### **Jesus’ Disciples Pluck Corn of the Sabbath**

It was probably on the following Sabbath that another controversy arose. The disciples were walking through a field and plucked corn to eat. This was in keeping with the Law that allowed a hungry man to pick grain along a pathway to satisfy his hunger.<sup>15</sup> The Pharisees, however, did not view this to be legal; they said it violated their tradition about the Sabbath.

Jesus defended His disciples based on the following points.

1. The example of David eating the Tabernacle’s shewbread, which was normally reserved only for the priests.
2. The priests who labored in the Temple on the Sabbath were blameless in their service. How much more should His disciples be blameless in His service since He was greater than the Temple and hence greater than the Sabbath?
3. The words of the prophet Hosea (Hosea 6:6).
4. The superiority of man to the Sabbath since God made the Sabbath for man.
5. Jesus’ lordship of the Sabbath.

### **Jesus Heals the Withered Hand on the Sabbath**

Following the discussion, Jesus departed and went into the synagogue. There He saw a man with a withered hand. Seeking to accuse Him further, the Jews asked whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus answered with an example.

What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days (Matthew 12:11-12).

The Pharisees taught it was lawful to save life or prevent death on the Sabbath. Their silence showed they were caught in their own trap. His enemies were again defeated in argument and shamed into silence even though they had come confidently, hoping to find some basis of accusation.

Jesus then commanded the man with the withered hand to stretch it forth. Immediately the hand was restored.

## **RETURN TO GALILEE**

Christ’s acts in Jerusalem so enraged the Pharisees and Herodians that He returned to Galilee, withdrawing with His disciples to the lake.

Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judaea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumaea, and from beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him (Mark 3:7-8).

The people were so eager to hear Christ, it was necessary for Him to enter into a boat and address the people from it. Matthew interpreted Christ's ministry to the Gentiles from the surrounding nations as a fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1-4. Even though they were not of the household of Israel, they too shared in the blessings as Christ preached, healed the sick, and delivered those possessed by demons.

## The Selection of the Twelve Apostles

The Jews expected Messiah to appear, overthrow the Roman yoke of bondage, and reestablish the throne of David. When He did appear, however, He proclaimed that His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men (Luke 17:20-21). (His millennial kingdom with its reign on earth is still future.) Nevertheless, the time had come for Christ to organize His kingdom more fully. Being omniscient, Jesus Christ knew His time on earth was nearing its end. For His ministry and kingdom to continue, it would have to be committed to the hands of mortal men. The importance of the choice of these men was manifested as Jesus spent the night in prayer. Afterward He chose twelve men who would be with Him at all times in all places. They would be companions in His travels, witnesses of His miracles, students of His doctrine, recipients of practical experience, ambassadors of His kingdom, and the foundation of future growth.

Mark 3, Matthew 10, Luke 6, and Acts 1 list the twelve apostles.

1. Peter (always mentioned first)
2. Andrew
3. James
4. John
5. Philip
6. Nathanael (Bartholomew)
7. Thomas
8. Matthew (Levi)
9. James the Less
10. Judas (Thaddeus)
11. Simon Zelotes
12. Judas Iscariot (always mentioned last).

Edersheim suggests that five of the twelve disciples were directly or indirectly cousins of Jesus. He states that Salome, Zebedee's wife, was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, thus making James and John Jesus' cousins. Edersheim also projects the idea that James the Less, Judas (Thaddeus), and Simon Zelotes were indirectly cousins of Jesus as their father, Alpheus, also called Cleopas, was the brother of Joseph.<sup>16</sup>

## The Sermon on the Mount

Shortly after choosing the Twelve, Jesus gave the greatest of all sermons recorded in human history. The Sermon on the Mount, described by some as Jesus' Inaugural Address, certainly cannot be given justice in a short study such as this. The wise student will take time to explore prayerfully the depths of this discourse, for in this sermon, recorded in Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6:17-49, Christ defined the ideals and objectives of His kingdom and set forth some of its fundamental requirements and principles.

The Sermon on the Mount may be outlined in eight sections.

1. *Introduction (Matthew 5:3-12)*
  - (a) Beatitudes and woes
  - (b) Privileges of the subjects of the kingdom
2. *The Theme of the Sermon (Matthew 5:13-20)*

Christ's standard of righteousness contrasted with that of the scribes and Pharisees
3. *Christ's Ethical Teachings (Matthew 5:21-48)*

Christ's ethical standards were superior to that of the scribes and Pharisees as illustrated by His teachings regarding the following:

  - (a) Murder
  - (b) Adultery
  - (c) Divorce
  - (d) Oaths
  - (e) Retaliations
  - (f) Love of enemies
4. *The Practice of Real Righteousness (Matthew 6:1-8)*

Christ contrasted the practice of the kingdom to that of the ostentatious hypocrisy of the Pharisees in three areas:

  - (a) Almsgiving
  - (b) Prayer
  - (c) Fasting
5. *Single-hearted devotion to God (Matthew 6:19-34)*
6. *Captious Criticism or Judging Others (Matthew 7:1-6; Luke 6:37-42)*
7. *Prayer and the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:7-12; Luke 6:31)*
8. *Conclusion (Matthew 7:13-8:1; Luke 6:43-49)*

The examples from parables drove home the lesson of personal righteousness.

## The Healing of the Centurion's Servant

After concluding His sermon, Jesus entered Capernaum where a delegation of Jewish leaders met Him. A Gentile centurion had sent them to ask Jesus to heal his paralytic and tormented servant. (Perhaps previous healings by the Messiah in Capernaum had sparked this man's faith.) The leaders' testimony concerning the centurion's generosity and his concern for his slave witnessed loudly to his moral character. By sending the elders instead of coming himself to Jesus, he showed his humility.

Jesus followed the elders as they started toward the officer's home. As they neared the home, the centurion sent other friends to Jesus with another simple message.

Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it (Luke 7:6-8).

Coupled with his humility, this Gentile, although not a proselyte to Judaism, had great faith in Jesus and understood His authority. He perceived that Jesus could speak an authoritative command and the demons would have to go forth in obedience.

In response, Jesus exclaimed, "I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Luke 7:9). Here was an absolute trust that deemed all things possible with Jesus, coming from a man who made no claim to outward or inward fitness to receive divine blessing. This centurion was an example of the many Gentiles who would come from the East and the West to join with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God. Because of his faith, Jesus told the centurion, "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee" (Matthew 8:13).

### **Raising of the Widow's Son in Nain**

Located about twenty-five miles southwest of Capernaum, the village of Nain was the next place Jesus visited following the healing of the centurion's servant. As Jesus, accompanied by His disciples and a large crowd of people, reached the town gate, He met a funeral procession on its way to the cemetery. The procession was for the son of a well-known and respected widow. The mother's grief moved Jesus. "Weep not," He said consolingly to her. Then He came and, touching the bier, commanded, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise" (Luke 7:13-14). Immediately the son sat up and began talking. As a result, great fear came upon those who witnessed this miracle. Here was concrete evidence that Jesus was "the resurrection, and the life." (See John 11:25.)

### **The Message from John the Baptist**

The news that a great prophet had appeared spread throughout the land, reaching even John the Baptist, whom Herod had imprisoned at Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea. John sent two of his disciples to Jesus asking, "Are you the Messiah or should we look for another?" This question should not be considered as an indication that John had lost faith in the coming Messiah, but rather an expression of faith that the Messiah would appear. When the messengers came, Jesus was busy in the midst of His ministries of curing and preaching to the popular throng made up of all classes. He healed many "in that hour" of disease, plagues, evil spirits and all kinds of bodily ills, and gave sight to the blind. In reply to John's question, Jesus simply told the disciples to tell John what they had seen. (See Isaiah 35:5-6.)

Jesus then gave to John the most wonderful tribute ever bestowed on a mortal man. John was the greatest of the prophets, in privilege if not in character, because he was the forerunner of the Messiah. (However, "he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" [Luke 7:28], not morally, but positionally in the new dispensation of the Holy Ghost. John was the greatest one born in the realm of the flesh; those born of the Spirit are born into a higher realm.)

## Jesus Upbraids the Unrepentant Cities

Jesus did most of His mighty works in Galilee, and principally around the Sea of Tiberias, in the populous districts of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. He began to upbraid these three cities, which had been the scene of His greatest activities, because they did not repent. It would be more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for these cities. To whom much is given, much is required. Although they had freely received, they did not respond. Because the people had had the light of both Christ's words and works, they were subject to greater judgment than the Gentiles who had not had that testimony.

Why did the Jews reject Christ? Was it because He did not fulfill the messianic prophecies? Was it because He could not substantiate His claims? No. The Jews rejected the evidence of His messiahship and deity because of their spiritual blindness. (See Matthew 11:25-27.) Jesus ended His upbraiding of the cities with an invitation.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

## The Anointing of Jesus' Feet

A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to his home for dinner. This was not a sign that Simon accepted the claims of Christ; instead, it appears he was only seeking opportunity to examine Jesus more closely, as he coldly omitted the ordinary attention usually shown to an invited guest.

As the men were lying around the table in typical oriental fashion, a sinful woman entered and, in deep repentance and with utmost respect, began to bathe the feet of Jesus with her tears. Perhaps she had been listening for a word of hope when Jesus invited those who were heavy laden to come unto Him for rest. Not having a cloth, she wiped His feet with her hair; then she kissed His feet and anointed them with costly perfume.

It was considered improper for a rabbi to talk to a woman—especially a woman whose unbound hair testified to her soiled reputation and profession. Wrapped in the smug and self-righteous robes of his sect, Simon watched the scene and thought, "If this fellow were a prophet, he would have known who and what manner of woman this is that is touching him, for she is a sinner."

Jesus knew Simon's thoughts and presented an illustration to him. "A creditor had two debtors. One owed five hundred pence while the other owed fifty. When they had nothing to pay, the creditor forgave each one. Which of them will love the creditor the most?"

"I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most," replied Simon. Simon's correct response gave Jesus ample opportunity to contrast the action of Simon and the sinful woman.

Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little (Luke 7:44-47).

The woman, considered by many to be Mary Magdalene, acknowledged her many sins and found forgiveness at the feet of Christ. Her actions demonstrated her great love. Likewise, Simon's behavior manifested his lack of love. Self-righteousness so blinded Simon that he failed to recognize his debt to Jesus.

Jesus turned to the woman and said, "Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke 7:48-50). His statement brought peace and joy to the woman's troubled soul, but consternation to the men who sat with Him at meat. "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" they asked within themselves.

### **Another Tour of Galilee**

Following this incident, Jesus' work took a deeper hold in the hearts of the people. The miracle at Nain had attracted wide attention. His preaching had great appeal and reached some of the worst sinners, drawing them back from lives of depravity. To extend His ministry, Jesus began a systematic tour through the province, city by city, village by village. The Twelve were with Him, but He did the heralding and evangelizing. His theme was the good news of the kingdom of God. The tour was underwritten by the first "ladies auxiliary," and headed by Mary Magdalene, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, and Susanna, who were also witnesses of Jesus' divine power.

### **Accused by the Pharisees**

When Jesus returned to Capernaum after His tour of the cities of Galilee, He entered into the house of Simon. The multitude came together again in such numbers, anxious to see and hear and be healed, that Jesus and His apostles could not find time or place to rest and have their meals. So great was the tension that some of His friends got overanxious about Him. The fact that the enemies of Jesus had arrived from Jerusalem and were spreading slander about Him "that He was crazy," reinforced their anxiety. The Master went about His activities so intensely, that some of His friends began to agree with the Pharisees' interpretation "that He was becoming overbalanced mentally." They went out to lay hold of Him and by gentle violence remove Him from the intensity of His movement.

At this time the Pharisees brought to Jesus a man who was blind, dumb, and demon possessed. Jesus healed him, performing three simultaneous miracles in such an easy and simple way that the people were beside themselves when they saw the man with restored sight, fully aware, and speaking coherently.

In their amazement, the people questioned, "Is not this the Son of David?" The miracles Jesus performed testified to His deity. Yet, the Pharisees rejected His claims. How were the people to reconcile this situation? They had been taught all their lives to follow the teaching of their religious leaders. Now that teaching conflicted with what they perceived as signs of divinity.

The Pharisees heard the question of the people and rendered a swift, vindictive response: “This fellow does not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.” They did not attempt to deny that Jesus had performed a miracle; they simply attributed it to the power of Satan.

Jesus offered three explanations to prove this accusation of the Pharisees false.

1. Division leads to destruction and unity is necessary for preservation. If Jesus had received power from Satan and used that power against him, then Satan’s kingdom would fall. Naturally, Satan would not grant power that would result in his own destruction.
2. Exorcists existed in Israel, and the Jews deemed them God’s gift to the nation. If the Pharisees recognized the ability to cast out demons as being from God, then they should not accuse Jesus of being demon possessed. If He used the Spirit of God to cast out demons, then the Pharisees must conclude that His offer of the kingdom was genuine and He was its bona fide King.
3. A robber cannot enter a guarded citadel without having subdued the guard. Therefore, if Christ could enter Satan’s stronghold, then His power was greater than Satan’s. Satan could not grant power stronger than what he possessed. Since Christ’s power was greater than Satan’s, then the conclusion had to be that Christ’s power was from God. If that were true, then the kingdom of God had come unto the people. Consequently, the answer to their earlier question had to be, “Yes, this is the Son of David, the promised Messiah.”

Jesus then cautioned the Pharisees to be careful about their attitude concerning Him. The power of God was being manifested in their midst in those wonderful cures. Their attitude toward Him determined whether they were on God’s side or Satan’s. “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matthew 12:30).

Jesus followed this word of caution with a sharp countercharge of blasphemy against the Spirit. He warned there is a limit to God’s tolerance of mankind’s antagonism against the Spirit of God. These men were mentally convinced that Jesus was the representative of the kingdom of God, yet in the very face of the fact, they attributed His works, done through the Spirit of God, to satanic power. Such blasphemy would never be pardoned, neither in this age nor in the one to come.

The Pharisees had determined to reject Jesus, whatever proofs He might offer of His divine mission. Their prejudice and self-interest blinded them; they deliberately refused to be convinced. Their consciences had been deadened; their hearts were now incapable of repentance. They willfully and deliberately showed enmity and antagonism toward Jesus by blaspheming the Spirit of God. Eternal sin is an adversary of the manifest work of the Spirit of God, attributing it to Satan. (See Hebrews 6:4-10.)

### **Scribes and Pharisees Demand a Sign**

Visiting emissaries from Jerusalem probably pushed some of the local Pharisees to the front, asking Jesus to substantiate His implied claim to be the representative of the kingdom of God, the Messiah, by showing them some sign. With bland hypocrisy, they expressed their wish to see Him perform a miracle that might resolve doubts about His messiahship. The people expected that the Messiah, when he came, would repeat the great deeds and miracles of Moses and Joshua. The pressure of the request was in fact that the people thought Jesus should be willing to do this if He were the Messiah.

Instead of the miracle they requested, He gave them a spiritual sign of His sacrificial life, terminating in His atoning death and three days in the tomb. This sign of the prophet Jonah was what they needed, but not what they desired. (See Matthew 12:40.) Jesus next began to declare future judgment and condemnation on them by contrasting them with the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba.

### **Christ's Mother Takes Him Home**

While Jesus was speaking to the crowd, word came to Him that His mother and brothers sought to speak to Him. These children of Mary and Joseph had been friendly toward Jesus earlier in His ministry (John 2:12), but after the Jews' rejection of His claim to messiahship at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-31), they seem to have developed a disbelief of His claims. Later they ridiculed Him, calling Him the "Secret Messiah" (John 7:5).

Jesus did not stop His work, but made use of the occasion to lay down a far-reaching principle that referred not only to His own ministry but to all laborers in His kingdom. He asked, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" Then stretching forth His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew 12:48-50). By doing so, He clearly indicated that all human relationships must be subordinated to higher spiritual relationships of the kingdom. He had entered the earthly family in order to found the spiritual family. They who do the will of God are His true kindred, for they have been born of the Spirit. His earthly family failed to understand Him and His mission.

## **Chapter 6**

# **THE FIRST GROUP OF PARABLES**



### Robertson's Sections 64-68

Jesus had used parables occasionally in the earlier part of His ministry. Following the encounters with the Pharisees and the visit of His mother and her children, Jesus adopted this style of teaching and used it frequently.

A parable has been simply described as “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” Ralph Reynolds expounds on the nature of a parable in *Life of Christ III* of the International Alpha Bible Course.

Certainly a parable is a story—a created story of something that might have happened. It is a story that has been told for the definite purpose of making some truth clear. Therefore, it is an illustration to throw light upon some doctrine. A parable is usually a short story that is allegorical in nature. An allegory is the description of one thing under the image of another.<sup>17</sup>

Dwight Pentecost offers further insight.

A parable is a literary device and is used to teach by means of transference. In order to make it possible to discover truth in the unknown realm, something familiar is transferred from the known realm to the unknown realm. . . . While an allegory may or may not be true to life, a parable is always true to life.<sup>18</sup>

In the hands of Jesus, the parable became a vehicle of instruction and warning, of comfort and condemnation.

Why did Jesus teach in parables? When the disciples posed this question, Jesus' enigmatic reply may have added to their confusion and aroused further curiosity.

Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand (Matthew 13:11-13).

A parable must be interpreted to be understood. It takes divine revelation to understand the truths brought out in parables. When Jesus taught in parables, He gave simple stories that were interesting and easily remembered. By doing so, He accomplished four things.

1. He gained and held the attention of the people and instilled vital truths in a concrete form that would be easily remembered.
2. He helped His disciples understand the failure of His ministry to reach and convert vast multitudes. For the sake of their own future ministries, the disciples had to understand that the message and messenger are not responsible for the lack of response; the fault

lies with the condition of the hearer. Without this realization, they would be devastated by their disappointments.

3. He sifted the hearers. Those spiritually sensitive would understand the truths being imparted; the spiritually dull would be left in darkness.
4. He avoided the offensiveness, but not the effectiveness of direct rebuke.

How may we understand parables? Parables are not to be interpreted literally. They have a spiritual meaning that must be understood by divine revelation. There are two things about which one must be cautioned.

1. Doctrines must not be formed on the basis of parables alone. Parables illustrate doctrines and make them clear, but are not a foundation for formulating dogma.
2. Never make a parable out of a literal, historic story. An example would be the story of the beggar named Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). Jesus never gave the names of the characters in parables. Therefore, stories such as the one about Lazarus must be accepted as literal accounts of something that actually happened.

In the discourse recorded in Matthew 13 and Mark 4, Jesus taught by parables. How many He gave is not known. Matthew stated, “And he spake many things unto them in parables” (Matthew 13:3). Mark wrote, “And with many such parables spake he the word unto them” (Mark 4:33). Three accounts of this session, however, list eight different parables, each of which illustrates some phase of the kingdom of God. The eight may be grouped in four pairs: the parables of the sower and the seed; the parables of the tares and the net; the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven; and the parables of the buried treasure and the pearl of great price.

The kingdom parables teach many truths regarding the value of salvation that places us into the kingdom of God. Here are a few of these truths.

1. Jesus paid a great price to purchase the church.
2. The sinner must surrender all in order to be saved.
3. Jesus is the one pearl of great price.
4. In the kingdom there will be many false members who will remain there until the judgment day.
5. The church will have a small beginning but will enjoy tremendous growth.

### **Parable of the Sower**

(Mark 4:3-25; Matthew 13:3-23; Luke 8:5-18)

Perhaps a better name for the story commonly called “The Parable of the Sower” would be “The Parable of the Soils,” for the emphasis is upon the different types of earth. Christ likened the soil to the heart of the individual and thereby explained the varied responses to His ministry of

sowing the seed (the Word of God). Some refuse to hear because their hearts are hardened (rocky soil). Others receive the word with joy but do not continue as they lack spiritual depth (shallow soil). And others allow the cares of life and materialism (thorns) to choke out the seed. But some seed produces an abundant harvest (good ground). The same seed is always sown; the factor that determines the size of the harvest is the condition of the ground.

### **Parable of the Seed**

(Mark 4:26-29)

Mark recorded the Parable of the Seed that is supplemental to the Parable of the Sower. In the Parable of the Seed (Mark 4:26-29), Christ pointed out to the disciples—and to all who follow Him—that the resulting crop would be the results of the life in the seed and not a direct result of their own efforts. Too often the sowers try to take the credit for the abundant harvest.

### **Parable of the Tares**

(Matthew 13:24-30)

In the Parable of the Tares, Jesus likened the kingdom to a field of wheat in which an enemy sowed tares. This teaches that false seed will be sown alongside the seed of the Word of God. The tares look entirely like wheat until the real grain appears. However, at the time of harvest, the two will be separated and the tares will be cast into the fire and burned. We must ever be on guard against Satan spreading false doctrine. At the judgment, God will separate those who have followed His Word from those who have accepted the lies of Satan. Until that time, the two will live side by side.

This is one of the few parables that Jesus interpreted for His listeners. (See Matthew 13:36-43.)

1. The field is the world.
2. The good seed is the children of the kingdom.
3. The tares are the children of the devil.
4. The harvest is the end of the world.
5. The reapers are the angels.

### **Parable of the Mustard Seed**

(Mark 4:30-32; Matthew 12:31-32)

The Parable of the Mustard Seed shows that the kingdom of God will grow from a small beginning until it fills the earth. The illustration likens the enlarged kingdom to a tree that provides shelter for the birds of the air. The birds represent the nations who will be blessed in the tremendous growth of the kingdom.

### **Parable of the Leaven**

(Luke 13:20-21; Matthew 13:33-35)

According to Dr. Pentecost, the Parable of the Leaven emphasizes the leavening process. When the yeast is introduced into the flour, it begins a steady, irreversible process. The yeast continues its work until the whole lump is leavened.<sup>19</sup> The kingdom of God operates by an internal force, the Holy Ghost. Edersheim states that “the Kingdom of God, when received within, would seem like leaven hid, but would gradually pervade, assimilate, and transform the whole of our common life.”<sup>20</sup> However, an alternate interpretation, based on such verses as I Corinthians 5:6, likens leaven to false doctrine.<sup>21</sup>

After the Parable of the Leaven, Jesus took His disciples into the house and explained the Parable of the Tares. Then He imparted other parables to them.

### **Parable of the Hidden Treasure**

(Matthew 13:44)

Jesus said the kingdom was like a man who found a treasure hidden in a field and then sold all he had to buy the treasure. This parable has two widely accepted interpretations. First, the hidden treasure is the Jewish church, those members of the household of Israel who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and obeyed His word. In this parable, Jesus taught that a multitude from the nation of Israel, God’s peculiar possession (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 14:2; Psalm 135:4) scattered throughout the world (the field), would be redeemed by His shed blood. The second interpretation is that the hidden treasure is Christ. The sinner who comes to Christ must surrender all and place all on the altar before he can have the treasure of salvation.

### **The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price**

(Matthew 13:45-46)

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price is similar to the story of the hidden treasure. It also has two accepted interpretations. First, the pearl is the Gentile church. Frequently in Scripture, the sea represents the Gentile nations. This parable shows that God will get His treasure (church), not only from Israel, but also from the nations of the world. Second, the pearl is Jesus. In order for a man to have Jesus, he must lay all upon the altar and surrender it to Him.

### **The Parable of the Net**

(Matthew 13:47-50)

The Parable of the Net teaches a message similar to that of the Parable of the Tares. While many may come into the kingdom (the net), not all are acceptable. There will be a final separation or judgment.

At the conclusion of the discourse, Jesus asked the disciples if they understood what He had taught them. He then likened them to a householder who brings both new and old things from his treasure. They could draw from the ancient prophecies as well as the newly revealed truths of the kingdom. As true Christian teachers, they must be wise conservators of the old facts and realities while receiving with open minds the new truth.

The principles of the parables can be summarized in seven points.

1. This present age with its kingdom will be characterized by the sowing of seed (the gospel), to which there will be varying responses depending upon the condition of the soil (the hearts of the hearers).
2. The harvest will result from the life that is innate in the seed, not by any special ability or feat of the sowers.
3. There is false sowing.
4. Although it had a small beginning, the kingdom will have tremendous growth.
5. The kingdom will not be external but internal (the Parable of the Leaven).
6. God will gather a peculiar treasure to Himself through this present age.
7. The age will end in judgment that will separate the righteous from the unrighteous. The righteous will enter the millennial kingdom while the sinful will be excluded.

## **JESUS STILLS THE TEMPEST**

Evening had fallen by the time Jesus concluded His instruction. The multitude continued to press Him, so He suggested to the Twelve that they cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Aboard the boat Jesus sank in weariness near the stern and fell into a deep sleep. This is the only time the Gospels speak of Jesus sleeping. The exhaustion that prevailed over His physical frame aptly demonstrated His humanity.

Suddenly a fierce storm arose upon the sea. Waves lashed violently at the boat, which began to fill rapidly with water. Panic seized the disciples. In great fear, they rushed to shake Jesus. “Master,” they cried, “carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38).

The sleepy form arose and stood as almighty God. With the authority of the Creator, Jesus rebuked the wind and then commanded the sea to be still. “And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mark 4:39). He then turned to the disciples and asked, “Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?” (Mark 4:40).

Through the fright of their near disaster, the disciples marveled at Jesus. “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41). Although the band accepted Jesus as the Messiah, they failed to grasp fully the fact that He was more than just a man. He was eternal God, the Creator of the elements, incarnated in human flesh!

## **THE HEALING OF THE DEMONIACS NEAR GADARA**

The boat landed near the village of Gergesa that was of the district of Gadara in Perea. And when he [Jesus] was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones (Mark 5:2-5).

The demoniac saw Jesus and ran to worship Him, but a demon spoke through him: “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not” (Mark 5:7).

Jesus commanded the demon to depart and demanded to know his name. “My name is Legion: for we are many,” came the reply. (A Roman legion consisted of six thousand soldiers.) The demon then requested to be permitted to enter into a nearby herd of about two thousand swine. The hogs went berserk, rushed down the steep hill into the sea, and drowned.

When the news of the incident reached the city, the people came to Jesus. They found the transformed demoniac, clothed, in his right mind, and sitting at the feet of Jesus. In great fear, the people begged Jesus to depart from their midst.

As Jesus prepared to return across the lake, the former demoniac begged to be allowed to accompany Him. (Matthew mentioned two demoniacs who met Jesus; the accounts in Mark and Luke seem to center on the one man who made this request.) While the man’s desire just to be with Jesus was commendable, the Master did not grant his request. Instead, He told the man to return home and tell of the good things the Lord had done for him. What a witness Jesus left behind to the Gadarene multitude who loved their sins, demons, and pigs more than they loved Him!

## **MORE MIRACLES IN CAPERNAUM**

A large and expectant crowd welcomed Jesus as He returned to Capernaum from across the Sea of Galilee. The crowd continued to swell as the news of Jesus’ appearing spread throughout the city. Jairus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, made his way through the crowd and approached Jesus. Jairus was agitated because his only child, a twelve-year-old girl, was at the point of death. Dismissing his pride, the distraught father prostrated himself before Jesus, beseeching Him to come and lay His hand on the child that she might live. Such a request showed faith in Jesus’ ability to heal.

A large crowd continued to press around Jesus as He made His way to Jairus’s home. In the mass of humanity was a woman who had suffered from an issue of blood for twelve years. (Some authorities believe she was a Gentile since a Jewish woman’s ceremonial uncleanness would have prevented her from being in a crowd.<sup>22</sup>) She believed that if she could but touch the hem of Jesus’ garment, she would be made whole. With fierce determination, she forced her way through the crowd until she could reach out and touch His clothing. Immediately she was healed. Jesus felt the healing power flow from Him and asked who had touched Him. Fearfully, the woman made herself known. Jesus kindly replied, “Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole” (Matthew 9:22).

When the crowd arrived at Jairus’s home, a messenger told him there was no need to bother the Master anymore, for his daughter was already dead. Jesus turned to Jairus and told him not to fear, just believe. Then, taking Peter, James, and John with Him—this was the first time the trio was singled out—Jesus and Jairus entered the house where the mourners were already wailing.

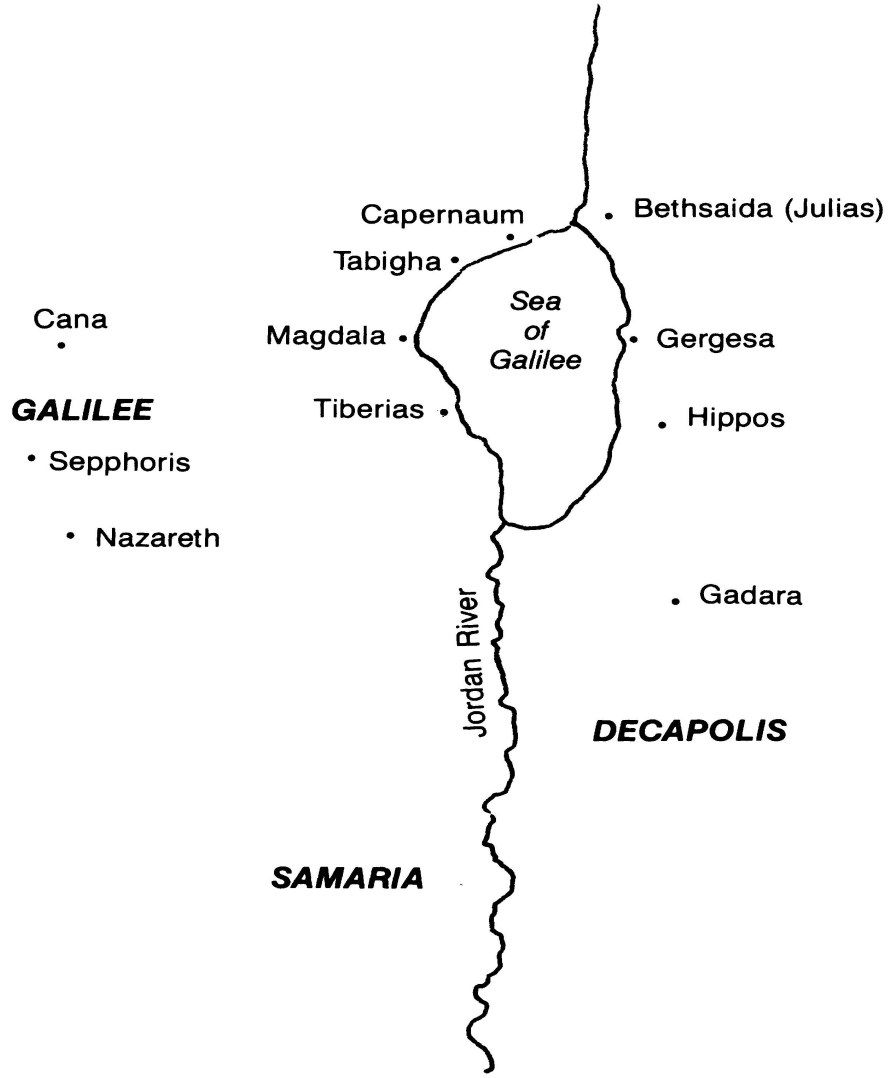
“Why do you wail and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping,” He told the crowd. They responded with laughs and jeers.

After putting the mourners out, Jesus led the three disciples and the parents to where the child lay. Taking the girl by her hand, He said, “Damsel, I say unto you arise.” She immediately arose and He commanded that something be given her to eat.

After leaving Jairus’s home, two blind men followed Jesus, crying, “Have mercy on us, thou son of David.” In response to their faith, Jesus touched their eyes and healed them. He then gave strict instructions that they should tell no man about it. However, they spread His fame abroad in all that land.

After the blind men, a dumb man possessed of demons approached Christ. To the utter amazement of the multitude, Jesus cast out the demons and the man spoke. The people marveled, saying, “It was never so seen in Israel,” but the Pharisees said, “He casts out devils by the prince of the devils.”

**THE REGION OF  
GALILEE**





## Chapter 7

# THE GALILEAN MINISTRY PART II

Robertson's Sections 69-95

### FINAL VISIT TO NAZARETH

Jesus left Capernaum with His disciples to pay a last visit to His native town of Nazareth before launching His third and final preaching tour of Galilee. His previous visit to Nazareth had been ugly and violent. The people had rejected Jesus and maliciously attempted to push Him over a cliff (Luke 4:16-31). He now came back after many months to offer His fellow townspeople a second chance.

Using Nazareth as a starting point, He launched His campaign in the province, sending the Twelve out two by two into all the villages and towns. On the Sabbath, He went into the synagogue for worship, as was His custom. As He taught, many amazed and dubious hearers said, "Who gave this fellow such wisdom?" (See Mark 6:2.) On His first visit to Nazareth, Jesus had not performed miracles, but now He healed a few sick folk that the people might see and believe. However, the Nazarenes refused to believe. "Isn't this the son of the widow Mary and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? Aren't His sisters living here with us in Nazareth?"

Jesus replied, "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house" (Mark 6:4). He then left Nazareth once and for all. They had sadly lost their last opportunity to believe and receive salvation.

### THE THIRD MISSIONARY TOUR

From Nazareth, Jesus descended to the populous Plain of Esdraelon and began His missionary campaign with the disciples, who had been serving their apprenticeship in missionary work up to this time. They went through villages and towns, teaching, preaching, and healing the sick. Jesus beheld the crowds with compassion. He used two beautiful illustrations to characterize their spiritual state. (See Matthew 9:36-38.) First, He said the crowd was like an abandoned flock or like sheep having no shepherd. Second, He described them as an abundant, overripe harvest that was ready for reaping. The greatness of the harvest stood out in striking contrast to the scarcity of laborers. The way to meet this need was to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send laborers into the harvest. Jesus well knew that one who sincerely prays for the Lord to supply workers will be more ready to respond should the Lord call him personally to the task. (It has been said that one should not pray "Lord, send laborers" without praying Isaiah's prayer, "Lord, here am I, send me.")

The Master now came to a new juncture in His method of ministry. Up to this point He had gone out with the disciples, but now He sent them forth two by two as missionaries. He commissioned them with power over unclean spirits to heal every kind of disease and to herald the kingdom of God. Before sending them forth, Jesus defined the sphere and character of their work and gave them minute instructions as to their equipment, conduct, method, and approach to their task: First, they were not to go “in the way of the Gentiles,” since Jesus would send them later on a worldwide campaign. Second, they were not to be troubled about food or raiment, but they were to trust completely in God for these things. Thus Jesus laid down a permanent principle for His workers for all time. The laborer must not be anxious about his material support. God takes the responsibility of providing for His worthy workmen. (See Matthew 10:9-10.) Third, their coming unto any house should mean a blessing to that household. It was their responsibility to make this true by their conduct and expressions of peace.

In the second part of His instructions, Jesus warned of persecutions the apostles would encounter and gave directions as to how they should meet them (Matthew 10:16-23). Some of these warnings undoubtedly pointed forward to bitter persecutions suffered by the disciples after the Ascension at the hands of heathen governors and kings. The workers were to be wise as serpents in cautiousness, and like doves in simplicity, guilelessness, and purity of heart. He hastened next to arm them against fear and anxiety. So sweeping and universal would be the opposition of the forces of darkness in the world, they would be hated by all men because of the name of Jesus and their identification with Him.

Jesus added further encouragement for the persecuted by citing His own example. He had already been accused of being in partnership with Beelzebub; the disciples should not expect a better lot for themselves than that of their Teacher. They were to hold back nothing of His teachings through fear but to proclaim them boldly in the most public manner. The Twelve were to speak out and act as His disciples should under all circum-stances and at every risk.

Jesus stated that the fundamental cause of persecution is found in the very nature of His principles, which, when proclaimed, would cause divisions and conflicts among the hearers, even in the bosom of families. His kingdom of lights is uncompromising in its antagonism to the power of satanic darkness. The Master concluded His instructions to the apostles by putting a premium on the kindness others showed to any one of them.

Having made an end of detailed instructions to each of the disciples, Jesus resumed His own labors. He probably followed after them in many cities, and after the campaign was over, the apostles came back to meet Him in Capernaum (Mark 6:30) to tell Him about their work and experiences.

## **HEROD ANTIPAS’S GUILTY FEARS**

The fame of Jesus had now spread over Galilee as never before and penetrated even into the palace of Herod Antipas in Tiberius. Riddled with guilt, Herod assumed that John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, had been resurrected and was performing the miracles attributed to Jesus.

After Jesus received the news of the death of John and His disciples had returned to Him in Capernaum, He embarked with them in a boat and passed over the sea to the other side for rest.

## **THE GALILEAN CRISIS**

The period known as the “Galilean Crisis” encompasses the first retirement and its related events, the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-14), the walking on the stormy sea (John 6:16-21), the sermon on the Bread of Life in Capernaum (John 6:22-59), and the crisis resulting from this discourse (John 6:60-71). In the ensuing six months, Jesus’ main purpose would be to give His apostles special instructions and training.

The disciples returned to Capernaum with glowing reports of their campaign experiences. Their arrival was a signal to the multitudes who soon gathered again with their sick to be healed. Jesus told His disciples, “Come apart into a desert place and rest a little while.” When they cast off in the boat, the crowd saw them and recognized them. They could not bear to let Jesus out of their sight, so they followed on foot by the land route to the north of the lake. Others from various cities and towns joined the throng until it swelled to a vast multitude of over five thousand men, besides the women and children.

Before the large crowd arrived, Jesus withdrew to a mountain retreat near the southern extremity of the little plain for a period of meditation. This period was soon cut short and when He came forth, He saw the great mass of humanity moving toward Him. His heart stirred with compassion, for He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. They had plenty of so-called religious leaders, but none of them fed the people spiritually. Jesus welcomed the people warmly and began to teach them, healing many.

### **Feeding of the Five Thousand**

The day began to wear away and the apostles became hungry and anxious to send the crowd away. The proper hour for lunch had passed and the sun was inclining toward the west. Then came one of Jesus’ greatest miracles. With five barley loaves and two small fishes, Jesus fed the five thousand men, plus the women and children. The Gospel writer gave more prominence to the loaves in the narrative because the miracle set forth in symbolic form what Jesus was to be for the multitudes of the earth—the Bread of Life! (The miracle laid a foundation for the sermon to follow in Capernaum on the morrow.)

The record of this miracle is one of the best attested of all, being narrated in harmonious detail in all four Gospels. The great event caused the participants to say, “This is certainly the looked-for prophet who is coming into the world, the prophet like Moses.”

Jesus knew the mindset of the crowd. They were looking for a national king—Messiah—and they were on the verge of seizing Him and proclaiming Him their king. Jesus avoided this by instructing His disciples to get back in the boat and cross the sea to Bethsaida. He then sent the crowd away and retreated to a secluded mountain to pray.

## Rescue on the Stormy Sea

As the disciples sailed across the Sea of Galilee, a fierce wind whipped up a storm similar to the one in which Jesus had calmed the wind and the sea. But this time Jesus was not with them in the boat. They were alone, rowing frantically as the wind howled and the waves threatened to swamp the boat. Meanwhile, Jesus prayed in solitude on the land (Mark 6:47). Yet He could see the Twelve and their torturous pulling on the oars and futile bailing as the relentless waves drenched them and the wind beat against them. The darkness of the night did not hinder His vision when His beloved disciples were in peril.

In the fourth watch, between 3:00 AM and 6:00 AM, when the disciples thought they were about to perish, they saw an apparition coming toward them, walking on the water. They became even more afraid but the wind hurled away their cries. Then they heard the beloved voice of their Master: “Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid” (Mark 6:50). He had come to save them in their hour of dire need! The storm still raged, but their distress vanished.

Peter asked to walk on the water to meet Jesus. As long as he kept his eyes on the Master, all was well. However, when he took his eyes off Jesus and looked down at the waves, he began to sink. He immediately cried out and Jesus reached down and rescued him. When Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat, the wind and storm ceased and they quickly made it to land. The disciples fell down before Him in worship, saying, “Truly you are God’s son.” This lasting memory would strengthen them in many subsequent storms.

Before continuing our study of the life of Christ, we need to ask two questions.

1. Why were the disciples out in the midst of the sea?

It was because they were obeying their Master’s command to go to Bethsaida on the other side of the sea. From this we learn that obstacles will often arise while we are trying to do the will of God. Many “storms” will confront us as we earnestly seek to obey what God has told us to do. The howling winds and the billowy waves do not mean we have missed the will of God. They arise only to deter us and to test our determination. In the midst of such critical times, we can rest assured that Jesus will come to our rescue.

2. Why did Jesus walk on the water?

It was further proof to the disciples that He was the mighty God, for Job 9:8 states it is God “which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.”

## Reception in Gennesaret

The reception given Christ when the boat landed in Gennesaret summarized Jesus’ popularity as a result of His extended ministry in Galilee. The signs He had done were widely known. Wherever He went, multitudes came to Him for help. What He did in the physical realm, however, was only a shadow of what He wanted to do in the spiritual realm.

## The Collapse of the Galilean Campaign

The crowds were waiting for Jesus when He returned the next day to the synagogue in Capernaum. The feeding of the five thousand and the campaign of the apostles had raised the messianic expectation to its highest pitch. In their excitement and anticipation, the people were ready to proclaim Jesus the new king of Israel and overthrow the Roman forces.

Jesus was obliged to meet this situation promptly by making two things clear.

1. The messianic kingdom was not one of meat and drink or material wealth and power. He was not a political Messiah, nor was His kingdom political.

Jesus . . . said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed (John 6:26-27).

Eternal life and entry into the messianic kingdom were synonymous with the Jews. Yet, the new kingdom was totally different from what the people expected. Their citizenship in the kingdom would not be based on anything they could do, but it would be founded on belief in Him whom the Father had sent.

The people then asked for a sign and cited the example of Moses who gave their fathers bread from heaven to eat. Because of the recent miraculous feast, the people likened Jesus to Moses, failing to realize that it was God who provided the manna in the wilderness, not Moses.

Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:35-40).

In John 6:48, Jesus again declared that He was the Bread of Life. He identified His own life, which was to be offered up in sacrificial death, as the means of life for the world, setting forth the central fact of the atoning death for the spiritual life of mankind. He declared He was the Bread of Life come down from Heaven, but the people did not understand.

2. He further declared He was the Bread of Life for the world and identified His sacrificial and atoning death as the bread to be broken in a fleshly body (John 6:44-65).

By this declaration, Jesus sought to push away all superficial bread seekers who would never come to the truth. In rabbinical literature, sacred instruction was called “bread” and those who eagerly absorbed it were said to “eat it.” For example, Jeremiah stated, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them” (Jeremiah 15:16). Jewish literature was perfectly familiar with the symbolism of “eating” as an entire acceptance of and incorporation with the truth. It ought not to have been difficult for most of the hearers to comprehend the main points of this discourse.

At this juncture came the final break with the masses, as it does so often when disillusionment as to the real sacrificial nature of Christ’s life sets in. From this moment on, many of the professed disciples turned away. Then came the acid test of the Twelve. Would they desert or stand for Jesus? “Will you also leave?” He asked, and they replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Jesus answered, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70). This was the first time Jesus clearly spoke of His betrayer and significantly so in connection with the first definite prophecy of His atoning death.

### **Further Opposition from the Pharisees**

The Pharisaic opposition did not lose its good opportunity to escalate the fight. Once again they launched their attack, under what seemed to them from all outward appearances, to be more favorable circumstances. They had witnessed Jesus’ disciples disregarding the observance of the elders’ tradition concerning ceremonial defilement of the hands. Before and after every meal and whenever they came from the marketplace or town square, the Jews had to wash or bathe according to certain ceremonial restrictions. These traditional rites and ordinances stood higher in the esteem of the Jews than their Scriptures. Where the Scriptures and tradition seemed opposed, the Jews treated the latter as the higher authority.

It aggravated the Pharisees and scribes that the disciples were indifferent to the Pharisaic traditions, as evidenced by the fact that they did not wash their hands according to the prescribed rules. The Jews asked, “Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread” (Matthew 15:2). Jesus answered with an example of how the Pharisees used tradition to bypass a biblical mandate.

Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me: and honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:3-9).

Jesus then called the multitude and explained that it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles a man, not what is ingested.

The conflict with the Pharisees left the disciples uneasy. In Matthew 15:13-14, Jesus quieted their fears. Then He granted Peter's request for an explanation of the parable.

Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man (Matthew 15:16-20).

The opposition from the Pharisees had come from evil hearts.

## **THE SECOND RETREAT**

### **In the Coast of the Heathen**

The encounter with the Pharisees had sharply revealed the spiritual duties of the disciples. For the next several months, a large part of Jesus' time would be spent giving special instructions to the disciples so they could come to a clearer understanding of His character and mission.

There was another reason Jesus withdrew to the area of Tyre and Sidon. His enemies had closed the doors of the synagogue in Judea to His preaching (John 7:1) and had now redoubled their efforts to do the same in Galilee. He had defended His disciples against the subtle attack of these enemies, leaving His foes defeated and humiliated before the people. Thus embittered, they would doubtless resort to violence to do away with Him. The wiser policy was to withdraw temporarily from the vicinity of Tiberius and seek rest and privacy with His apostles in another location not too distant from the scene of action. The nearest place would be the border and region of Phoenicia, about thirty-five miles to the northwest.

Jesus did not go to Phoenicia to initiate a public ministry. To do so would veto His work among the Jews due to their fanatical attitude toward the Gentiles. It was impossible, however, for Him to hide. Soon a Syrophenician woman, a descendant of the Canaanites that had inhabited this area before the Israelites had conquered the Promised Land, came to plead for mercy for her daughter. In extreme distress, she cried, "O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil" (Matthew 15:22).

As strange as it may seem, Jesus did not respond to her request. When His disciples came, they insisted that He send her away, for she cried out unto them. Nevertheless she continued her pleading until Jesus finally turned and said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Undeterred by the rebuff, the woman worshiped Jesus and beseeched Him, crying, "Lord, help me!" Jesus responded, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." He was trying the woman's faith and humility. He wanted her to recognize that it was no little thing she was professing and asking, so he reminded her of the wide breach between the Jews and the

Gentiles. The Jews thought of themselves as God's children and the Gentiles as "dogs." She answered, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." In reality, she was asking for what the children (Israel) were rejecting.

Moved by her response, Jesus replied, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Through humility, persistent prayer, devoted love, and great faith, the woman secured the physical cure of her daughter. This incident reveals Jesus to us as the master interpreter of the human heart, the skilled teacher of His apostles, and the wise builder of His kingdom.

## **THE THIRD RETREAT**

### **The Feeding of the Four Thousand in Decapolis**

Jesus departed from the coast of Tyre and Sidon and went to Decapolis, the area of the ten allied Greek cities that lay east of the Jordan. The people there brought a deaf and partly dumb man to Jesus to be healed. Consequently, crowds began to gather, bringing their lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others. Jesus poured His love out to them in healing until they were filled with amazement at seeing the dumb speak, the cripple made whole, the lame walk, and the blind see.

The multitude continued to grow. For three days, the people held on, sleeping on the ground at night and eagerly pressing around the great miracle worker by day that they might witness every wonder and catch every word. Then moved with compassion for the multitude, Jesus took seven loaves of bread and a few fish, gave thanks, and fed the four thousand men, plus the women and children. After the people had eaten their fill, they took up seven baskets full of broken meat.

Jesus then sent the people away and sailed with His disciples to the coast of Magdala.

## **OPPOSITION OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES IN MAGDALA**

As soon as the boat touched the lake's western shore, the Pharisees, accompanied by the Sadducees, came to meet Jesus and the disciples. They began at once to argue with Jesus. Their motive was to tempt Him to do or say something He would afterward regret. Many of the people believed Jesus was the great prophet and were hoping secretly that He might be the Messiah. The best way His enemies knew to discredit Him was to ask for a "sign from heaven." There had been enough signs and miracles to convince any open mind, but the Pharisees and the Sadducees had attributed these to the prince of demons.

Jesus absolutely refused to meet their third demand for a sign. It would have been wrong to accede to the demand simply to please His enemies. And even if He had done so, they would have again attributed it to the devil. Jesus had provided many unmistakable signs: the fulfillment of the Scriptures; the events of the day; the preaching of John; and His own preaching, miracles, and life that pointed to His messiahship. If the Pharisees were successful in discerning the tokens of the weather (Matthew 16:2-4), why weren't they capable of looking around to read the signs of their



own times? If they had done so, they would have seen that soon Jerusalem would be destroyed and the Jewish state overturned.

Dr. Pentecost points out that the reason the Pharisees rejected Jesus was not for lack of a sign.

The reason for the leaders' rejection was not insufficient proof of Christ's person by adequate signs but rather because they could not interpret the signs that had been given. And He condemned them, for they had learned to interpret the weather signs in the heavens but could not interpret the signs that had come from heaven to authenticate the person of Christ. Their unbelief had blinded them, not the inadequacy of the signs (Matthew 16:1). As He had done when previously challenged to give incontrovertible proof that would convince them, Christ said the only proof that would be given would be His resurrection from the dead. This shows the importance that Christ placed upon resurrection as evidence of His person (Romans 1:4) and explains why the apostles in preaching to Israel in the Book of Acts preached the resurrection of Christ consistently.<sup>23</sup>

It was now unsafe for Jesus to remain in the area of Capernaum and Tiberias. He was outlawed in His own town and most of Galilee. He could not force His mercies on those who rejected Him. With a heavy heart, He re-embarked in the boat with His disciples and told them to set a course for Bethsaida.

## **JESUS REBUKES THE DULLNESS OF THE DISCIPLES**

The enemies of Christ had repeatedly tried to alienate His disciples from Him. The Twelve had to be warned against the seductive influence of the hypocritical enemies who, under the guise of religious zeal, were seeking to destroy Jesus. On the voyage to Bethsaida, Jesus charged them again and again to look out for the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The disciples were slow to understand. They had wholly misinterpreted His language about the leaven and applied it to the fact they had forgotten to bring bread. Their mistake in this instance in supposing Him to be speaking of natural bread was absurd and revealed the gross materialism of their thoughts when they should have been spiritually minded. Jesus turned to them with sharp rebuke (Matthew 16:8-11).

At last it dawned upon them that He was speaking of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They would beware of it from now on, and this was worth the Master's patience. Food and raiment would not occupy so large a part of their thinking, neither would they be so blind and deaf to spiritual matters. They would seek to perceive and by reflection to discern the true doctrines from the false. They would have greater faith in the providence of Jesus by treasuring up in their memories the things they had experienced with Him in the past.

Arriving in Bethsaida-Julias in the late afternoon, they spent the night there. Early the next morning, the people came, bringing a blind man and beseeching Jesus to heal him. He took the man by the hand and led him outside the city to heal him. (It was not Christ's purpose to give a

public demonstration of His person, yet He was responsive to the need of an individual who had faith in Him.) At the first touch, the man saw men as trees walking. The second touch resulted in the man seeing clearly.

## **PETER'S GREAT CONFESSION**

From Bethsaida-Julias, Jesus traveled with His disciples to the region of Caesarea-Philippi where He visited the villages in the area. He devoted most of His time, however, to confidential instruction and discussion with the Twelve. At one point when they were away from the crowd (Luke 9:18) and after their hour of prayer, they were walking along the way. Jesus asked His disciples, "Whom say the people that I am?" One answered, "John the Baptist." Another said, "Elias." A third responded, "A prophet of old risen from the dead." Jesus then went to the heart of the matter and, probing their perception, asked, "But whom say ye that I am?"

In sublime eloquence Peter summarized Jesus' nature and office, stating, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus blessed Peter for receiving this revelation.

Blessed are thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter [Petros], and upon this rock [petra] I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:17-19).

This was the first time Jesus revealed His plan to build a church. Contrary to the teaching of some groups, the "rock" upon which Jesus built His church is not the personage of Peter, but the faith of his confession (Mark 16:16). The true church is founded upon the rock of revelation of the mighty God in Christ: "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Founded upon this rock, the church will remain unconquerable even though assaulted by all the power of Hell.

Because of the confession, Peter was given the keys to the kingdom. The key was the badge of authority, for the servant who had the key to the master's storehouse had authority over all the master's goods. Note how Peter unlocked the door of the church to the Jews in Acts 2, to the Samaritans in Acts 8, and to the Gentiles in Acts 10.

## **JESUS FORETELLS HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION**

Following Peter's confession, Jesus entered into a new phase of His ministry. He had acknowledged His messiahship to His disciples, and they had definitely accepted Him as such. It was now time for further revelation to the Twelve as Jesus' death was only a little more than six months in the future. They did not fully understand any of the symbolism, for they still held the current Jewish misconceptions of the Messiah. But they who had avowed their belief in Him and loyalty to Him were now as prepared as they could be for the rude shock of His death.

From this point Jesus began to reveal to them in plain, matter-of-fact statements the reality of His approaching suffering, death, and resurrection. It was necessary for the sake of their understanding to speak openly about this matter. In the midst of the impending storm of tragedy, Jesus arched the rainbow of His resurrection, but as of yet the disciples saw only the blackness of the clouds. Jesus stated four things about His future.

1. He must leave in a little while for Jerusalem. It was impossible that a prophet should perish outside of that city, the corporate murderess of the prophets.
2. He must “suffer many things at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes.”
  - (a) He must be killed.
  - (b) He would be resurrected.

Jesus repeatedly emphasized these facts to the Twelve, trying to get them to understand.

At this juncture, Peter rebuked the Lord, saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (Matthew 16:22). Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matthew 16:23). Peter had inadvertently placed himself on the side of the great adversary by thinking after the manner of men instead of thinking according to the things of God.

### **The Cost of Discipleship**

In the light of His impending death, Jesus now began teaching the Twelve the principle that cross bearing is the fundamental law of discipleship. The essence of all highest duty, the meaning of all truest life, is found in the law of self-sacrifice. Jesus stated this law in words that have sunk into the consciousness of mankind (Matthew 16:24-26). To be a disciple, one must take up his cross day by day, deny himself, and follow Christ.

The Gospels reveal three stages in the development of a disciple: (1) Multitudes were attracted to Jesus Christ to hear His words and see His works. They came out of curiosity. Such ones are called His disciples (Matthew 5:1). We would call these the curious. (2) From the curious there were many who came to put faith in Jesus Christ (John 2:11). We would call such ones the convinced. (3) But now Christ demanded that the convinced make a commitment. We would call these the committed.<sup>24</sup>

Jesus gave three reasons why men should completely commit their lives to Him.

1. The only true safety is in Him.
2. True and eternal riches are only from God.
3. Jesus will return to earth to judge the world.

He then promised that some who were standing there would not die until they had seen the kingdom coming in power (Luke 9:27).

## The Coming of the Son of Man in This Generation

Another reason Jesus assigned to His philosophy of the disciplined life is that the Son of Man is to have the final victory. With the Crucifixion would come an enlargement of the power and glory of the kingdom of Christ. The majesty of His sacrifice would become a great light that would flare up from Calvary and continuously send out its beams through the darkness of the world and down through the centuries. The Resurrection would also demonstrate the power of the kingdom over the grave. The outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost would illustrate the power of the kingdom over the hearts and consciences of men. Jesus has been coming in judgment and glory down through the centuries and will have the final victory when He appears upon the clouds in His second advent for the final judgment.

## THE TRANSFIGURATION

The Transfiguration fitted into the progressive plan of instruction for the disciples. It served as a prediction of Jesus' resurrection and, by implication, of their own life beyond the tomb. It was to open up their understanding as to the glorious victory of the kingdom through the atoning death, resurrection, and final advent of the Messiah. It was to proclaim that the Law and the Prophets found their fulfillment in Jesus. It was to proclaim that they and we are to hear Jesus! It was also to show forth the fact that there is "Jesus only!" Colossians 2:9 states, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

During the six or eight days that followed the first lesson on the principle of the cross, Jesus went over and over the facts with the disciples, seeking to enlighten them. But they were ill prepared to receive it and unwilling to accept it. Jesus finally took Peter, James, and John up into lofty Mount Hermon. Upon arrival, they were weary and weighed down with sleep.

Jesus prayed. While He prayed, He was transfigured before them, His very raiment kindled to the dazzling brightness of the light and His face shining as the sun. (Compare this to Revelation 1:10-16.) This was a rending of the human veil to reveal the glory of God. In a glorious display of eternal majesty, deity broke through flesh and shone out. It continues to break through to those who want to see it today. Otherwise, men will never see Jesus for who He really is.

Aroused from sleep by the splendor, the disciples were filled with awe and dazzled by His glory. Then there appeared two men, Moses and Elijah, who stood with Jesus, discussing His imminent suffering and death at Jerusalem. Perhaps they discussed the numerous Old Testament types and prophecies that pertained to Calvary.

Moses and Elijah represented the old economy. Moses, its founder, represented the Law. He was the one who led the people out of the bondage of Egypt. Elijah, the best-known prophet, was taken up into Heaven in a whirlwind and was to return as the forerunner of the new dispensation. It was as if the Law and the Prophets were pouring their glory into Jesus Christ. Jesus would lead His people out in a new exodus from the bondage of sin and be the prophet of the new dispensation, calling the people to repentance and new life from God. He would accomplish this through His atoning death.

The three disciples were overcome with awe. As the vision began to fade, Peter, not really understanding what he was saying, exclaimed, “Lord, it is good for us to be here: if you will, allow us to make three tabernacles here; one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elias.” Undoubtedly Peter was thinking, “Why descend to the plain and resume the conflict? Why go to Jerusalem and die? What would be better than to remain on the mount in heavenly fellowship?” But we cannot remain on the mountaintop. Fruit grows in the valley where Jesus is the Lily of the Valley.

As Peter spoke, a white cloud of God’s shekinah glory descended on them and completely covered them. Suddenly a voice came out of the midst of the cloud: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him,” (Matthew 17:5). No longer could men find salvation in rituals, ceremonies, and forms of the old order—they must hear Him. They were to hear His message about the Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and outpouring of the Holy Ghost. They were to hear His promises and claims.

The Transfiguration taught the disciples that vicarious suffering and death were not incompatible with the Old Testament concept of the spiritual Messiah. The voice from Heaven confirmed their confession of Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. Years later Peter remembered vividly this voice when he wrote his second epistle.

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount (II Peter 1:16-18).

Jesus had taught concerning His divine nature and the necessity of His vicarious death; now, Heaven added its testimony to confirm His teaching. The disciples fell on their faces, filled with fear, until Jesus came to them, saying, “Arise and do not be afraid.” When they lifted up their eyes, they only saw Jesus, whom Paul described as the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).

Jesus charged them to tell no man about the vision until He should arise from the dead. This experience strengthened them greatly during the devastation that lay ahead and clarified their understanding after the Resurrection. But at the time of the Transfiguration they went along the way, discussing among themselves what rising from the dead should mean.

Another serious question arose about Elijah. The disciples asked why the scribes had said that Elias must come before the Messiah. Jesus replied that Elias had already appeared but the scribes did not recognize it. Then they understood that He referred to John the Baptist.

## **THE HEALING OF THE DEMONIAK BOY**

While Jesus was on Mount Hermon, the place of transfiguration, a man brought his son to be healed of demon possession. In the absence of the Master, the nine apostles, who had been

commissioned to perform similar miracles in the Galilean campaign, undertook to cast the demon from the boy. They failed! They could not do anything for him. At one time they had power over demons. What had happened?

When Jesus came down to where the nine were, the man said, “Lord, if you can . . .” The lack of faith of the nine reflected on Jesus. Of course, He could! Only one stronger than a strong man could bind the demon. And that man was God manifested in human flesh. Yet, the lack of power among the nine hindered this man’s faith. Jesus put the “if” where it belonged. He said, “If you believe . . .” The poor father had hinged the case on the ability of Jesus to cure; Jesus returned the responsibility to him, making it depend on his faith.

The man recognized that his faith was utterly weak. In desperation he cried out, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.” In response, Jesus healed the boy. He would have done the same for the nation of Israel had they placed their faith in Him.

The disciples later asked why they could not cast out the demon. Jesus replied that such acts come only as the result of prayer and fasting. This should be a lesson for all Christians to learn: when we neglect to pray and fast, we lose power with God.

The period of comparative isolation was now drawing to a close. Through the experiences of nearly six months, Jesus had led His apostles to a more intimate understanding of His own nature and the true character of His kingdom. He now returned through Galilee for a brief stay in Capernaum before going on to Judea for His last ministry and final struggle in Jerusalem.

### **JESUS AGAIN FORETELLS HIS DEATH**

Once again Jesus turned His steps southward to Galilee. Again He mentioned His death, burial, and resurrection. Nevertheless, the disciples continued to be as dense as ever, not grasping the meaning of His declaration. Their timidity prevented them from asking any questions regarding the coming tragedy. Dr. Pentecost identified the source of their confusion.

The Jews at the time of Christ were confused about the Old Testament prophecies concerning Messiah. They recognized on one hand that Messiah was to suffer, and on the other that Messiah would rule in power and glory. These two lines of revelation seemed to be contradictory. Jewish theology sought to harmonize the confusion by teaching the coming of two Messiahs: one to suffer and die, and the other to reign in power and glory. The disciples were not above accepting this popular conception . . . Christ was trying to show these men that the same Messiah who one day would reign must also suffer and die.<sup>25</sup>

### **THE PAYMENT OF THE TEMPLE TAX**

The Temple tax was a small “religious poll tax,” first instituted by Moses for the erection of the Tabernacle. At first it was payable only during a census. After the Babylonian captivity, however, it was expected annually of every Israelite over the age of twenty years. The tax was not compulsory; no one could be compelled to pay it.

Jesus claimed He was exempt from the Temple tax. The tax was redemption money for the ransom of each man’s soul. How could the Redeemer of all men pay ransom money? To pay

without claiming exemption and without explanation in the ordinary way would be to acknowledge that He was a mere subject of the kingdom. On the other hand, if He should refuse to pay it, people would think He was objecting to what all the Jews considered a religious obligation to be met cheerfully.

Through a miracle, Peter found money in a fish's mouth to pay both his tax and Jesus' tax. The purpose of the miracle was to teach the deity of Christ, to demonstrate His universal foreknowledge and supremacy over all nature. In the incident, Jesus claimed authority over the Temple and exemption from the tax that supported it because of His relationship to the One to whom the Temple was dedicated.

## **INSTRUCTION TO THE DISCIPLES**

### **A Lesson in Greatness and Humility**

A dispute arose between the Twelve as to who would have preeminence in the kingdom. They could not, in spite of all the recent teachings of Jesus concerning His suffering and death, rid themselves of the traditional beliefs about the messianic kingdom's materialistic character. Jesus knew that disciplining their temper, disposition, and will was the most difficult phase of His work in training them. He called them close to Him and began to preach with a direct thrust at their selfish ambitions and jealousies. "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last and the servant of all." Then wishing to enforce the teaching in a concrete and impressive way, He called to a little child and taking him in His arms said, "Truly I say unto you, except you turn and become as one of these little children, you may not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Thus, Jesus denounced their selfish ambitions with the same severity He used in denouncing the Pharisees. The Twelve were heading in the wrong direction and must be turned around. Nothing was more difficult in their training than getting them to recognize the claims of the law of love and expel ambition, jealousy, and envy from the heart in relationship with brethren and all men. Many who attain great excellence in prayer, in knowledge of the Word, in accomplishments and attainments of service and other virtues of the disciplined life and character fail in the area where the Twelve showed one of their greatest weaknesses. When the disciplined worker is full of ambition for place, preference, and honor, the cause is compromised in his hands and brought into contempt.

Jesus put the case so strongly that admission to the kingdom itself depends on childlike humility and unpretentiousness. The child knows no pride of rank or distinction. So the disciple must consciously put aside pride and selfish ambition for a higher position and give himself unreservedly to the work, leaving his promotion in service in the hands of the Lord. In His kingdom, the honors are given to the meek and lowly who are self-forgetful and seek a higher place only so they might serve in a greater way. There is a holy ambition for great accomplishment and service in the kingdom, but it is not hurtful to others, nor does it partake of the spirit of vainglorious egotism. By this principle they must govern their conduct if they would be His true followers, for position in the kingdom is determined by the degree of submission to Christ and the service of the disciples for Christ.

Jesus knew that ambition, jealousy, and envy would corrode the hearts of His disciples and spoil the gospel work in their lives and the lives of those to whom they would minister.

### **A Lesson in Tolerance**

In what may have been an attempt by John to divert Jesus from His rebuke, John related the incident about the man who cast out demons in Jesus' name but would not follow the disciples. The man acted out of faith in Jesus and not to gain acceptance. The disciples commanded the man to stop.

Jesus used this incident as a lesson of tolerance toward all who work for Him in any way and enjoy His manifest approval on their efforts. Jesus added, "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink" is safe-guarded by these promises, if they assume the role of humble, disciplined workers who seek the good of the kingdom and not the ends of selfish ambition. He impressed upon them the greatness of the unpretentious disciple in his humility by showing the tragedy of leading any of "these little ones" into sin. In using tolerance, we may not, however, excuse error or approve of wrong doctrine or practice.

To make the matters more solemn still, Jesus pronounced one of His infrequent woes because of the stumbling blocks. Offenses will come, but woe unto him from whence they come. It would be better to cut off one's right hand and enter Heaven maimed; it would be better to cut off one's right foot and enter Heaven halt; it would be better to pluck out one's right eye and enter Heaven one-eyed, than to allow a hand or eye or foot to be the minister of sins, and then be cast into Hell where the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched. No member of the body should be allowed to become an instrument of stumbling to them or to "His little ones," lest the offender suffer the unquenchable fire of the ages. Jesus taught that there is eternal death just as truly as there is eternal life.

Jesus wound up His sermon by giving another admonition about the little ones and about the disciples' own conduct in disputing over who should be greatest. They were the salt of the earth; but if the salt should lose its saltiness, how would it season anything? If God cares for the "lost one" who has gone astray as the sheep from the fold, how much more will He care for "each one of His little ones?"

### **A Lesson in Forgiveness**

Jesus passed on to a related subject, the proper treatment of a brother who has wronged another through unholy ambition. Jesus taught that the injured party should take the initiative and go privately to the offender. Once the offense is revealed, the guilty party should confess the error and make reconciliation. If this step does not rectify the matter, the injured brother should take one or two witnesses and once again confront the offender. If this action still does not produce reconciliation, then the matter should be taken before the assembly. Finally, if the matter is still not resolved, the offender should be disfellowshipped from the congregation.

The same principle of humble love, which Jesus urged as a remedy for self-seeking ambition that results in jealous wrangling and envious dispute, should lead the offended brother to seek the good of the offender. Strictly private dealing on the part of the offended with the offender is



required. If that attempt fails, two sympathetic and impartial brothers are brought in as assistants and witnesses in order that the offender may be convinced and led to acknowledge his fault. As the last resort, if he refuses to listen and admit his fault, the matter must be brought before the local church, which will deal with the brother, seeking to bring him to the right attitude of mind. Instead of the church hearing him, he is to hear the church. If he stubbornly refuses to listen, the church is to consider him as a heathen.

This is a great responsibility. One must ever be careful how it is used. Scandalous sin may not be tolerated in any individual member of the church without contaminating and demoralizing the whole.

Jesus added another related thought in the form of a promise in Matthew 18:19-20.

### **The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant**

The other phase of dealing with a brother who has wronged another is set forth in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. Jesus told the parable in answer to Peter's question as to how many times one should forgive his brother who had injured him. The parable teaches that there must be a readiness to forgive great and often repeated offenses. Forgiveness is not a matter of mathematics but of love and character. The parable was designed to set forth the character of forgiveness in the kingdom.

## **THREE WOULD-BE DISCIPLES**

The days of Jesus' public Galilean ministry had ended and the time of passion in Jerusalem was nearing. Luke wrote that "he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Judged by worldly standards, His ministry in Galilee had ended in failure. Judea also had closed its door to Him, so during these last months He gave Himself to the evangelization of Perea.

Three men approached Jesus, volunteering to become His disciples. The first was a scribe who stated, "Lord, I'll follow wherever you go." However, Jesus' response that He had nowhere to lay His head caused the scribe to reconsider his careless dedication. His action clearly shows that although he addressed Jesus as Lord, he had not made Him the Lord of his life. This man was more committed to comfort than to Christ.

When Jesus extended to a second man the invitation to follow Him, the man asked permission first to go and bury his father. On the surface this seemed like a reasonable request since most Jewish funerals occurred on the day of death. Yet, one wonders why the son was out and about instead of performing the duties required by a death. In reality the man was putting his family responsibilities ahead of his desire to be a disciple. Often a son would speak of his responsibility to provide an honorable burial for his father, even though the father was robust and in good health. In light of this, Jesus' reply, "Let the [spiritually] dead bury their [physically] dead" (Luke 9:60), is easily understood.

A third man volunteered for discipleship, but he requested permission to bid his family farewell. He therefore was putting them above the service of Christ.

## **THE RIDICULE OF JESUS' HALF-BROTHERS**

The Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. This was the holiest and greatest of the seven Jewish feasts, intended to commemorate the Israelites' wandering through the desert.<sup>26</sup> Around two million Jews would enter Jerusalem to celebrate this feast. In ridicule, the half-brothers of Jesus urged Him to go up to the feast and manifest His messianic powers, for they did not believe He was the Messiah.

Jesus was hated in Jerusalem, disliked by many in Galilee, haunted by His enemies, and ridiculed and insulted by His half-brothers who had lost faith in Him and would force Him out of hiding. He answered, "My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come" (John 7:6-8). The world did not hate the half-brothers because of the Law of Moral Correspondence: they were like the world and the world was like them. Jesus exposed the unbelieving world and consequently the world hated Him.

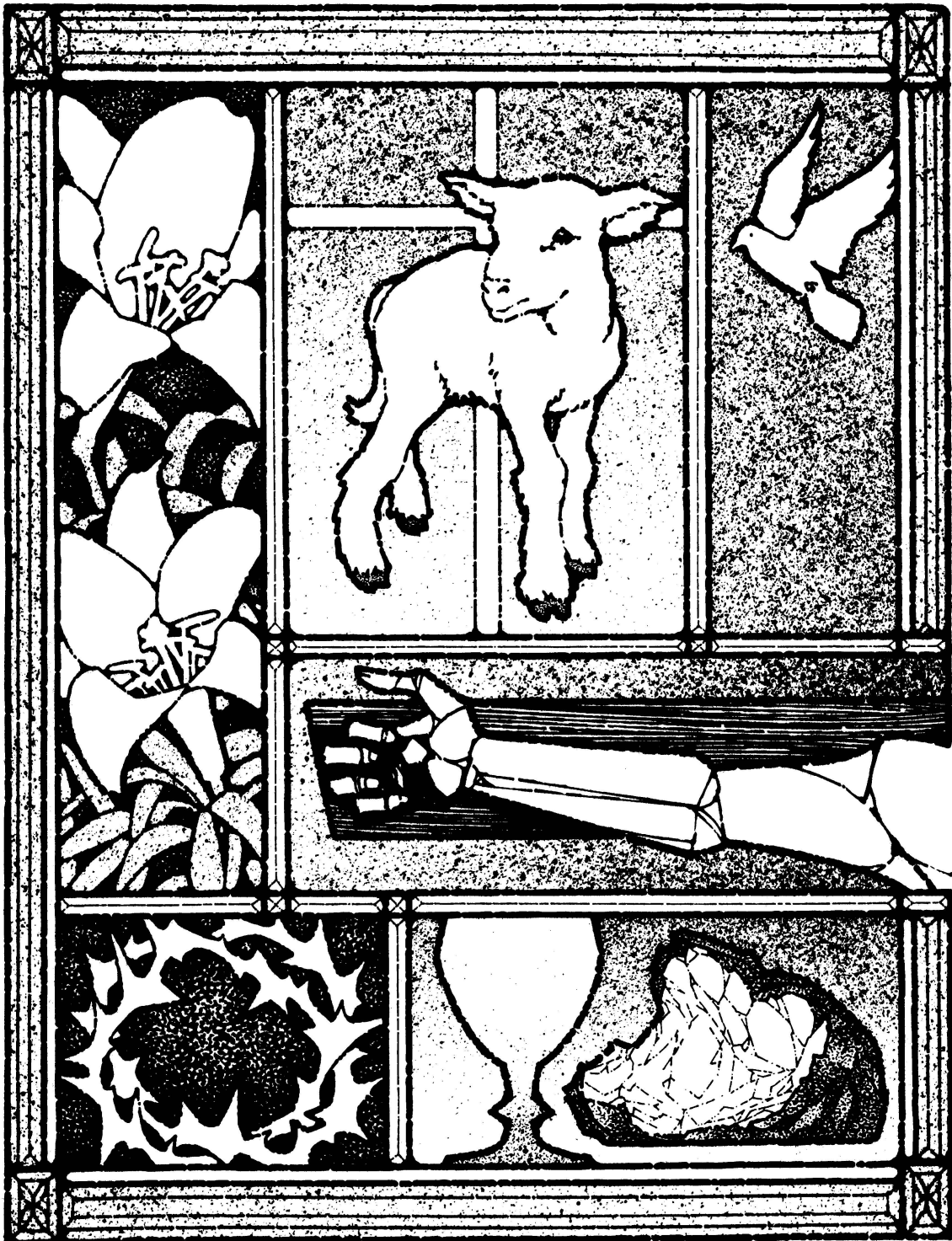
## **JESUS GOES PRIVATELY WITH HIS DISCIPLES TO JERUSALEM**

Jesus was fully conscious of the near approach of His death. In spite of all difficulty and danger, "He set His face to go to Jerusalem." As He went, there was such a look on His face that the disciples who followed were amazed and afraid.

Jesus had planned to pass through Samaria on His way to Jerusalem. The Samaritan village refused, however, to let Jesus pass through. James and John, the "sons of Thunder," were grieved and incensed by the hostility of the Samaritan town. They thought it was bad enough for Jesus to be rejected by His fellow countrymen and it was too much for Him to be rejected also by the "Samaritan dogs." Therefore, the brothers desired to call down fire from Heaven to destroy the town as Elijah had done many years ago in another locale.

Jesus answered that they did not know what kind of spirit had prompted their outburst. The Son of Man was come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. This was the challenge of the ministry: to save, not destroy. Anyone can destroy.

Then they went on to another village.



## Chapter 8

# THE LATER JUDEAN MINISTRY

Robertson's Sections 96-111

## THE FEAST OF LIVING WATER

The festive pilgrims were expecting to see Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles. Although fear of the Jews prevented open discussion, there was much murmuring and division concerning Him. To some He was a good man, possibly the Messiah; to others He was a deceiver and of the devil.

Jesus' appearance in the middle of the festivities sparked intense excitement concerning the messiahship. As He began teaching at the Temple, He encountered three groups of people. The first were the Jewish leaders, then the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and finally the officers sent by the chief priests. The people marveled at Jesus' knowledge of the sacred writings and His wisdom. He had never sat at the feet of the rabbis, yet He showed Himself familiar with the current literary methods that were supposed to be confined to the scholars and popular teachers. In the eyes of the Jewish leaders, Christ was a mere self-taught enthusiast.

Jesus met this defaming ridicule by declaring, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me" (John 7:16). In defense of this significant statement, Jesus offered two proofs. First, everyone who "will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). Edersheim expands this theme.

Among the Jews a Rabbi's teaching derived authority from the fact of its accordance with tradition that it accurately represented what had been received from a previous great teacher, and so on upwards to Moses, and to God Himself. On this ground Christ claimed the highest authority. His doctrine was not His own invention; it was the teaching of Him that sent Him. The doctrine was God received, and Christ was sent from God to bring it. He was God's messenger of it to them. Everyone who in his soul felt drawn towards God, each one who really "willeth to do His Will," would know "concerning this teaching, whether it was of man." It was this felt though unrealised influence, which had drawn all men after Him, so that they hung on His lips.<sup>27</sup>

Second, Jesus did not seek to glorify Himself, but the Father. Thus, because of the twofold evidence, Jesus could proclaim that His doctrine was from God and that He was sent of God.

The Jews professed to accept the law of Moses, yet they did not follow it. Consequently, since they were not faithful to the truth they had already received, they could not comprehend the teaching of Jesus. If they had understood, they would not have sought to kill Him.

Others took up the discussion and many believed because of it. When the Pharisees realized the schism among the people, they sent officers to seize Jesus. When the men appeared in His

audience, He simply stated that after a little while He personally proposed to withdraw from their midst and return to One who had sent Him. He said, “Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come” (John 7:34). This statement greatly puzzled the Jews. Where could He go that they could not find Him? Even if He went among the dispersed Jews or Gentiles, they could track Him.

### **Jesus Offers Living Water**

The last day of the feast was called Hosanna Rabba or Great Day and was celebrated as a Sabbath. One of the outstanding events of this day was the pouring of water gathered by the priest from the Pool of Siloam into the silver basin on the western side of the altar. While chanting the words to Isaiah 12:3, “With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation,” a multitude of pilgrims would also pass the brook of Siloam to drink.<sup>28</sup>

It was on this last day of the feast that Jesus stood and cried and offered living water.

If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:37-38).

The water from the Pool of Siloam was only a type of the living water of the Holy Ghost that Jesus offered. The Feast of Tabernacles reminded the Jews of their wanderings in the wilderness and how the nation had often suffered thirst. God had miraculously supplied natural water to quench their physical thirst in the arid desert. Now Jesus, identifying Himself with Jehovah of the Old Testament, offered to satisfy their spiritual thirst just as He did for the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. And today the same water that Jesus offered at the feast continues to flow from an abundant and endless stream to those who are willing to drink of the new life of the Holy Ghost baptism.

Jesus’ statements again divided the multitude. Some said He was a prophet. Others confessed He was the Messiah. Others questioned if the Messiah could come from Galilee. The soldiers even went back empty handed to the Pharisees and confessed frankly that no man had ever spoken like Jesus.

The Pharisees railed on the officers for failing to arrest Jesus. “Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?” They assumed that only the uneducated, accursed people who were ignorant of the Law would believe on Jesus. At this point, however, Nicodemus, one of their own, charged the Pharisees with condemning Jesus without proper investigation of His activities. They in turn accused Nicodemus of partisanship with the Galilean.

### **An Adulteress Finds Forgiveness**

Jesus had earlier charged the Pharisees with disregarding the law of Moses and substituting their traditions in its place. The Pharisees believed that the Mosaic law was too harsh to be strictly obeyed and had to be reinterpreted through their traditions. Seeking to entrap Jesus in acknowledging the severity of the Law, the Pharisees brought before Him a woman found taken in the act of adultery.

They set the trap: “Now Moses in the law commanded that such should be stoned: but what do you say?” If Jesus said to stone her, He would be in opposition to the Roman authorities. If He released her, He would break Moses’ law. As if He did not hear, Jesus stooped and began writing on the ground. (While no one knows what He wrote, some have conjectured that he listed various sins.) When the Pharisees continued their assault, Jesus replied, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7). Christ’s point was that judgment belongs only to God, who above all else is holy. One by one the Pharisees left, convicted by their own conscience. (Those claiming to be righteous proved by their own actions that they were in fact unrighteous.)

When there was no one left to accuse the woman, Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). As the Savior of the world, Jesus did not condone the woman’s sin, but in loving mercy, He forgave her.

### **Jesus Is the Light of the World**

On the last day of the feast, Jesus had proclaimed that He was the Water of Life, satisfying the thirst of every individual soul coming to Him. Now later in that day, or perhaps on the following day, the Octave of the Feast, when the Temple would also be crowded, He declared Himself to be the Light of the World. Like the light of the golden lampstand in the Temple, He was shedding forth His benefits for the whole race. As “The Light” was a Jewish title for the Messiah, the Jews understood Jesus’ statement to be a declaration of His divine role as the Christ.

This proclamation startled the Pharisees, raising within them a spirit of fierce antagonism. He professed to be the Light that produced life, and anyone who followed Him would not walk in the darkness of ignorance, sin, and spiritual death. The Pharisees challenged Him, “Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true” (John 8:13). According to their traditions no man could give witness or testimony for himself. Jesus answered their allegation.

Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go: but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me (John 8:14-18).

His own testimony in words and sinless life, coupled with the approval of His Father as demonstrated in the mighty power within to perform miracles met all the legal requirements. The testimony of a life was the final appeal, as always. Both His character (life) and the approval of the Father substantiated His claim to being the Light of the World.

The Pharisees said, “Where is this second witness—your Father?”

Jesus responded, “Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also” (John 8:19). (If they had fully investigated the matter, they would have discovered that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and that His birth fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the birth of the coming Messiah. No wonder Jesus stated they did

not know His Father. In their spiritual blindness, they merely assumed that Joseph was the father.) If they had been spiritually minded, having a just conception of Jesus, they would have known the Father too. God is only known spiritually. Their failing to know Him reveals their lack of spirituality!

## PHARISEES SEEK TO STONE JESUS

Later, possibly the next day, Jesus drew a sharp line between Himself and His enemies in regards to their character and destiny. Again He spoke of going away. “Does this mean He will kill Himself?” the Pharisees pondered.

He said, “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). They could not understand. They were hopelessly preoccupied with thoughts of an earthly deliverer and could not recognize Jesus as God.

When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. . . . If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:28-32).

They misunderstood His words in their racial pride; they hotly resented the insinuation that they should be subjected to any power. They said, “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?” (John 8:33). They were conveniently forgetting the 430 years of Egyptian bondage, the numerous oppressions during the days of the judges, the seventy years of Babylonian captivity, and the Roman garrisons that then dotted Palestine and held sway over Jerusalem. Their reply revealed they did not sense a need of the Messiah because they supposedly had nothing from which to be set free.

Jesus, nevertheless, was not talking about political or filial status. Physically, they were Abraham’s children, but morally they were enslaved in sin’s bondage just as others were. In John 8:34-51, He refuted their claims as Abraham’s spiritual sons. Had they been his seed, they would have exercised his faith and believed Christ since He was from God. Their only hope lay in the freedom that the Son of God offered: “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

The Jews had no answer for Jesus’ proof that they were not the true spiritual descendants of Abraham, so they changed their filial claim: “We have one Father, even God” (John 8:41). Jesus countered this argument by illustrating that they were not of God. If they were the children of God, they would have loved Him, since He was from God, and would have received Him, because the God they claimed as their Father had sent Him. Jesus concluded by identifying the Jews’ real father.

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

## THE HEALING AND CONVERSION OF THE MAN BORN BLIND

A short while later Jesus again presented Himself in the Temple. It was there that the battle must be fought to the finish against the ceremonialism of the rabbinical system.

The disciples gestured toward a man born blind and asked, “Who sinned? This man or his parents?” Jewish thought identified physical disorders, such as blindness, as divine retribution for sin. Jesus’ chief concern was not to place the blame for the man’s pitiful condition, but to shine light into his darkness. (That should also be our main concern when we deal with sinners.) The disciples had to learn to look upon such cases of diseased and afflicted humanity as opportunities to manifest the work of God’s redemptive love. Consequently, Jesus laid upon them the necessity and urgency of giving themselves to this activity when presented with the opportunity. He also reminded them that His own day of active service was limited and He must be about His work while He was present to light the world.

The cure of the man lay in Jesus’ power as the eternal God manifested in flesh. His method was to mix spittle and clay and apply it to the blinded eyes. This was only a means to aid the man’s faith in Him. Then, in obedience to the divine command, the man washed in the Pool of Siloam and came forth seeing. Through this miracle Jesus proved He was the Light of the World by bringing light to one who had been in darkness since birth. This was a strong affirmation of Christ’s claim since, as Farrar points out in *Studies in the Life of Christ*, no blind eyes were healed in the Old Testament.<sup>29</sup> (See Isaiah 42:7.)

The Pharisees questioned how the man was healed, indicating they acknowledged the facts of his healing and his identity. As they could not deny the miracle, they sought to discredit the character of the miracle worker. They charged that Jesus, a habitual Sabbath breaker, again broke the law of the Sabbath in both word and deed. Some said, “This fellow cannot be from God because he is not keeping the Sabbath.” Yet others questioned, “How is a man who is a sinner able to do such things?”

The Pharisees next interrogated the man’s parents. As they were afraid of being excommunicated, they answered by stating their son was of age—so they should ask him what happened.

True to form, when the man testified that Jesus had healed him, the Pharisees expelled him from the synagogue. However, the moment the door of the synagogue closed on him, the gate of the kingdom swung open to receive him. The man who so courageously gave witness before the council bowed down in reverent worship the instant Jesus revealed Himself to him.

Jesus said, “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.”

“But we are not blind, are we?” countered the Pharisees. They suspected that Jesus was insinuating they were blind, but thought He would hardly dare face their authority—authority demonstrated in the excommunication of the man born blind.



Jesus responded in no uncertain terms, “If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.”

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Going from the thought of blindness of the Pharisees, who professed to be the teachers of the people, Jesus spoke a self-explanatory allegory in their presence about true and false teachers, contrasting Himself with them. In the story, Jesus likened the kingdom of God or the church to the sheepfold. He declared, “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7). This statement, reminiscent of other declarations He made concerning His nature and mission as the Bread of Life and the Light of the World, reveals that Jesus is the only door of the spiritual fold by which the true shepherds may enter. Those who try to enter some other way do so only to steal and kill; that is, the many false messiahs and self-appointed leaders who had wreaked havoc on the flock. The scribes and Pharisees had just given a graphic illustration of false shepherds by their ouster of the poor beggar whom Jesus healed.

Jesus reiterated His declaration and expanded the theme.

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep (John 10:9-11).

Jesus was willing to lay down His life in self-sacrifice for His sheep, unlike the hireling, who works merely for wages and is not a true shepherd. Such a hireling does not feel that the flock is his very own property, nor does he have a real interest in its welfare. When the hireling sees a wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and flees.

Looking forward to His cross and the universality of His gospel, Jesus added, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this [Jewish] fold.” Those of the Gentile world would be brought into the fold, would listen to the Shepherd’s voice, and would become one flock under the Great Shepherd.

As so often before, Jesus’ discourse resulted in division among the Jews. Many insisted, “He has a demon and is gone mad. Why do you listen to Him?” But others staunchly affirmed, “These are not the words of one possessed of a demon. Is a demonized man able to open the eyes of the blind?”

## THE MISSION OF THE SEVENTY

Following the discourse on the Good Shepherd, Jesus began His final campaign in Judea. Starting out from Jerusalem, He reached out to all the towns and populated districts of the surrounding country.

Several days after the incidents of the trip down from Galilee (Luke 9:46-62) Jesus announced His choice of seventy other disciples for a special mission. He had chosen the Twelve

some months before and sent them forth by twos in an evangelistic campaign in Galilee (Luke 9:1-6). He now employed the same method on a more intensive scale in Judea, choosing the Seventy to do what the seventy Sanhedrists had failed to do in preparing the people for the coming Messiah. The number was suggestive of the seventy elders Moses had appointed to assist him. Also there were seventy known nations of the world at this time; the number was an implication of the universality of the kingdom work, a representative missionary for each nation. He sent the Seventy out in twos for the advantage of companionship and efficiency.<sup>30</sup>

Jesus gave the Seventy certain considerations and instructions.

1. The campaign was needed because “the harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few.” The way they were to increase the number of workers was by earnestly and definitely praying that the Lord of the harvest would send forth laborers into the harvest. Prayer is the primary way of increasing workers.
2. They were warned of the perils to be encountered among the wolf-like enemies and the necessity of maintaining a harmless, lamb-like innocence and inoffensive conduct in the midst of those dangers.
3. They were to depend on those to whom they ministered spiritually for their material support, not taking with them any purse for coins, traveling bag for clothes or food, or even an extra pair of sandals.
4. They were to waste no time in unnecessary talk along the way.
5. They were to be proper in their conduct toward any town into which they entered. If the people received them with goodwill, they were to accept with all courtesy and hospitality, eating the things placed before them.
6. Their mission was to be one of preaching and healing, and the essence of their message was simply “The kingdom of God has come nigh to you.”
7. They were to deal with their opponents fearlessly. If they were not received, they were to shake the dust from their feet and move on. It would be more tolerable for Sodom than that city in the judgment.
8. The Lord added a forceful illustration of the consequences to those who would reject Him (Luke 10:13-15). The cities that would reject the workers He was now sending forth would suffer the same dreadful fate.
9. He then pointed out to them the authority and power of their mission (Luke 10:16).

The Seventy returned to Jesus following the campaign. They were overjoyed because even the devils were subject to them through the name of Jesus. Jesus then revealed to them through the defeat of the demons the quick-as-lightning and complete downfall of Satan from the highest seat of power. He then added, “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19). But they were not to continue rejoicing because of their power over the demons. Their rejoicing should be because their names were written in the Book of Life.

The student should note Jesus’ prayer of rejoicing in Luke 10:21-22 and His comments to the disciples in verses 23-24.

## THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

A lawyer, probably an expert in Jewish canon law, stood up from among those seated in the synagogue and asked Jesus, “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” The man was testing Jesus’ ability as a teacher. Even though his primary motive may have been to entrap Jesus with some question, it is possible he desired to know better the way of life.

Jesus knew the man had studied the Law at length and was at least familiar with the letter of the Law. He asked, “How do you read the law?” The man answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all of man’s four powers of heart, soul, strength, and mind and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus treated this answer with sincerity. “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.” The trouble with this plan of obtaining eternal life is that no one can ever live up to the requirements. No man has ever been able to live a life blameless before the Law. One slip brings failure.

Embarrassed and seeking to justify himself, the lawyer asked, “Who then is my neighbor?” In response, Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The parable gives three basic responses to the need of the world. The first was that of the priest. He came alongside the beaten man, looked, and then passed by on the other side of the road to avoid ceremonial contamination. Here is a vivid picture of ceremonial cleanliness at the cost of moral principle and duty. The next traveler was the Levite. He too passed on the other side. Like many in the world, he was too busy to become involved. There was no love in either the heart of the priest or the heart of the Levite. Finally, a despised Samaritan came upon the injured man. With loving-kindness he treated the wounds and then took the man to an inn and paid the innkeeper to care for the man.

What a sharp contrast between the despised Samaritan and the robed priest and Levite, members of the orthodox Jewish clergy who supposedly ministered religiously in matters of human welfare! The kindness of the Samaritan was not one of the letter but of the spirit of the Law. It was not circumscribed by national or racial prejudices, but was universal. It was not limited by personal convenience, but was sacrificial.

In posing his question, the lawyer was limiting his idea of a neighbor to one who was near to him and from whom he received helpful treatment for himself. His point of view was totally selfish. Jesus, on the other hand, substituted a concept based on outgoing love. The question is not “Who is my neighbor?” but “To whom may I be a neighbor?” When He had finished the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer, “Which of these three men acted as a neighbor?”

The lawyer could not help but see the obvious. “The one who took pity on him,” he replied. Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.” My neighbor is any man—Jew or Gentile; black, red, yellow, brown, or white; rich or poor; learned or ignorant—who needs my help and whom I have power and opportunity to help. A love that makes us do that for every needy soul is the kind of love God had for sinful men when He sent His Son to be our Savior. It is the kind of loyal love we must have toward God and men if we are to have eternal life.

## JESUS, THE GUEST OF MARY AND MARTHA

When Jesus came to Bethany with His disciples, He received a personal invitation to stay in the home of Mary and Martha. The setting indicates that this was a family who enjoyed easy circumstances and a position of social esteem in both Bethany and Jerusalem.

The characters of the two sisters stand out in marked contrast. Mary took her place, seated on the floor in the traditional posture of a disciple, right in front of the feet of Jesus. Her attitude was one of an eager learner, alert to catch every word of her Lord's teaching. She recognized that Jesus was her Lord and she desired to know what He would have her do. Martha, on the other hand, was preoccupied with preparing an elaborate meal for Jesus. Certainly, the part Martha chose was good, but Mary chose the better part.

In the kitchen Martha grew tired and nervous, and a bit of jealousy crept into her heart as she caught a glimpse of Mary doing nothing but sitting at the feet of Jesus. She reproached Jesus for monopolizing Mary and complained that both He and Mary had forgotten her. Jesus answered with a tender rebuke. Martha had allowed herself to be filled with inward anxiety and outward agitation about many things in arranging the elaborate meal. But "one thing," the spiritual thing, was more important than all else, and since Mary had chosen it, Jesus would not let anyone take it away from her. Notice that Jesus did not rebuke Martha's service; it was her undue preoccupation with material things. This extreme occupation resulted in her nervous distraction, anxiety, and her jealous outburst of temper.

## **JESUS TEACHES THE DISCIPLES TO PRAY**

One of the main elements in all the work of our Lord, and now especially in this intensive campaign in Judea, was prayer. Prayer was systematic in the conduct of His campaign in Judea and habitual in the life of Jesus. His example in prayer in this campaign inspired His disciples to seek to know how to pray better.

In teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus gave a model prayer, now commonly called "The Lord's Prayer." Luke's account of the model prayer is more abbreviated than Matthew's account. One reason for this is that Jesus did not give the prayer for formal, ritualistic use. He altered the words and phrases to teach that true prayer must be spontaneous and come from the heart.

The parables of the friend at midnight and of the selfish neighbor teach perseverance in prayer, which is never out of season and must be importunate. The Scriptures teach that we ought always to pray and not grow faint hearted when the answer is delayed. In these parables Jesus set forth one of the main conditions of successful praying: one must wait and persist in prayer if he would have the "desires of his heart" fulfilled.

Jesus concluded the lesson on prayer with a threefold exhortation, promise, and statement, illustrated with examples from human relationships.

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth;

and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:9-13).

In response to earnest and persistent prayer, God gives neither a useless thing like the stone nor a harmful thing like the serpent or scorpion, but He gives the Holy Ghost, the supreme object of desire for all disciples.

## **JESUS CASTS OUT DEMONS**

Jesus again began casting out demons. This time He cast a demon out of a man who was dumb, but who could speak after the demon had departed. As before, the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of devils.

Jesus answered, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth” (Luke 11:17). This was the same logic He used to silence the Pharisees in Galilee: He who would go in and spoil the house of a strong man must be stronger than the one who protects that house and its goods from within. If Jesus could destroy the satanic kingdom, which all the bystanders had seen Him do with ease by the “finger of God,” then He was stronger than Satan, for Satan would not knowingly destroy his own “house.” If Jesus was indeed casting out demons by the power of God, then the kingdom of God had come to the Jews.

## **JESUS BREAKFASTS WITH A PHARISEE**

A Pharisee invited Jesus to breakfast with him. This meal was served at midday and after returning from morning prayers at the synagogue. Jesus’ refusal to keep the ceremonial law caused a stir among the people. He rebuked them, saying, “Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?” (Luke 11:39-40). It was indeed foolish to wash hands, cup, and plate, while leaving the soul polluted with greed and wicked excess.

Jesus then pronounced three woes on the Pharisees because of their conduct (Luke 11:42-44). Three more woes followed for the lawyers, whose behavior was no better than the Pharisees.

1. They bound upon the people burdens of traditionalism too heavy to be borne.
2. They persecuted the messengers of God.
3. They took away the key to the door of knowledge.

The lawyers were the teachers of the people. But they refused to go into the house of knowledge themselves and locked the door and held the key, hindering those who were attempting to enter. The people needed the Scriptures to obtain knowledge about the way of salvation, but the scribes had cut off access of this knowledge through false interpretations, which were fatal to themselves as well as to the people whom they despised.

After pronouncing the woes on the Pharisees and lawyers, Jesus addressed His disciples and the great throng. His message concerned hypocrisy, covetousness, worldly anxiety, watchfulness, and His own approaching passion (Luke 12).

### **PARABLE OF THE BARREN FIG TREE**

Based on two tragic incidents, Pilate's treatment of certain Galileans and the death of the eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, Jesus strongly set forth the need for repentance. Twice He said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5).

This theme is carried forth in His Parable of the Barren Fig Tree. The parable sets forth the longsuffering and severity of God. There were two reasons for not allowing the fig tree to continue any longer. First, it had not produced any fruit. Second, it was taking up space that should have been occupied by a productive tree. This story aptly illustrated the long-suffering patience of God with the Jews.

Following this discourse Jesus healed a crippled woman in the synagogue on the Sabbath and defended His action. He then repeated the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven.

### **AT THE FEAST OF DEDICATION**

At the end of His Judean ministry, Jesus went back to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication. While on Solomon's porch, His enemies came and asked Him, "If you are the Christ (Messiah), tell us plainly." This was not an honest question, for they had not accepted His testimony. Instead, Jesus declared the mute but powerful witness of His works. He stated they did not believe because they did not belong to His flock. His sheep follow Him; He provides eternal life for His sheep. No one can snatch them out of His Father's hands.

Then He revealed, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). (See Colossians 2:9.) The Pharisees considered this statement about the oneness of God as blasphemy and sought to stone Jesus. "For which of these good works do you stone me?" He asked.

"For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (John 10:33). They could not conceive of Him being anything more than a mere man, and this mere man was making himself God. They failed to comprehend that the eternal God had made Himself to become a mere man.

Jesus answered their accusation.

Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him (John 10:36-38).



## Chapter 9

# THE LATER PEREAN MINISTRY

### Robertson's Sections 112-127

The Later Perea Ministry of Jesus probably occupied a three and one-half month period, extending from the Feast of Dedication in AD 29 to the last journey to Jerusalem in the spring of AD 30. (Dr. Pentecost dates the tour from the Feast of Dedication in December AD 32, to the last journey to Jerusalem in spring AD 33.<sup>31</sup>) As all the doors to Jesus' ministry were now closed in Judea, He went to Perea and centered His work in Bethany where He had met and won His first disciples. John the Baptist had preached extensively in this area and therefore Jesus was readily accepted because of John's testimony. Consequently, many believed on Jesus in Perea.

### JESUS IS WARNED AGAINST HEROD ANTIPAS

It seems that Jesus made another brief visit to Jerusalem after the Feast of Dedication and before that of the Passover three and one-half months later. Somewhere on this journey someone asked Him, "Are there few that be saved?" To the Jewish mind the question meant, "Lord, when the Messiah's kingdom comes, will only a few enter into it?" Jesus provided a detailed answer.

Strive to enter in at the strait [narrow] gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last (Luke 13:24-30).

Physical lineage and good works will be meaningless in the judgment for those who have rejected the message of salvation. The admonition to strain every muscle and nerve to enter into the way of personal salvation implies that many shall fail and relatively few shall succeed. Entering into the door of salvation is the supreme concern and worth every struggle and sacrifice. This must be accomplished while the opportunity presents itself. Once the "door" is barred it will be too late.

Later certain Pharisees came and said, "Get out and depart, for Herod will kill you." Herod had been wily, deceptive, crafty, and cruel in dealing with John, secretly disposing of him and defending his act on false grounds. Even though Jesus was in the same vicinity where Herod had taken John the Baptist, Jesus was not afraid. (See His reply in Luke 13:33.) Could it be that Jesus



looked beyond the Pharisees' surface concern for His safety and realized they sought to drive him back to Jerusalem and into the hands of the Sanhedrin?

## **BREAKFAST WITH A CHIEF PHARISEE**

While eating the Sabbath meal in the home of a chief Pharisee, a man with dropsy entered the house and placed himself immediately in front of Jesus. Farrar speculates that the man, probably one of the uninvited guests that normally presented themselves at such occasions, may have been purposely positioned before Jesus as a test.<sup>32</sup> Seeing the man, Jesus asked, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?" (Luke 14:3).

When the lawyers and Pharisees, knowing that the Mosaic law permitted works of mercy to be done on the Sabbath, held their peace, Jesus healed the man. He then said, "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?" (Luke 14:5). This powerful question put the Pharisees and lawyers on the defensive. The question could have been phrased, "How do you act when your own personal interests are concerned?" The self-interest instinct was too strong to allow one's own donkey or bull to remain in the ditch or the well and perish. Without any thought about the Sabbath rule, they would at once haul the animal out. The Pharisees and lawyers were helpless before this argument based on their own practices. Surely a sick human was more valuable than a donkey or an ox!

After noticing how the guests chose their places for the meal, the Lord taught on humility or taking the lowest seat (verses 7-11) and on hospitality (verses 12-14). The Parable of the Great Supper followed these lessons.

The Parable of the Great Supper should not be confused with that of the marriage of the king's son (Matthew 22:1-14), for there are many vital differences of detail. The story of the great supper is a warning, predictive of the reception of the Jews and calling of the Gentiles. Although spoken in answer to the remark of a guest, it showed the whole company the nature of the privileges they enjoyed, the responsibility they faced, and the danger in which they stood if they rejected the gospel. These Pharisees had to feel they were not only in the place of privilege, but also of peril and that by rejecting the gospel message they would be counted less worthy than the poorest, most ignorant, most degraded of men, since that class by acceptance was entering into the gospel feast.

The gospel feast is a great celebration of pardon, forgiveness, peace, access, joy, and a thousand other blessings. The invitation is frank and the entrance to the feast is free. The great majority of men, however, make flimsy excuses, putting things of the world first; religion must occupy a secondary place, if any, in their lives. As a result, these who reject Christ are themselves rejected—but the wedding shall be furnished with guests in spite of earlier rejection. These later guests come, not because they are worthy, but because they are invited.

## **COST OF DISCIPLESHIP**

Great crowds continued to follow Jesus. In Luke 14:26-34, He revealed to them the conditions of effective discipleship. He presented the conditions under five aspects.

1. Disciples must choose their loyalties (verse 26). Christ must hold first place in the disciple's heart. Not even the dearest earthly tie of family may stand in the way of loyal devotion to the cause of the Master.
2. Disciples must bear a cross (verse 27). The idea of cross bearing was familiar to the people. It was no easy task they were embracing when they became His disciples. They must deny themselves and daily bear their cross.
3. Disciples must pay a price. The cost to be counted was illustrated by the rash builder and the inept king.
4. Disciples must renounce all possessions (verse 33). They must be willing to put Jesus and service in His kingdom first in their lives.
5. Disciples must maintain the spirit of sacrifice and service (verses 34-35). Disciples without the spirit of self-denial are like tasteless salt that has lost its strength; it cannot even be used, as many other things can be, to fertilize the land.

## **JESUS' DEFENSE AGAINST THE CRITICISM OF THE PHARISEES**

The Pharisees and scribes greatly resented Jesus' popularity with the multitudes and always sought an excuse to attack Him. On one such occasion, they criticized Him for receiving sinners. "This fellow," they said with contempt, "welcomes sinners and eats with them." By this they implied that Jesus preferred these outcasts, even harlots, to the respectable class because He was like them in character and taste.

In reply to this base accusation, Jesus encouraged the penitent sinner by setting forth the love of God for man in his lost estate in three of the most beautiful stories of all His ministry: the Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son. In these parables Jesus presented three pictures of God, showing His posture toward the sinner before and after repentance. He pointed out to the Pharisees and scribes His own attitude toward sinners, what theirs should be, and justified this position by revealing what God's attitude is toward the lost.

Jesus wound up this parabolic discourse by vividly illustrating the Pharisaic attitude through the disgruntled attitude of the elder son, severely rebuking their self-righteousness and exclusiveness in relationship to the lost. Shepard expounds on this theme.

The character of the three parables is such as to depict all aspects of the relationship between a loving God and a lost man. The first emphasized "God's possession and attachment, the second God's ownership and man's intrinsic worth and the third God's kinship and supreme affection." . . . The first parable emphasizes the loss, the second the search, and the third the restoration. The three parables form a climax: the pasture, the house, the home; the herdsman, the housewife, the father; the sheep, the treasure, the beloved son. They teach other correlated truths: God's feeling of His loss and His joy in recovering the lost. The

first two have their start in the heart of God and the last in the heart of the sinner. The full truth concerning the conversion of any sinner is attained by combining all three.<sup>33</sup>

## **LESSONS ON STEWARDSHIP**

Among the followers of Jesus were a number of converted publicans and sinners. For years these men had followed the course of making ill-gotten gain. They and all the other disciples as well, needed to learn the right use of wealth. Jesus taught this important lesson through a parable and the true account of the rich man and Lazarus. Jesus taught that riches do not necessarily involve sin, but they bring responsibility and are accompanied by danger.

### **The Parable of the Unrighteous Steward**

The Parable of the Unrighteous Steward is well known for its difficulty of interpretation. Most scholars suggest that the hidden lesson is the follower of Christ should be as shrewd about his spiritual future as the unjust steward was about his immediate security.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Rich Man and Lazarus**

The account of the rich man and Lazarus is not a parable but a true story. Jesus said, “There was a certain rich man.” To the Pharisees, this man’s riches were a sign of divine favor while the beggar’s poverty indicated divine contempt. In this narrative, the rich man was not condemned for being rich; nothing is said of ill-gotten wealth or avarice. He formed, however, the habit of selfish, thoughtless living oblivious to the misery around him. Such a character can never be at home with God.

Before continuing on to the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant, Jesus instructed the disciples in forgiveness and faith.

### **Parable of the Unprofitable Servant**

The Parable of the Unprofitable Servant shows that the followers of Christ must not be mercenary in spirit or think of their own merit. If they will preserve a humble attitude of dependence on Him and readiness to serve Him as dutiful slaves, they will be able to give account of their stewardship. The Pharisees served God for reward; Christ’s disciples are to avoid that leaven of false doctrine.

## **THE RAISING OF LAZARUS**

The raising of Lazarus is the last sign recorded by John. He brought the conflict between belief and unbelief to its final climax before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This sign caused many to believe in Jesus, but it caused the scribes and Pharisees to say, “If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him!” As a result, they began plotting to put Jesus to death.

Some of the Jews allowed each fresh revelation of Jesus to harden them into hopeless, bitter hostility. When He manifested Himself as the Giver of Life, they refused what He offered and turned away; when He declared Himself the Good Shepherd, they did not listen to His voice nor follow Him; when He proclaimed Himself the Light of the World, they chose to walk in darkness. With the raising of Lazarus, He revealed Himself as the Resurrection and the Life, and they planned to put Him to death.

Yet, there were always some who believed.

While Jesus was still in Perea, a message arrived from Bethany of Judea stating that Lazarus was dying. Jesus waited two days longer, and then left for the village. The disciples were afraid to venture so close to Jerusalem as they knew the Jews sought to stone Jesus. Jesus enigmatically replied, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him” (John 11:9-10).

Note Thomas’s exhortation to the disciples to go with Jesus to Jerusalem in order “that we may die with him” (John 11:16). This is an important statement as it revealed that Thomas anticipated his own death and that of Jesus on the journey to Jerusalem and showed his evaluation of the hatred of Christ in the city.

When Jesus approached Bethany, Martha met Him with a gentle reproach that expressed her keen disappointment. Jesus had delayed and Lazarus had died. Her brother’s death now severely tested her faith. She had fully expected Jesus to come and heal him; she could not account for the delay. (In all situations we must remember that God in His sovereignty is under no obligation to do things our way—no matter how much “faith” we have.)

Why did Jesus delay? He wanted to perform a greater miracle than would have been possible had He come at once. He wanted to inspire the faith of the disciples (John 11:14-15). He wanted to show His love, not just a warm, affectionate love, but a higher love than that. This was the same love that later took Him to the cross. The delay was divinely arranged for God’s glory that through it the Son might be glorified (John 11:40).

Martha knew that Jesus had risked His life to come. This aroused a desire in her heart for Him to do something. She stated, “But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee” (John 11:22). Even this weak expression of faith gave Jesus an opportunity to lead her to something better. Jesus assured Martha that her brother would live again. Martha did not understand. Why did not Martha rejoice when Jesus said her brother would rise again? She had faith in the past and future, but not for the present. How many are like that today; they do not realize that the same power is available now!

Jesus clarified her belief concerning a general, but distant resurrection by bringing it down to a specific and present reality. Tying the resurrection to His own person, and by virtue of His deity, He said, “I AM!” By this He meant, “Today I am the resurrection to your brother!”

Going to the tomb, Jesus called for the stone to be rolled away. He could have rolled it away by His miraculous power, but He wanted to test their faith by asking them to do something that looked foolish to the natural eye. In much the same way, He had asked the five thousand to sit down for a meal when there was nothing to set before them but five loaves and two small fish.

This test was much too practical for Martha. Immediately Jesus checked Martha's unbelief by a sharp, though not harsh, rebuke. He wanted to challenge her and restore her to the place of faith. He wanted to take her eyes off circumstances and place them on Him. He wanted her to look to Him to destroy the power of death and rob it of its sting. In His prayer, He said in effect, "If God does not work through me now, then reject me as an imposter; if He does, yield to me as Messiah!"

With the authority of all Heaven, Jesus then commanded, "Lazarus, come forth!" To the utter amazement of the crowd, the bound figure of Lazarus appeared at the mouth of the tomb. Jesus then further instructed, "Loose him and let him go."

### **Reaction to the Miracle**

While the Scriptures do not describe the joy of Lazarus or his sisters, the Word states that many believed on Jesus because of this miracle of resurrection.

The miracle also prompted the chief priests, both of whom were Sadducees, to swift action. They called the Sanhedrin into special session. In their excitement and haste, they were saying over and over again to another, "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation" (John 11:47-48). The Sanhedrists were worried about losing their personal status and the little autonomy that the Jewish nation possessed under Roman rule.

Caiaphas, the high priest appointed by Rome, voiced what the others were afraid to say, "Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:49-50). The priest had unconsciously prophesied and uttered a deeper truth than he knew. The statement was meant to be selfish and mean as he expressed the bloodthirsty decision of the council. He never realized he was prophesying the downfall of the priesthood (their "place") and the destruction of the people whom he professed to be saving by his decision against Jesus.

He did not consider that an unjust decision on the part of a judge against an innocent victim would always revert in curses on the head of the one who pronounced it. Caiaphas, by virtue of his office of high priest, unconsciously announced the great plan of God: Jesus should die for that nation, and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Christ would indeed die "on behalf of the people" in a sense far deeper than Caiaphas would ever understand. This was the last prophecy of the high priesthood in Israel.

The die was now cast. Jesus had committed the final and unpardonable act in raising Lazarus from the dead. From that day, the Jews began planning to kill Him.

“Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city call Ephraim [in northern Judea], and there continued with his disciples” (John 11:54).

## **FINAL JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM**

Finally, it was time for Jesus to again head toward Jerusalem. This was His final journey to the City of David and would terminate in His death. Edersheim suggests that He detoured along to the northern frontier to a place at the southern border of Galilee in order to meet those who would accompany Him to Jerusalem. It is possible that some of Christ’s immediate followers would want to visit relatives and friends in Galilee before journeying on to Jerusalem. Such a detour would also allow the “many women which came up with Him unto Galilee” a chance to join the band as it is doubtful they had been with Jesus during His later Perea ministry.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Ten Lepers**

As Jesus entered a certain village, ten lepers met Him and cried, “Jesus, Master, take pity on us!” (Have you ever noticed how easy it is to address Jesus as “Master” when we need something from Him?) Jesus responded by telling the lepers to go show themselves to the priest. This command was in obedience to the Mosaic law, which required such action in order for a leper to be pronounced clean. It was also a test of the lepers’ faith as their condition had not changed. As they went, however, they were cleansed of their dreaded disease.

While nine hastened on to the priest, greatly anticipating the end to their social isolation and a glad reunion with their families and friends, one returned and threw himself at Jesus’ feet in grateful worship. Ten had received the blessing; but only one was thankful. “Where are the nine?” Jesus asked.

The nine characterized Jewish ingratitude. The Jews took divine blessings for granted: it was their birthright as the children of Abraham, their just due for having such an auspicious birth; it was their heritage for being a part of the chosen people. (Do we who have been born again of the Spirit find ourselves falling into the same trap?) Instead of finding thankfulness where it should have been—in the nine Jews—He found it in the one, a Samaritan, who returned praising God with a loud voice, falling at the feet of Jesus and thanking Him for the miracles.

This incident was another object lesson showing that while the self-righteous Pharisees would reject Christ, publicans and harlots would press their way into the kingdom of God.

## **THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM**

### **The Coming of the Son of Man**

The Pharisees wanted to know when Jesus, a wanderer and now a fugitive from His own people, would set up His kingdom. His reply to their insinuating question and derisive sneer was keen and cutting, revealing their utter misconception of the nature of the kingdom of God: “The

kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20-21). (Dr. Pentecost points out, “The Greek word translated ‘within you’ literally means ‘in your midst,’ or ‘among’ [NIV margin].”<sup>38</sup>)

Jesus then turned and addressed the disciples, revealing to them and others present the true character of the Second Coming. They should not be deceived or run after false signs and prophets. His Second Coming would be sudden and universally visible. It would come with the shock and suddenness of a flash of lightning, rending the sky from east to west, horizon to horizon. The Second Coming would find the world unprepared. He cited the times of Noah and Lot to illustrate the vain worldliness and careless enjoyment that would prevail at that time. Both Noah and Lot preached concerning imminent judgment, but the people rejected their message. Christ closed His address, pointing to the final separation (Luke 17:34-37).

## **PARABLES ON PRAYER**

The delayed second coming of the Son of Man would be a test to the faith of the mistreated disciples. Consequently, Jesus added a lesson on the necessity of persistence and humility in prayer for deliverance.

### **Parable of the Unjust Judge**

The Parable of the Unjust Judge illustrates the need of importunity in prayer. It was given to show the necessity of praying continually and not giving up under difficult and discouraging circumstances. The Jews taught that men ought to pray, at the most, three times a day so as not to weary God with incessant prayer. Jesus taught that we should pray always and about everything, not to lose heart, turn coward, or give in to evil, but persist and faint not. There is danger in “giving up” and abandoning prayer if the answer does not come soon. The Parable of the Unjust Judge warned against this tendency.

It must be remembered, however, that one must not try to browbeat God—who is sovereign and knows what is best for His children—into answering prayer, nor must one trust in his own importunity; he must have faith in the faithfulness of God to answer always, though the answer may be delayed. The parable teaches that God does delay and we are to be faithful, persistent, and faith-filled in our praying. We must pray continually in all circumstances and not get discouraged and give way to evil.

When Jesus returns to earth, will He find such persistent faith and faithfulness as this on earth? This is a great challenge!

### **Parable of the Pharisee and Publican**

Luke connected the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican with that of the Unjust Judge. The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican teaches that effective prayer depends on the character of the one praying, the nature of the thing asked for, and the spirit in which prayer is offered. This is the lesson Jesus wanted to teach both His disciples and the Pharisees concerning the character of true prayer.

## A LESSON ON DIVORCE

The popularity of Jesus was more than His enemies could bear. If they could only bring up some decisive question that would make Him unpopular with the people, then perhaps they could gain an upper hand. They sought for such an issue and soon found it, for the divorce question was a burning one then as it is now. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” The liberal School of Hillel voiced the opinion that divorce was lawful “for every cause.” Shammai, who restricted divorce solely to the grounds of unfaithfulness, championed the conservative side.<sup>37</sup>

Appealing to God’s original law of marriage, instituted by the Creator in Genesis 2:24 at the first wedding, Jesus answered, “Did you never read that the creator from beginning made them male and female?” At the beginning of the race, God created one woman for one man, each suited for the other. For the same reason, it was declared that all other human relations, even the most intimate ones, as that existing between children and their parents, must be secondary to that between husband and wife. Therefore, this yoke of God, by which He bound two souls together, should not be broken. In solemn words, Jesus said, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matthew 19:9). The Pharisees, on the other hand, viewed marriage as a social institution governed by the laws of men. Christ showed that marriage was a divine institution, governed by the laws of God.

## THE LITTLE CHILDREN

Children were brought to Jesus so He could lay hands on them and bless them. Thinking they were doing Jesus a favor, the disciples tried to send the children away—just as many try to keep children from church today. How little the disciples understood the children and Jesus. Likewise, the pastor who does not like children in his church services has something more to learn about Jesus.

Jesus rebuked the disciples: “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14). The kingdom of Heaven belongs to persons who are childlike in disposition. For this reason, He took the children into His arms and blessed them. Jesus is the greatest friend of every child.

## THE RICH YOUNG RULER

As Jesus left the house where He had blessed the children, a certain rich young ruler—probably of a local synagogue or, as Pentecost suggests,<sup>38</sup> a member of the Sanhedrin—came running. He knelt before Jesus and asked, “Good Master, what good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Let us look at the rich young ruler. Several things were right about him.

1. The man came in the right way: running and kneeling.



2. He came to the right One. While other leaders would not believe Jesus was divine, this man called Jesus God, for one of the titles given to God in writing was “The Good One of the World.” Jesus was saying, “You have given me a title that belongs only to God. Do you understand and mean it?”
4. He asked the right question: What must I do to inherit eternal life? He yearned for something higher than the ordinary experiences of a self-satisfied religionist. He had tried what was ordinary and considered “good” and found it insufficient and unable to give inward satisfaction. He had observed the Law from his youth. He was of high moral character, but there was dissatisfaction that he could not fathom. Consequently, he asked, “What lack I yet?”
4. He received the right answer even though it was not the one he expected: “Go and sell what you have and give it to the poor; come and take up your cross and follow me.”

In spite of all these good things, the young man had a tragic flaw; he made the wrong decision. What he possessed, possessed him. Unable to let go of his great wealth, he went away very sorrowful.

To point out the lesson of this incident, Jesus used a metaphor the disciples easily understood.

Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Mark 10:24-25).

Peter spoke up, “Lord, we have left all and followed you; what shall we have?” He—and probably the other disciples as well—was looking forward to the coming kingdom with eager expectations, thinking that when it should come he would realize great material profit. Jesus quickly rectified this faulty thinking as shown in Mark 10:29-31 and Matthew 19:28-29.

### **The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard**

Jesus then gave the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. The story set forth the character and motive of true workers and the viewpoint of God in His work, caring more for the nature and spirit of the workers than for the work done.

## **JESUS FORETELLS THE MANNER OF HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION**

Once again Jesus took the Twelve aside and began to explain to them in more detail than ever before the things He must suffer in Jerusalem.

He also promised that on the third day He would rise again (Matthew 20:19).

After this discourse, the mother of James and John asked Jesus, “Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom” (Matthew 20:21). The brothers then echoed this request. They were not content just to occupy one of twelve thrones ruling over Israel, which Jesus had just promised (Matthew 19:28); they wanted to occupy the seats of honor on either side of the King.

Jesus answered, “Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:38). The cup of which Jesus spoke was the complete obedience to the will of the Father, even if that meant death.

They responded affirmatively. And so they did as history bears out. But little did they understand the character of the kingdom; it was a spiritual kingdom that called for spiritual characters void of worldly ambition, envy, and the mercenary spirit they had just revealed.

The request of Zebedee’s wife aroused indignation in the other disciples; they too were coveting the honored positions. Jesus called the Twelve to Himself and, recognizing that all were at fault, sought to illustrate clearly to them the character of the kingdom. (See Matthew 20:25-28.)

## **HEALING OF BLIND BARTIMAEUS AND HIS COMPANION**

As Jesus neared Jericho, two blind men (Matthew 20:29-34)—one identified as Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)—sat beside the road, begging alms. As they heard the multitude approaching, they asked what was going on. When told that Jesus was coming, the blind men began to cry, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on us!” Those around them rebuked them and told them to be quiet. Yet, they cried louder, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on us!” Their address acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah and their petition recognized a part of the prophesied messianic ministry.

With His attention captured by the pleading cries, Jesus stood still and asked the men what He should do for them. “Lord, that our eyes may be opened,” they humbly asked. Word of the wonderful miracles of Jesus had somehow found its way to these blind men and instilled faith in their hearts. Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they could see and followed Him.

Some have read the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke and concluded the reports contradict each other; Matthew wrote of two blind men, but Mark and Luke recorded that as Jesus was leaving Jericho He healed one blind man.

Pentecost reconciles the three accounts by suggesting that the blind men approached Jesus as He neared Jericho and followed Him through the city, all the while petitioning Him, but Jesus waited until they were leaving the city to respond to their petition. Mark undoubtedly singled out Bartimaeus as the more prominent of the two blind men.<sup>39</sup>

## **ZACCHEUS**

Although Zaccheus was a publican guilty of graft and corruption, his climb in the sycamore tree demonstrated his great interest in Jesus. Still, Jesus was the one who took the initiative by inviting Himself to the home and hospitality of Zaccheus. He who claimed to be the Messiah was going to the home of the most notorious sinner in the town.

Jesus' decision stirred Zaccheus's heart to repentance and he made a full and bold confession of his sins to Jesus. He even went beyond the requirement of the Mosaic law, which claimed one-fifth for the poor and, in cases of fraud, an amount equal to that robbed plus one-fifth more. Zaccheus promised to give one-half of his goods to the poor and restore the amount robbed four-fold.

In a voice that all might hear, Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this household, seeing that Zaccheus is also a son of Abraham." Jesus acknowledged Zaccheus's Jewish heritage in spite of the social ban. It was not, however, his genealogy nor his works that brought salvation to Zaccheus; it was the faith he placed in Christ.

Jesus summed up the whole matter for the multitude and for us in a wonderful conclusion. His mission to this world was to search for the lost until He found them and then to save them. What a beautiful picture: the sinner seeking the Savior and the Savior seeking the sinner!

### **Parable of the Pounds**

While the Jews were still in shocked amazement that Jesus would go with Zaccheus, Jesus gave the Parable of the Pounds. Many details of this parable differ from that of the talents, and serve a different purpose. The Parable of the Pounds is a prophetic sketch in parabolic form of the real future before the disciples, the fortunes of the messianic King, and the various attitudes of men toward Christ. It sets forth the picture of the near departure of Jesus to a "distant country," a journey requiring a long time. The disciples, like slaves seeking to do the will of their lord, are to receive the "common pound" of the gospel—the entrusted Word of the kingdom—and go forth to make use of it in hard, obscure, unhonored activities, calling for faithfulness and preserving loyalty, until He should return in His second glorious advent in this world.

When the nobleman returned, he summoned the servants to whom he had entrusted the pound that he might learn what business they had done. Two had gained, but one kept what he had secured in a napkin. The servants were rewarded according to their stewardship.

Jesus wished to make clear to all that neither glory nor material riches nor power were to be the lot of the servants of the absent Lord, who was to go away in a few days, but rather, their lot was labor and responsibility. He knew that not all His disciples would make the same use of His entrusted work and Word of the kingdom. In the acid test of hard and difficult labor, sacrifice and persecution, some would be very faithful, trading with their small opportunities and privileges, and gaining larger ones; others would be less devoted, diligent, and constant; and some would be good-for-nothings.

Finally, addressing the Jewish enemies who would lead their nation to reject and crucify the Messiah in a few days, Jesus concluded, “But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me” (Luke 19:27). This was a prophecy of the impending destruction of the Jewish nation.

# THE LAST PUBLIC MINISTRY

## Robertson's Sections 128-138

When Jesus arrived in Bethany from Jericho, He was welcomed into the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. The masses were already gathering in Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover that was only a few days away. When the news spread that Jesus was in Bethany, the crowd made the short trip to the village, as they wanted to see Jesus and Lazarus, the one whom Jesus had raised from the dead six weeks earlier.

The action of the people so enraged the chief priests that they plotted together how they might do away with Lazarus. They reasoned that while he was alive they could do nothing against Jesus, for many of the people who came and saw Lazarus went away believing on Jesus as the Messiah. Could a less than the expected Messiah perform such a miracle as raising the dead?

### THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Preceded by the crowd that had come from Jerusalem and followed by His disciples and a multitude of pilgrims, Jesus started for the Holy City seated on an unbroken colt, thus fulfilling Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9. The greater part of the multitude spread their garments in the way. Their joyful shouts of “Hosanna to the Son of David!” and their waving palm branches showed that they felt their Messiah had come.

Let us take a closer look at the triumphal entry.

The entry really began as Jesus—once again manifesting His omniscience through the minute instruction given to the two disciples—sent them into Bethphage to get the animal on which He would ride into Jerusalem. With His entry into the city on the foal of an ass, esteemed as a symbol of Jewish royalty and peace, Jesus offered Himself to the Jews as their promised messianic King. He was not the one they expected; but He was the King foretold by the prophets. His reign would not be one of might, or a display of grandeur, or a rule by force. Instead, He entered the city as the Prince of Peace.

As the entourage neared the Eastern Gate, Jesus beheld Jerusalem and broke into loud wailing and sobbing over the city: “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes” (Luke 19:42). The Prince of Peace could have brought peace and salvation through their acceptance, but through their rejection, they were blinded and could not see their own goal. His statements of the city’s desolation (Luke 19:43-44) were fulfilled forty years later under Titus, the Roman general.

Jesus offered Himself as the Prince of Peace, just as Zechariah had said the Messiah would come. But neither the populace nor the disciples seemed to have understood the significance of the symbolic demonstration. Instead of embracing His theocratic ideal of a spiritual kingdom of truth, they insisted on an earthly reign that could break the yoke of Roman bondage and set them

free. The idea of a material kingdom, secretly nurtured in the hearts of an ambitious, arrogant, and worldly priesthood, would soon bring the inevitable collision with the Roman Empire.

Once again the procession moved forward. Jesus rode into Jerusalem and came to the Temple. Leaving His beast and entering the hallowed building, Jesus took possession of it in the name of Jehovah. For a moment He remained the hero of the hour, the Master of the Temple beholding all its grandeur. The purpose of the messianic demonstration had been attained. He had declared to the whole world that He was the Messiah. On this day the paschal lamb was traditionally selected. By His action Jesus showed that He had consecrated Himself as the Passover Lamb, who would be sacrificed for the whole nation. How tragic that the Jews should bypass the Lamb of God as they looked for their sacrifice!

Dr. Pentecost adds insight to the significance of the triumphal entry.

This, then, was the day of Christ's official presentation of Himself as Messiah to Israel. Christ was identified as Messiah at His temptation. His glory as Messiah was revealed at His transfiguration. But it was at this triumphal entry that Christ made an official presentation of Himself as Messiah to the nation.<sup>40</sup>

The Pharisees were in despair. The resounding shouts of the people showed that all their efforts had failed. In desperation, they appealed directly to Jesus to rebuke His disciples. Jesus, reading their hearts, replied, "I tell you that if these shall hold their peace, the very stones will cry out!"

## **JESUS REVEALS HIS AUTHORITY**

At the close of the day, Jesus and His band passed quietly out of the city to the well-beloved home in Bethany. On the morrow He started out again for Jerusalem. During two incidents that transpired early on this day, Christ revealed His authority. In one He cursed the fig tree; in the other He cleansed the Temple.

### **Jesus Curses the Fig Tree**

Becoming hungry on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus saw a fig tree on the roadside. It stood out conspicuously because of its abundant foliage; the leaves gave reasonable hope of finding fruit. Jesus examined the tree, but all He found was leaves. Although it drew nutrients from the ground, it was barren—a perfect example of empty profession. In this tree so advantageously situated, so abundant in promise, yet fruitless, Jesus saw an emblem of Israel and cursed it.

### **Jesus Cleanses the Temple**

Jesus came again into the Temple; He did not come to reform the worship, but to declare the beginning of messianic judgment. The corrupted Temple, its hypocritical, scoffing priest, and its vain and empty ceremonies were doomed to pass away. This second cleansing, approximately three years after the first, was to be the final judicial sentence of the messianic King. (See Matthew 21:12-13.)

As to be expected, the Temple authorities were enraged and sought how they might destroy Jesus.

### **The Greeks Seek to See Jesus**

The miracles and message of Jesus, His life and demeanor had an enormous impact on Palestine. The extent of this influence is revealed through the Greeks who, addressing Philip, said, “Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:21). These men were not Hellenistic Jews, but real Greeks, symbolic of bringing the Gentile world into contact with Jesus. The Magi also had symbolized this aspect shortly after Jesus’ birth.

Jesus recognized in these men the forerunner of a vast throng of the Gentile world that would come to Him from all nations, tribes, and kindreds of the earth.

The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name (John 12:23-28).

In the next few hours the world would come to a crisis of judgment and condemnation when they would convict Jesus. Satan, the prince of this world, would be cast from his seat of power and Jesus would draw all men unto Him. The cross would become the central magnet of the universe. Satan would be defeated on the cross.

At this point John ended his Gospel record of Jesus’ public ministry by summarizing Christ’s teachings in John 12:44-50.

### **Proof of Christ’s Authority**

During the following morning, Peter discovered that the fig tree had already withered. This withering signified that the judgment pronounced on the generation would fall quickly and suddenly, seemingly terminating God’s program for the Jews. Consequently, Peter could not understand how the nation on whom the unconditional and eternal Abrahamic Covenant rested could be brought under such judgment. Christ used this occasion to teach Peter the necessity of faith in God for the fulfillment of divine promises in spite of divine justice.<sup>41</sup>

## **CHRIST’S AUTHORITY CHALLENGED AND DEFENDED**

On the morning following the lesson of the fig tree, Jesus began teaching in the Temple court. A group from the Sanhedrin came and interrupted the Master with a threefold question and demanded to know His motive and source of authority. They asked, "Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?" (Luke 20:2). This was an important question to them, as pointed out by Edersheim.

There was no principle more firmly established by universal consent than that authoritative teaching required previous authorization. Indeed, this logically followed from the principle of Rabbinism. All teaching must be authoritative, since it was traditionally approved by authority handed down from teacher to disciple. The highest honor of a scholar was that he was like a well plastered cistern, from which not a drop had leaked of what had been poured into it. The ultimate appeal in cases of discussion was always to some great authority, whether an individual Teacher or a Decree of the Sanhedrin. In this manner had the great Hillel first vindicated his claim to be the Teacher of his time and to decide the disputes then pending. And, to decide differently from authority, was either the mark of ignorant assumption or the outcome of daring rebellion, in either case to be visited with "the ban."<sup>42</sup>

Jesus would not be ensnared in their trap. He turned His defense into a counter-attack by resorting to a counter-question. He asked, "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?" (Luke 20:4). By doing so, He forced His enemies to face a dilemma, and either answer would place them in the same kind of trap they were laying for Him. To denounce John as an impostor was extremely dangerous. On the other hand, to accept his ministry as divinely commissioned was to admit to Jesus' authority. It was obvious that the authority of Christ and John the Baptist were identical.

The Jews replied that they did not know the answer. Dr. Pentecost states, "If they were unable to determine the authority behind John, they would be unable to determine the authority behind Christ even though He demonstrated that authority to them. Consequently He refused to answer."<sup>43</sup>

Instead of giving a direct answer to their question, Jesus proceeded to teach the Jewish leaders truths concerning the kingdom in three parables.

### **The Parable of the Two Sons**

First, Jesus contrasted the character of His opponents in the Parable of the Two Sons. The background of this story is the claim that the Pharisees were the sons of the kingdom by virtue of their descent from Abraham. Christ, however, taught that true sonship must be tested by obedience and only the obedient are sons. In this parable Jesus exposed the insincerity of the Pharisaic leaders in their treatment of John the Baptist. Jesus hated no sin worse than that of hypocrisy. By exposing their insincere and deceptive attitude toward John, He prepared the way for the final blow to their artificial religious leadership of the people.

Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the



publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him (Matthew 21:31-32).

### **The Parable of the Wicked Husbandman**

Second, Jesus added the Parable of the Wicked Husbandman to reveal the rejection of His person and His ministry by the leaders and the Jewish people as a whole and to warn them of the dire consequences. They did not perceive, in the drift of the parable, that they were pronouncing their own destruction. Jesus solemnly repeated the sentence of doom on the people who had rejected the long line of prophets and who were now preparing to kill Him. With a piercing look at the rulers, He asked another question.

Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder (Matthew 21:42-44).

Woe to the builder who rejects Jesus!

### **The Parable of the Marriage Feast**

Third, Jesus used the Parable of the Marriage Feast to set forth Israel's contempt for God's great kingdom feast (Matthew 22:1-14). The parable is a drama in three acts. In Act I, the king sends out his slaves to call those who have received the first invitation to the feast. They will not come. This first bidding was given to the Jews by the prophets of the Old Testament dispensation. In Act II, the apostles and His Son are killed. Finally, in Act III, the king commands his slaves, "Go out therefore into the highways and bring them in." This invitation was extended to the Gentiles. Note, however, that the wedding guests, whether Jew or Gentile, are required to be clothed with the wedding garment—the righteousness of God through the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17).

#### **A Political Catch-Question**

The rulers had been outwitted in their rabbinical questions about the authority of Jesus. Now they tried to get Him to speak against the Roman government. "Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar?" they asked. This was a sly trick designed to ensnare Jesus. The plain, direct, and frank question demanded an answer. They could imagine His two replies, either of which would involve Him in a very serious or even fatal circumstance. If He declared the tribute unlawful, He would be brought before the Roman tribunal at once as a revolutionary. If He declared it lawful, He would alienate the sympathies of the great mass of Jews who were nationalistic. At least a part of this latter group would be opposed to paying taxes on religious grounds, reasoning to do so would be to disallow that Jehovah alone was Israel's King.

Jesus requested a penny. He then asked, "Whose image and superscription hath it?" When the people replied, "Caesar's," Jesus stated, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's" (Luke 20:25). Thus Christ recognized two divinely constituted spheres of authority. In the one sphere, God was supreme; in the other sphere,

Caesar had delegated authority. This teaching did not conflict with God's right to rule, and the payment of taxes to Caesar did not nullify the fact that ultimately God will appoint His Son as ruler in Caesar's place.

### **A Question about the Resurrection**

After the Herodians and Pharisees failed to ensnare Jesus with a trick question, the Sadducees decided to try. Their question, like that of the other two groups, was intended to destroy His influence with the people. The Pharisees intended to inspire distrust with their question about His authority. The Herodians and theologians, with their question about the tribute, had sought to create indignation against Jesus among the Romans. This third question asked by the Sadducees was designed to cause derision and ridicule by all the people.

The Sadducees' question concerned an imaginary case of a woman who had seven husbands. They queried, "In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" This sect rejected the implication of the doctrine of the resurrection as it was popularly understood. According to the popular idea, the resurrection would restore men to their former bodies, appetites, passions, and the usual material condition and relationships. The Sadducees' sensual conception of the future prompted the scorn and ridicule of others.<sup>44</sup>

In answering their question, Jesus exposed their ignorance of the Scriptures and of the power of God. They had cited Moses' law. Jesus in turn cited the "passage of the bush," in which Jehovah said to Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Jesus further taught that in the resurrection, one neither marries nor is given in marriage, but is as the angels. He had opened up the very doors of Heaven that all might see the blessed state of the resurrected. The people were astonished at His teaching.

### **A Legal Question**

Defeated again, the Jews made another attempt to discredit Christ. Surely He would not be able to stand before the profound questioning of a skilled Pharisaic lawyer. Therefore, they selected the most experienced one among them to act as their spokesman. He asked, "Which is the first and greatest commandment?" The Pharisees had codified the Law into 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions. Discussing which ones were "light" and "heavy" consumed much time.<sup>45</sup>

Jesus' reply went right to the heart of the matter.

The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:29-31).

The learned lawyer caught the spiritual importance of Jesus' reply and added his observation.

Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mark 12:32-33).

Jesus replied, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” Christ had successfully passed through the Jews’ snare by asserting that their monotheistic belief was true—He was not “another,” but the one God veiled in human flesh.

### **Jesus Silences His Enemies in His Last Public Ministry**

On this last day of Jesus’ public ministry, all of His enemies had assaulted Him with questions. When they had exhausted all their resources and been beaten down by His dexterous defense, they retreated with humiliation, but also with renewed determination to make an end of Him.

As Jesus continued teaching in the Temple, He turned the defense to an attack on the error of the Pharisees’ doctrine by asking them a question. “What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?” They answered, “The son of David.” “How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then called Him Lord, how is he his son?” (Matthew 22:42-45).

The scribes insisted on a temporal king who should be the successor of David in a splendid material rule. They had grasped the fact that the Messiah was to be David’s son by human descent; but they failed to recognize the significance of the Lordship of the Messiah. The Messiah’s relationship to David was twofold. First, He was David’s son by natural lineage. Second, He was David’s Lord because of His divinity. Psalm 110 teaches the dual nature of Christ: He was both God and man. Notice what Jesus stated in Revelation 22:16: “I am the root and the offspring of David.”

The Pharisees realized the dilemma they faced in this discourse and refused to answer. No one could refute Christ’s wisdom. Matthew recorded, “And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions” (Matthew 22:46).

It was fitting that in Christ’s final public discourse in the Temple that He should warn His disciples against the hypocrisy of these corrupt and perverse men. The seven woes Jesus pronounced against the Pharisees are to be interpreted as an effort not merely to warn others against their vanity, selfishness, and irreligion, but to open their own eyes and convert them from the error of their ways.

The first woe was aimed at those hypocrites who slammed the door of the kingdom of Heaven in the face of men by pretending to open the door to the Scriptures, but in reality they were concealing them—blocking the entrance of sincere seekers.

The second woe was a deadly thrust against proselyters who “scoured land and sea to make a single proselyte” to Pharisaism. Their aim was not to bring men into the kingdom of God, but into their own belief system.

The third woe was a withering charge against their “creating confusion in moral distinctions.” In their Pharisaic mentality, swearing by the Temple was no real oath, but swearing by the gold in the Temple was valid; an oath by the altar was nil, while one by the gift of the altar was binding. They were blind not to understand that the altar was greater than the gift, and that one swearing by the Temple swore by it and the One dwelling in it. Jesus taught against all use of oaths, for in the kingdom of God, a man’s word must be as good as his oaths. Dr. Pentecost comments on the hairsplitting of the Pharisees.

By making such a distinction the Pharisees were able to take an oath, but then absolve themselves of responsibility for fulfilling the oath. The one uninitiated in the distinction would accept the oath of the Pharisees, not knowing that the oath had been couched in such phraseology that the Pharisee did not consider himself bound by it. Christ condemned such duplicity.<sup>46</sup>

The fourth woe referred to tithing, which was scrupulously observed by the scribes and Pharisees while at the same time they omitted the weightier matters of the Law.

The fifth woe was a vial of wrath poured out on Pharisaic externalism, rapacity, and incontinence. They cleansed the outside of the cup and platter, symbols of their outward appearance of piety, while leaving the inner man full of extortion and excess.

The sixth woe referred to no special vice, but gave a graphic picture of their hypocrisy in general. Like the whitewashed tombs, they appeared outwardly clean, but inside were full of spiritual and moral decay.

The seventh and final woe dealt with their inconsistency and the deception of the Jews when they denied they would have murdered the ancient prophets as their fathers did. Jesus said, “Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.” In essence, He said, “Crown their misdeeds by killing the prophets God sent you! Do at last what has long been in your hearts!”

Jesus concluded His fearful indictment with a memorable lament over the beloved city of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39). He then left and sat down in the place of the treasury. There He gave His disciples the lesson regarding the widow’s two mites. She gave more than all the rich men, for she gave all she had.

## Chapter 11

# PREPARATION FOR THE PASSION

Robertson's Sections 139-152

### JESUS' PROPHETIC DISCOURSE

The disciples went out from the Temple with Jesus to return to Bethany, apprehensive that something bad was going to happen. They looked back at the beautiful Temple and one of them said, "Master, see what manner of stones and what manner of building!"

In essence Jesus replied, "You think this building is great? It won't be long before it is torn down; not one stone will be left upon another." (See Matthew 24:2.) Three times prior to this incident Jesus had foretold the destruction of the Temple: some six months earlier while working in Perea (Luke 13:34); again in the triumphal entry (Luke 19:41-44); and finally in His last address to the people in the Temple. The leaders would incur the wrath of the Romans with their false conception of a temporal messianic kingdom. The disciples needed to abandon the current messianic idea of a material kingdom.

When Jesus mentioned the destruction of Jerusalem, He also cited the nearness of His second coming and the end of the world. In Jewish eschatology, two ages were recognized. The first was this present age or the age in which Israel was waiting for the coming Messiah. The second age was the age to come or the one in which all of Israel's covenants would be fulfilled and the nation would enter into her promised blessings because the Messiah had come.<sup>47</sup> Convinced that something fateful was soon going to happen, the disciples came to Jesus privately, asking, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3).

Limited space in this book does not permit proper handling of this discourse, sometimes called the Olivet Discourse. The student is encouraged to conduct an in-depth study of this great prophetic message. In doing so, one must remember that Jesus was revealing the prophetic program for Jerusalem, the nation of Israel, and the Jews; He made no reference to the church or its prophetic program. Because of its Jewish context, this portion of Scripture should be interpreted with reference to Israel and not the church.<sup>48</sup>

The narrative of Matthew, which of all the Synoptics gives the fullest outline of the sermon, may be divided into the following sections.

- |                            |                 |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| A. The Disciples' Question | Matthew 24:1-3  |
| B. The Tribulation         | Matthew 24:4-26 |
| 1. First Half              | 24:4-8          |

- |                                   |                  |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| 2. Second Half                    | 24:9-14          |
| 3. Repetition and Explanation     | 24:15-26         |
| C. Second Advent                  | Matthew 24:27-30 |
| D. The Regathering of Israel      | Matthew 24:31    |
| E. Parenthetical Exhortations     | Matthew 24:32-51 |
| 1. The Fig Tree                   | 24:32-44         |
| 2. The Faithful Servant           | 24:45-51         |
| F. Judgment on Israel             | Matthew 25:1-30  |
| 1. The Parable of the Ten Virgins | 25:1-13          |
| 2. The Parable of the Talents     | 25:14-30         |
| G. Judgment on the Gentiles       | Matthew 25:31-46 |

The destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70 would be but an insignificant foreshadow of the total destruction of the city and the land of Israel during the Tribulation. Christ was warning Israel that in the end time, when they begin to see these particular signs, the people should flee. Even though this will be a time of unsurpassed suffering for the Jews (see Revelation 12:13-17), God will preserve a remnant.

Two days before Jesus would celebrate the Passover and institute the Lord's Supper with His disciples, He explained to them that He would be delivered to His enemies to be crucified. He knew the members of the Sanhedrin, along with Caiaphas, the high priest, were plotting His death. Above all else the Jewish leaders feared the people, which made them afraid to arrest Jesus during the feast lest it cause an uproar among the masses.

## **MARY ANOINTS JESUS**

Mary's action in the house of Simon the leper showed her great love for Jesus. She came with a flask holding approximately twelve ounces of costly, genuine spikenard perfume valued at one year's wage. With lavish abandon she broke the narrow neck of the vase and poured the perfume upon Jesus' head and then on His feet. She then wiped His feet with her hair. She filled the house with the fragrance and the whole world with the aroma of her love. This was a gift fit for a king. Only such a gift would express her deep devotion and profound love for Jesus.

Not everyone, however, appreciated Mary's act of devotion. Judas led the severe criticism for the wasteful use of the perfume, which could have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. Later John and the other disciples saw Judas's accusation in light of the betrayal and so interpreted it.

Jesus severely rebuked Judas! He then pronounced the highest eulogy upon Mary's loving act.

She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her (Mark 14:8-9).

## **JUDAS BARGAINS WITH THE RULERS**

Jesus' commendation of Mary and rebuke of Judas cut deep in the disciple's heart. Satan now began to enter in and take full possession of his heart with evil feelings, desires, and suggestions. Soon Judas was on his way to bargain with the chief priests about a plan and a price to betray the Lord. They finally settled on thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave. Little did Judas anticipate the dire personal consequences of this treacherous act just two days later.

Dr. Pentecost discusses Judas' agreement with the Sanhedrin.

In agreeing to betray Christ, Judas offered to do more than merely identify Him. Identification would have been unnecessary, for all the Sanhedrin were very familiar with Christ; all had seen and heard Him many times. Judas agreed to fulfill a point of Roman law, a necessary requirement if the Sanhedrin was to proceed with their plot to execute Christ. A person could not be brought to trial before a Roman court until an indictment had been officially lodged against him, charging him with a crime. This indictment had to be signed by witnesses who, by signing the indictment, agreed to appear in order to give testimony for the prosecution against the accused. Thus Judas offered himself as a witness against Christ. He agreed to go before the Roman courts when Christ was brought to trial on a yet undetermined charge. Judas' willingness to fulfill such a function laid bare the depth of his emotions—his bitterness, resentment, and disappointment in the Lord.<sup>49</sup>

Matthew recorded, "And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him" (Matthew 26:16).

## **THE PASCHAL MEAL**

Accustomed to sharing the Passover with Jesus, the disciples came to Him on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and asked, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal?" Jesus told Peter and John to go into Jerusalem and there they would see a man bearing a pitcher. Men did not normally carry pitchers in those days and they would easily single out such a man. Jesus told them to follow the man and say to him, "The Master saith, 'My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples. Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the Passover?'" The two disciples found everything just as Jesus said and prepared to celebrate the Passover meal.

### **A Lesson in Humility**

When Jesus and the Twelve arrived, they found the large upper room furnished and ready with all that was necessary for the feast. In their eagerness to occupy the places of honor nearest the Master, the disciples forgot themselves. But with tact and gentleness, Jesus reproved their contentious spirits, teaching that true greatness is in service, not in rank. He then assigned to them

the right of eating and drinking at His table in the kingdom and of sitting on thrones and judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

During the paschal supper Jesus exemplified to His apostolic group the lesson of His earlier rebuke, the spirit that would win the world. He rose from the table, laid aside His garments, tied a towel around His waist, and began to wash the disciples' feet. He, their Lord and Master, took the role of a servant. Lest there be any misunderstanding, Jesus explained this act in John 13:12-20. The Twelve were to learn that the greatest in the kingdom must be servant of all.

Shortly after this lesson on humility Jesus singled out Judas as the betrayer. After Judas's departure, Jesus began His final discourse and warned the disciples against desertion. The Eleven protested their loyalty. Peter even vowed that he was ready to go with Christ to death. Jesus rebuked Peter, stating that Satan desired to sift him as wheat and that he would deny Christ three times before the cock crowed. Peter's reaction demonstrated his sincerity, for he and the Eleven came to Jerusalem knowing that death could await them; he was, however, overly confident and not fully aware of the contents of his heart.

### **The Lord's Supper Instituted**

The Supper that Jesus initiated was a new institution, an antitype that corresponds to the Passover. It commemorates the atoning death of Jesus, but at the same time symbolizes the "flesh and blood" the disciples should eat to sustain their spiritual life.

The Supper is also a memorial of the redemptive death that sums up and consummates the sacrificial life of Jesus. The Testator of the New Covenant died; the New Covenant is found in His blood. We can find remission of sins only in the atoning power of the blood of Jesus. The Old Covenant was ratified with the blood of animals; the New covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. This blood is found symbolically in the Lord's Supper.

### **DISCOURSE CONTINUED**

Following the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus continued His discourse in the upper room. It is summarized as follows:

1. The necessity and issues of His separation from them (John 13:31-38)
2. The fact that He was the mighty God veiled in flesh (John 14:1-11)
3. The intimate and continued relationship between Himself and the disciples in the greater works they were to do once they were filled with the Holy Ghost (John 14:12-21)
4. The manner of His revelation of Himself to them, making them effective in the greater works and giving them peace in the midst of the persecution and struggles (John 14:22-31)

In loving-kindness, Jesus told the disciples that in a little while He would leave them and gave them a new commandment: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another



... By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35).

His words of departure troubled the disciples and raised many questions, so He comforted them.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know (John 14:1-4).

These words were reminiscent of a Jewish bridegroom returning to claim his bride once he had properly prepared a place for her. Such a statement let the Eleven know they were not to be permanently left alone.

Jesus then answered Thomas’s question about “the Way.”

I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him (John 14:6-7).

Showing his spiritual dullness, Philip requested, “Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us” (John 14:8). Jesus’ reply is easily understood in light of the oneness of the Godhead and the truth of the Incarnation.

As Jesus expanded His answer to Philip, He touched on the role of the believer in His great work and plan. In doing so, He again foretold the coming of the Holy Ghost and declared Himself not only to be the Father, but also the Holy Ghost.

## **FINAL CHARGES TO THE DISCIPLES**

Leaving the upper room, the band walked to the Garden of Gethsemane. On the way, Jesus continued the theme of His kingdom and the disciples’ relationship to it. This was done under the metaphor of the Vine and Branches (John 15) and the exposition of their work through the Holy Ghost (John 16).

### **The Vine and the Branches**

Just as Jesus had referred to Himself as the Light (John 8:12), the Door (John 10:7), and the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), He now presented Himself as the true messianic Vine. The main point of this parable is the necessity of a vital union between Christ and His disciples for fruit-bearing, which is the principal means to the glory of God, the main issue of life. Jesus pointed out that spiritual vitality, real life, is in Him and we must be in vital connection to fulfill the purpose of God. He called the Eleven’s attention to the necessity of the cleansing effect of severe trials in order that they might go on bearing more and more fruit.

In John 15 Jesus brought home the application of the great doctrine to the apostolic group (verses 3-6). He commanded them to abide, remain, and continue in the sphere of His example, life, and doctrine. Unless they continued to abide in Him, they could not bear fruit. Jesus then pointed them to the way to put the reality of the spiritual connection to the test (verses 7-8). The acid test and best evidence of their love was their obedience to His commands.

In the second division of His discussion of the loving union between the disciples and Himself, Jesus pointed out the two results of that union. First, the union would produce Christian joy in them. Christ wanted their joy to be complete, dependent on being fruitful and holding to the only true objective in life—the glory of God. Second, the relationship that ought to exist between Master and disciple is one of love and friendship. “Ye are my friends if you do what I command you,” Jesus said.

Jesus concluded this discussion of the union between Himself and His disciples by citing the result of the union in their relationship to the outside world (verses 17-27). They would be hated by the world, which would intensify their need to go on loving one another. They would be hated “for my name’s sake.” They were to go forward fearlessly, giving their testimony in the power of the Holy Ghost.

### **The Work of the Holy Ghost**

The next subject Jesus addressed (John 16) was the relationship of the Holy Ghost to the world of sinful men. After His departure they would suffer, but He said, “It is expedient for you that I go away.” Why? Because only then could the Spirit operate through them.

Jesus told them plainly how the Holy Ghost would work in the hearts of unbelievers. He would convict the world of ungodly men in three areas.

1. Sin, as missing the mark or wronging God and man. (Sinful men must be convicted of the reality of sin.)
2. Righteousness, the righteousness of Christ.
3. Judgment, because the prince of this world stands judged. Satan was already as good as judged and decisively defeated.

The Spirit put the truths about these things in a clear light before the worldly man.

The work of the Holy Ghost in the disciples was made plain (verses 12-15). Their sorrow would be turned into joy (verses 16-24). Jesus revealed more clearly how His going away was expedient for them.

In conclusion, everything He said was intended to lead them to His peace. He pointed the way for them. First, in the world they would be met with tribulation, confusion, hatred, and strife. Second, they were to be of good courage. Danger lay ahead and they would need courage to face it. But He had gone before them, endured great trials, and come out victorious. He had conquered sin and temptation of all kinds as their representative. He assured them that they too could conquer in His name. He proclaimed, “I have overcome the world!” This was a high note of victory! For Him it was a realized victory; for them it was an assured one.

## JESUS' INTERCESSORY PRAYER

At the close of His last discourse and charge to the apostles, Jesus interceded for them in prayer. The prayer was not offered mentally or in private, but for the benefit of the Eleven. It reflected much of the thought and needs referred to in the discourse that preceded it.

In this great high-priestly prayer, Jesus interceded for three things.

1. The glorification of the Son.  
He prayed that He might seal the successful work of His life with the testimony that His death brought salvation to mankind (verses 1-8).
2. His intimate disciples around Him (verses 9-19).  
He prayed that they might be protected, kept in the midst of the bitter trials through which they must pass, and sanctified through His Word, becoming positive forces in the work of the kingdom. The two things He most desired for them were preservation of the character of Godlike holiness and separation from the world, and spiritual unity in the church. The disciples must remain in the corrupt and hostile world in contact with worldly society, that they might be a purifying influence. They were to be in the world but not of the world. They must not get their spirit, standards, and message from the worldly society about them.
3. The disciples of future generations (verses 20-26).  
The thing He longed for, on behalf of the future generations of kingdom workers and learners, is that they might be one in spirit and purpose. He would have them go on being unified and keep on believing in the divine origin and mission of their Lord.

## Chapter 12

# THE TRIAL AND PASSION

Robertson's Sections 153-168

### THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

It was less than a half-mile walk from St. Stephen's Gate to the Garden of Gethsemane's entrance on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. As they entered the garden, Jesus left eight disciples near the entrance and said, "Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder." He then took Peter, James, and John and went farther into the garden. There He entreated the trio, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here and watch with me." Going forward about a stone's throw, Jesus knelt. Falling on His face He beseeched the Father, praying, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (See Matthew 26:36-39.)

Returning to the three disciples, Jesus found them asleep. "What," He said to Peter, "could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:40-41). Jesus went away a second time and prayed, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matthew 26:42). He again arose and returned to the three and found them sleeping. A third time He left them and prayed. Luke recorded that Jesus then received divine help.

And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow (Luke 22:43-45).

Gethsemane was the place of consecration. In the wilderness Jesus defeated Satan; in the garden He conquered the flesh. His method in each instance was the same: submission to the will of the Father. No one can read the passage cited from Luke without catching a glimpse of the intense struggle Jesus endured on the mountainside. Human abilities fail to express the great agony that gripped the soul and body of the Christ to the point that "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood." It was only natural that His flesh would shrink away from the physical suffering of the cross. But even more so, the spotless Lamb of God would shun, if possible, the intense loneliness and spiritual anguish that would occur when He who knew no sin became sin (II Corinthians 5:21) that He might purchase our salvation. It is no wonder that He prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39).

Having conquered the flesh through submission to the Father's will, Jesus returned to the disciples. Arousing them from their sleep, He said, "Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me" (Matthew 26:46).

## THE BETRAYAL

The Sanhedrists accomplished the arrest of Jesus through the Temple police, possibly accompanied by a part of the cohort of Roman soldiers from the Tower of Antonia. It is likely that several hundred soldiers in all went to arrest Jesus.<sup>50</sup>

Judas first led them to the house of John Mark's mother, where the Last Supper was eaten.<sup>51</sup> From there he took them to Gethsemane, knowing that it was where Jesus often spent time with the disciples. Coming to Jesus, Judas said, "Hail, Master," and kissed Him, the predetermined sign of betrayal between Judas and the Sanhedrin. Jesus said, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" (Matthew 26:49-50).

Jesus then stepped forward and asked the captain of the Temple police, "Whom seek ye?" "Jesus of Nazareth," he replied. Jesus answered, "I AM" (John 18:5). (The word "he" was added by the translators to conform the sentence to English grammar.) Here is another great proof that Jesus is the mighty God. When He said, "I AM," these Jewish soldiers fell to the ground. They had heard the same name God used in revealing Himself to Moses from the midst of the burning bush.

At this point, Peter, ready to fight to the death to defend Christ, drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, Malchus. Jesus rebuked Peter and healed the severed ear, thus showing His readiness to forgive and to follow the divine plan for His life by drinking the cup of suffering. (See John 18:10-11.)

## THE JEWISH TRIAL

### The Preliminary Examination

The soldiers seized Jesus, tied His hands behind Him, and led Him away to Annas. Annas served as high priest from AD 6-15 and, through astute politics, had succeeded in securing from the Romans the succession of that office to his five sons and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who was the present occupant of the high priesthood. The soldiers led Jesus before His archenemy for a preliminary hearing in preparation for the mock trial that was to follow as soon as the Sanhedrin could be aroused and brought together. The examination was illegal, both the time and the place.

Annas questioned Jesus on two counts: His disciples and doctrines. First, Annas desired to ascertain how extensive Jesus' following had become but Jesus remained silent. Second, perceiving the impossibility of further questioning along this line, Annas turned the examination to Jesus' doctrines. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world. I taught in the synagogues and in the Temple where all the Jews customarily congregate. I spoke nothing in secret." These indisputable facts were known to all. Jesus continued, "Why ask me? Ask them that have heard me. They know what I said."

A deputy struck Jesus an insulting blow in the face, saying, "Do you answer the high priest thus?" In a judgment hall, such an act of violence was an outrageous breach of common decency. Jesus answered, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?"

(John 18:23). Such a calm and dignified reply terminated the examination. Jesus was then sent bound to Caiaphas, who had meanwhile summoned those Sanhedrists who would best serve his purpose.

### **The First Trial before Caiaphas**

The Sanhedrin usually met in the Temple, but the mob led Jesus away to the high priest's house, which was just outside the present wall of the city. All the chief priests, elders, and scribes had been summoned there. The place of the trial was abnormal and the time of the trial was illegal, for night trials were not permitted. Other illegalities practiced in the trials of Jesus were undue haste, seeking or bribing witnesses, neglecting to warn the witnesses solemnly before they should give evidence, forcing the accused to testify against Himself, judicial use of the prisoner's confession, and failure to release the prisoner when the witnesses' testimonies did not concur.

Caiaphas searched diligently to secure false witnesses to testify against Jesus with the express purpose of putting Him to death. Many false witnesses came and gave their testimony, but they did not agree. According to the code of the Jews (Deuteronomy 19:15), the testimony of at least two witnesses must be identical or in harmony. Finally two stood and bore false witness against Jesus, saying, "We have heard Him say, I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands and in three days, I will rebuild it without hands." But their stories did not match, and no definite charge could be laid before the Roman authorities in order to secure Christ's death sentence.

Since Caiaphas could not find witnesses to suit his purpose, he resorted to an unjust legal trick of asking the accused to give testimony against Himself. The high priest asked, "I put thee on oath, by the living God, are you the Messiah, the Son of God?" To claim to be so, Jesus would be claiming to be the one God; this would be considered blasphemy and subject to the death penalty according to Jewish law.

Christ could have evaded the issue, but He chose deliberately not to do so. His words, pronounced with majestic calm, in tones of unmistakable conviction, ring down through the centuries: "Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). In essence, He said, "Now I stand as a prisoner before the bar; later I will be the judge on the bench."

Caiaphas thought he had achieved his purpose, but in reality, Jesus voluntarily chose to meet then and there the issue of His atoning death. With a great show of horror, the high priest rent his garments, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have for witnesses? All we need is a consensus among the people."

Amid screams and jeers, the people overwhelming answered Jesus was worthy of death. Venting their spite and hatred, they spat upon His face, beat Him on the neck with their fists, and struck Him in the face with the palms of their hands. They blindfolded Him, and, striking Him with rods, said, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?" (Matthew 26:68). This was their hour—the hour of the power of darkness.

Their long-awaited Messiah had come but they rejected Him, for Jesus was not the kind of king they wanted. He did not seek an earthly throne, but nevertheless claimed to be the Messiah. They later used His messianic confession to secure His condemnation of treason before the Roman

court, but if Jesus had not “confessed,” it would have been tantamount to denying His messianic claims.

### **Peter’s Three Denials**

During the Last Supper Jesus warned Peter that Satan desired to sift him as wheat and that he would deny Him three times before the cock crowed. Trusting in himself, Peter boldly stated that he would go with Christ, even to death. Peter and another disciple did follow Christ to the courtyard of the high priest. Peter, however, soon realized his human weakness.

In the high priest’s courtyard a maid accused Peter by asking, “Are you one of this Man’s disciples?” Peter instantly replied, “I am not!” Peter moved over by the servants and officers who were warming themselves by the fire. They also asked, “Aren’t you one of His disciples?” Again Peter denied knowing the Lord. But one of the servants of the high priest, a relative of Malchus,<sup>52</sup> persisted, asking, “Didn’t I see you in the garden with Him?” For the third time, Peter denied Christ. While Peter yet spoke, the cock crowed. And Jesus turned and looked upon Peter. Remembering the words of the Lord, Peter rushed out and wept bitterly.

Three reasons may be offered for Peter’s denial of Christ. In Luke 22:46, Jesus had exhorted him to pray lest he should fall into temptation; in John 13:38 He foretold the denial. Ignoring these warnings, Peter seemed to set himself up for failure.

1. Had confidence in himself (Luke 22:33; Matthew 26:35)
2. Separated himself from Christ and followed at a distance (Mark 14:54)
3. Sat down in the company of Christ’s enemies (Psalm 1:1; Luke 22:55)

May we take heed and ever learn from Peter’s failure.

### **The Formal Condemnation**

The night trial before Caiaphas adjourned. In order for the members of the Sanhedrin and chief priests to give a legal sanction to their illegal proceeding, they assembled immediately at dawn for consultation against Jesus for the express purpose of putting Him to death. This meeting was for mere ratification of what had been decided during the night.

## **REMORSE AND SUICIDE OF JUDAS**

When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he “repented himself” (Matthew 27:3). He returned to the chief priests and said, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood” (Matthew 27:4). The religious leaders were unmoved by Judas’s confession and his casting of the silver pieces into the sanctuary. They collected the money and decided to purchase a plot of ground in which strangers could be buried, for it was unlawful to put “blood money” into the treasury (Deuteronomy 23:18). In remorse, however, Judas went out and hanged himself.

### **THE ROMAN TRIAL**

#### **The First Time before Pilate**

The Jews brought Jesus before Pilate, the legal Roman authority in Jerusalem. Pilate surprised the people by demanding that they should state their terms and ground of accusation against Jesus (John 18:29). Not wanting Pilate to reopen the case, they answered, “Had he not been an evildoer, we would not have handed Him over to you.” They foresaw that they might not obtain Pilate’s sanction to their accusation of blasphemy. Therefore, they offered an accusation of treason on three counts.

1. Plotting sedition against Rome
2. Forbidding paying tribute to Caesar
3. Claiming to be the Messiah, a king

As the charge of treason was one Pilate could not dismiss lightly, he personally examined Jesus. “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus knew Pilate was not hardened beyond appeal; in reply He said, “Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?” (John 18:34).

“Then are you a king?” Pilate continued to probe. Jesus explained that His kingdom was not secular, but spiritual, a kingdom not of outward force, territory, or law and order, but of inward conviction and sentiments, a kingdom of the heart, a kingdom of truth. Convinced that there would be no danger to the Roman government from such a person, Pilate returned to the people and said, “I find no fault in Him.”

At this point, Pilate, under Roman law, should have released Jesus. Instead, he listened to the priests who angrily proclaimed, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee even unto this place.” Hearing Galilee mentioned, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, the ruler of that province.

### **Before Herod**

Herod was visiting at Jerusalem. He had desired to see Jesus for a long time, but did not wish to condemn Him to death. Herod’s experience with John the Baptist had taught him the penalty of such a death. Instead, he had some of his guards array Jesus in a bright-colored robe of mockery, and sent Him back, possibly with a letter of flattery, to Pilate.

### **The Second Time Before Pilate**

It was now near sunrise. Pilate’s ploy to rid himself of Jesus did not work. Once again he was confronted with the destiny of a Man whom he knew was innocent. (A message from his wife stating that he should have nothing to do with Christ because of a frightening dream she had heightened Pilate’s personal frustration.) In seeking a way to release Jesus, he offered to release a prisoner, for such a gesture was customary at the Passover. Pilate offered to release either Jesus or Barabbas, the meanest man in prison who was awaiting execution. In one accord, the mass chose Barabbas.

Pilate, possibly to garner sympathy for Jesus, decided to have Him scourged, thus again revealing his weakness in a case that called for strength and firmness of decision. The soldiers took



Jesus away and beat Him with a cat-o'-nine-tails in which pieces of stone, bone, or metal were embedded in the ends. Such beatings often ended in death. They cast a purple robe over His lacerated body, rammed a plaited crown of thorns on His head, and placed in His right hand a reed-scepter. They mocked Him and struck Him with rods on His thorn-covered brow. They slapped his face and His bleeding body. They spat in His face. Kneeling down to Him, they exclaimed in mockery, "Hail, King of the Jews."

Pilate had a purpose in allowing this. He thought one look at the broken and bleeding form arrayed in a clownish garb as a mock-king would convince the mob of the utter folly that such a person could usurp the Roman throne. Pointing to the battered form, Pilate said, "Behold the Man!"

Angry cries of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" dashed his hopes of releasing Christ. Renewing his efforts to free Him, Pilate questioned Jesus further. Then again he proclaimed, "Behold your King!" They answered, "Away with Him."

"Shall I crucify your King?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar!" they replied. This was the first time the Jews ever admitted this. The prophet had declared, "The scepter shall not depart until Shiloh come." This statement was additional proof that the Messiah had indeed appeared.

Pilate finally gave up hope. He took a basin of water and washed his hands, stating, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it" (Matthew 27:24).

In a tragic reply, the Jews cried out, "Let His blood be upon us and upon our children." Consequently, Pilate, wishing to appease the mob, released unto them Barabbas and delivered Jesus up to their will to be crucified.

Judgment fell upon some of the main characters in the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. Judas died a loathsome suicide; the house of Annas was destroyed some years later; Caiaphas was deposed a year after the Crucifixion; and Pilate was banished to Gaul and later committed suicide. When Jerusalem finally fell to Titus in AD 70, her wretched citizens were crucified around her walls until, in the historian's grim language, "Space was wanting for the crosses and crosses for the bodies."<sup>53</sup> The horrors of the siege of Jerusalem are unparalleled in history.

## **THE CRUCIFIXION**

### **On the Way to the Cross**

Three times Jesus had run the gamut of mockery: by the Sanhedrin and their servant-officers, by Herod's bodyguards, and by the Roman cohort. Afterward, they removed the purple-

scarlet military robe and draped His own bloodstained garments over His shoulders. They led Him away to be crucified, forcing Him to bear His own cross according to the custom.

The grim procession moved along the road that led to Golgotha, the place of the skull, situated on a knoll just outside the northern wall of the city. Although not stated in Scripture, Jesus, probably suffering from sheer exhaustion and blood loss, was unable to bear the weight of the cross on His lacerated shoulders. He fell and lay inert in the roadway. The soldiers looked around, saw a burly man named Simon, and compelled him to bear the cross to Calvary. (Simon of Cyrene was the father of Rufus and Alexander of apostolic history. See Mark 15:21.)

On the way to Golgotha, the women wailed and lamented Jesus' fate. He turned to them and gave them a more expedient reason to weep.

Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? (Luke 23:28-31).

Consider two interpretations of this passage. First, if the Romans dealt thusly with Jesus, whom they considered innocent, how much worse would they deal with the guilty and rebellious ones in the time of the future war. (In that future war more than a million Jews perished in Jerusalem within a few days.) Second, if the leaders of Israel were capable of doing things such as delivering up their divine King, thus setting a flame to her green tree, how terrible would be the judgment of God in the "dry wood" of an apostate and rebellious people in future years.<sup>54</sup>

At the time they crucified Jesus the Romans also crucified two malefactors, placing Jesus in the middle.

### **First Three Hours on the Cross**

The Gospel writers recorded several notable events that occurred during the first three hours on the cross, from 9:00 AM until noon.

1. Three sayings of Jesus
2. The soldiers gambling for the garments
3. The inscription nailed to the cross
4. The scoffing of the multitude and the Sanhedrists
5. The derision of the soldiers and of one of the two robbers
6. The repentance and salvation of the penitent thief

The cross was the most disgraceful and one of the cruelest instruments of death ever invented. It was so terrible that the Romans, who borrowed it from the Carthaginians, would not allow a Roman citizen to be crucified, but reserved the barbarous punishment for slaves and foreigners. (The Jews customarily used stoning and never crucifixion.)

Soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross at the Jews' third hour of the day, 9:00 AM. Pilate ordered them to place above Him the superscription, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the

Jews.” The priests demanded that Pilate change the inscription to read, “He said, ‘I am King of the Jews.’” But Pilate stated, “What I have written, I have written.”

The gentle Carpenter of Nazareth willingly subjected Himself to the agony of the cross. While the soldiers callously nailed His hands and feet to the rough beams, Jesus cried, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). His great heart of love took in the mob, the soldiers, and the Sanhedrin. This was the great victory of the cross, where love overcame hate and opened the door of redemption for the sin-enslaved human race.

After this cry, the soldiers parted His garments and cast lots for His seamless robe. This was in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18.

The rulers of the Jews mingled with the crowd, inciting it to jeers and mockery. They said, “He saved others, but He cannot save Himself.” They unwittingly uttered this truth, the bedrock of the whole plan of redemption. They added, “Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, and then we will believe on Him.” Thus they sought to deceive the people and make them believe in their own sincerity as their leaders.

Three groups echoed the mockery of the Jewish leaders.

1. The unthinking multitude—the rulers were responsible for leading the crowd in all this derision and hateful abuse.
2. The soldiers—lifted their wine cups, offered Him their sour wine, and drank to Him in their heartless glee, uttering blasphemy.
3. One of the two thieves—“Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

While the one thief mocked, the other rebuked him, saying, “Don’t you fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, but He has done nothing amiss.” Then reaching out his groping hand of faith in the blackness of his own utter desolation, he turned to Jesus and said, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” Somehow, this thief must have heard the message of Jesus prior to his conviction. The implanted Word of God germinated into eternal life, for Jesus replied, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). It took great faith to believe in the One who was crucified with him, and a great leap of the imagination from the cross to a crown, from a criminal’s death to eternal life.

After this exchange with the criminals Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to John. Edersheim states, “He [John] loved Jesus best; and it was fitting that to his manliness and affection should be entrusted Christ’s dangerous inheritance.”<sup>55</sup> This entrustment seems even more logical when one realizes that Mary was a sister to Salome, the mother of John and James.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Three Hours of Darkness: Noon to 3:00 PM**

It was noon, yet the sun began to fail and for the next three hours a peculiar supernatural darkness shrouded the whole land. Jesus hung on the cross in silence while nameless agonies of crucifixion inched Him toward death. Forsaken, Jesus felt a desolate isolation and loneliness.

Near the close of the three hours of darkness, Jesus felt that His Father had forsaken Him, and His anguished cry pierced the darkness. “My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” A suffering far greater than the mere physical pain of crucifixion wrung this bitter cry from His lips. These words of desolation expressed a crushing grief, even greater than that which He had felt in Gethsemane. David Bernard describes the scene in his book, *The Oneness of God*.

No one alive on earth had felt this spiritual death in its fullest degree, because all of us live, move, and have our being in God (Acts 17:28). Even the atheist enjoys many good things such as joy, love, and life itself. Every good gift comes from God (James 1:17), and all life originates from His and is upheld by Him. But, Jesus tasted ultimate death, the separation from God that a sinner will feel in the lake of fire. He felt the anguish, hopelessness, and despair as if he were a man eternally forsaken by God. So the human nature of Jesus cried out on the cross as Jesus took on the sin of the whole world and felt the eternal punishment of separation for that sin (I Peter 2:24).<sup>57</sup>

His cry was for us. He drank the dregs of the cup of sorrow, grief, and pain on our behalf. He became a “curse for us” and so redeemed us from the curse of the Law. He was our forerunner in every kind of experience, even to feeling God’s frown of disapproval on sin, that He might become our High Priest and understand all our infirmities and temptations. He felt the way a lost sinner feels, yet no sin could be found in Him.

The cry of Jesus on the cross, ‘My God, why hast thou forsaken me?’, does not mean that the spirit of God had departed from the body, but rather that there was no help from the Spirit in His sacrificial death of substitution for sinful mankind. When the sinless Lamb of God became sin (II Corinthians 5:21), it was not one person of the Godhead being deserted by another, but the human nature feeling the wrath and judgment of God upon the sin of mankind. The Lamb of God had taken the place of sinful man on the cross and was suffering the full punishment for sin. There was no abatement of suffering because of His deity. In His agonizing process of dying, Jesus suffered the pains of our sins, and His suffering became death when He yielded His Spirit.

Jesus then said, “I thirst.” Even a cruel soldier’s heart was moved by sympathy and one of the guards immediately ran and took a sponge, impaled it on a reed, soaked it with vinegar, and offered Him a drink. But He would not drink.

Jesus then with a loud voice uttered the final redemptive words, “It is finished!” The work of redemption, which was the object of His earthly life, had been completed. The prophecies with reference to the Messiah had been fulfilled and the last suffering for sin endured. Nothing had been left undone or un-borne. The statement was a shout of triumph. He cried with a loud voice, not the weakened utterance of a dying man, but of a Conqueror in the full flush of strength and victory. His task was complete!

Then lifting His face in glorious contemplation toward the heavens, He said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” With that, Jesus Christ gave up the ghost and died.

## **THE PHENOMENA THAT ACCOMPANIED THE DEATH OF CHRIST**

A number of supernatural events immediately followed the death of Jesus Christ.

1. The veil in the Temple rent from the top to the bottom. This veil, which was the thickness of a palm breadth, or one and a half inches, was sixty feet long and thirty feet high. It hung between the Holy and Most Holy Places. The veil being rent from the top to the bottom signified that God was throwing open the Most Holy Place to all men. Previously only the high priest entered and that once a year on the Day of Atonement. Now the way was opened for all men to come boldly to the throne of grace through the atoning death of Christ.
2. A supernatural earthquake followed the rending of the veil. The rocks were rent and the rock-hewn tombs were shaken open at the hour of His death. Some of the saints came forth from the dead after His resurrection and were seen by the people.

The centurion was so deeply impressed as he witnessed all the events of the six hours that he exclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" Literally multitudes of people witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus. When they beheld the cruelty of the soldiers, the vengeful and spiteful things done by the enemies of Christ, and heard the words from the cross, they returned to the city full of remorse, smiting their breasts in token of their sorrow and awe.

## **THE MESSAGE AND MEANING OF THE CROSS**

At the cross, sin and Satan were revealed in all the blackness of their real character as never before or since. The consequences of sin in men were seen in the trials, scourging, mockery, derision, and crucifixion. But the cross also revealed God as He was never revealed before or since—in all His exacting holiness and righteousness on the one hand, and in the fullness of His wonderful redemptive love on the other. Since Jesus hung on the cross, we now can understand how much God hates sin! He suffered His own Son to be despised, rejected by men, and nailed to a cross of shame and suffering. He "made Him sin" that He might eradicate sin forever from the human race. Against the background of the black cloud of God's hatred for sin shines the rainbow of His redemptive love and grace: the flesh of the eternal God purchased our redemption through His shed blood.

The Cross is central to redemption. It was God's eternal purpose and plan to redeem mankind, and the Cross was the method He chose to do it. The Cross marked the absolute victory of Christ over Satan and sin. The forces of light and the forces of darkness fought the decisive battle to the finish at the Cross. He broke the power of Satan who wielded the power of sin and death. At the Cross Jesus Christ paid the price of our redemption and "brought us up" from the bondage of sin to set us at liberty and make us free. The Cross is the mainspring of repentance, which is sorrow for sin and change of mind and purpose in relation to sin.

## chapter 13

# THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

### Robertson's Sections 169-184

The history of Christ's life upon earth closes with a miracle as great as that of its inception. It may be said that the one casts light upon the other. If He was what the Gospels represent Him, He must have been born of a pure Virgin, without sin, and He must have risen from the Dead. If the story of His Birth be true, we can believe that of His Resurrection; if that of His Resurrection be true, we can believe that of His Birth. In the nature of things, the latter was incapable of strict historic proofs; and in the nature of things, His Resurrection demanded and was capable of the fullest historic evidence. If such exists, the keystone is given to the arch; the miraculous Birth becomes almost a necessary postulate, and Jesus is the Christ in the full sense of the Gospels. And yet we mark, as another parallel point between the account of the miraculous Birth and that of the Resurrection, the utter absence of details as regards these events themselves. If this circumstance may be taken as indirect evidence that they were not legendary, it also imposes on us the duty of observing the reverent silence so well benefitting the case, and of not intruding beyond the path which the Evangelic narrative has opened to us.<sup>58</sup>

The Resurrection is the keystone to Christianity's arch; it is the seal of all Christ's claims. Without the Resurrection, He could not be the Savior of mankind. Through His resurrection, He reached the reality of the life beyond the tomb and substantiated His claim to be the Giver of life and Judge of mankind. By His resurrection He became the firstfruits of the eternal life He promised to all who come to Him.

Shepard states that the resurrection of the body of Jesus is the best attested fact of the evangelical records. On the basis of its historic validity rests the whole fabric of His supernatural birth, sinless life, startling miracles, and vicarious death. His whole life from the cradle to the grave is unified by the glorious resurrection from the dead. The history of Christianity finds its source and final authority and power in the Resurrection.<sup>59</sup>

## THE EARTHQUAKE AND THE OPENING OF THE TOMB

Let us take a closer look at the events of the Resurrection and those that followed. While it is difficult to harmonize all the details cited in the four Gospels, the events of this memorable Sunday, Resurrection Day, probably took place as follows.

1. The Resurrection
2. The earthquake
3. The descent of the angel
4. The opening of the tomb
5. The visit of the women to the tomb
6. The visit of Peter and John to the tomb

The supernatural was as much an order of the Resurrection as it had been of the birth and infancy of Jesus. Before sunrise on Sunday there was a great earthquake. “The earthquake,” however, “cannot have been one in the ordinary sense, but a shaking of the place when the Lord of Life burst the gate of Hades to re-tenant His Glorified Body and the lightning-like Angel descended from heaven to roll away the stone.”<sup>60</sup> (See Matthew 28:2.) The supernatural events associated with the death of Jesus (i.e., the rending of the veil in the Temple, the earthquake, and the opening of the graves), were well-known to the guards who nervously and fearfully watched over the sealed tomb. This new earthquake, the opening of the tomb, and the angelic being who sat on the stone terrified the guards. Dr. Pentecost comments further.

The guards were overcome with fear at the brightness of the glory of the angels, and the guards became as lifeless corpses. While the Gospel writers did not record the details of the Resurrection, they did clearly state the accompanying events and the results of the Resurrection.<sup>61</sup>

## THE VISIT OF THE WOMEN AT THE TOMB

While it was still dark a group of women came together and started for the tomb. The fact that they carried spices to supplement the hurried embalming of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus (John 19:38-42), indicated their total lack of spiritual understanding concerning Christ’s teaching of His resurrection. This is further demonstrated by Mary Magdalene who eagerly ran ahead and came first to the tomb. Finding it opened, she assumed the body had been removed and immediately ran back to inform Peter and John (John 20:1).

The other women completed their two-mile walk from Bethany to the sepulcher, arriving a little after sunrise (Mark 16:2). As they walked along the way, they discussed who would roll away the stone from the door of the tomb. As they approached, they saw the great stone had already been removed.

They entered the tomb and found the body of their Lord was gone. Suddenly two bright, shining figures in dazzling apparel stepped forward and the women, exceedingly amazed and terribly frightened, fell to the ground. The angel said, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but He is risen. Come see the place where the Lord lay! Go tell His disciples and Peter. He is gone before you into Galilee; there you shall see Him as He said unto you.”

The women retreated from the tomb as quickly as possible and fled with fear and great joy to bring their marvelous message to the disciples. Mary Magdalene had been the first to return to the disciples. Now the other women returned and, with great joy, narrated the experience they had

had on their early arrival at the tomb. The apostles received this report as the wild talk of those who were half hysterical. They would not believe.

The entrance of the tomb had been covered with the heavy stone and then sealed with wax. In addition, soldiers were sent to guard the sepulcher. These actions were done as a concession to the Jews who feared that the disciples would steal Jesus' body and proclaim He had resurrected. In spite of it all, the body was missing. Fearing for their lives, the soldiers hastened to the authorities to explain what had happened.

The authorities ordered the soldiers to say they had fallen asleep and the disciples came and stole the body. How absurd to think that a company of trained Roman soldiers would all go to sleep and be asleep long enough for such thievery to take place. But note the contrast: The disciples were dubious at the report of the risen Christ by Mary Magdalene and the women and sought confirmation. The Sanhedrin, on the other hand, believed the news of the soldiers and tried to discredit it.

About 6:30 AM Peter and John arrived at the tomb, although John outran Peter (John 20:3-10). While John stooped to look in, Peter entered the sepulcher. The disciples saw that the grave linen and the napkin that had been wrapped about the Master's head were folded. The neat appearance of the empty grave puzzled the pair, for if robbers had snatched the body, they would not have taken the time to unwrap the body and fold the grave clothes. Perplexed, Peter and John returned home, "for as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9).

## **THE APPEARANCES OF JESUS**

### **To Mary Magdalene**

The honor of being the first to see Jesus after the Resurrection was given to Mary Magdalene, the one out of whom Jesus had cast seven devils. Peter and John had visited the tomb and gone away before Mary returned. When she arrived, she stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb and saw two angels. They asked, "Why do you weep?" There would have been no need for Mary to cry if she believed in the Resurrection.<sup>62</sup> But her response, "They have taken away my Lord," demonstrated her lack of faith.

She then turned and saw Jesus but thought He was the gardener. He asked, "Woman, why do you weep?" Through tears she answered, "Sir, if you carried Him away, tell me where." Jesus said in the voice she knew so well, "Mary."

She cried and embraced His feet. Her Lord was back! Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I am not yet ascended."<sup>63</sup> He reminded her that He had not come back to resume the same relationship He had had with the disciples before His death. The previous fellowship of sight, sound, and touch no longer existed, and His final state of glory was not yet begun. The present state was a gap between the period of incarnation and the future outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

After Jesus disappeared Mary rushed to tell the disciples, but they would not believe her.



This appearance to Mary Magdalene is the first of five appearances recorded in the Gospels as occurring during the day of the Resurrection. Five more are listed as happening during the forty days that Jesus remained on earth. The five appearances during Resurrection Sunday are listed below.

1. To Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18)
2. To the other women (Matthew 28:9-10)
3. To the two disciples going to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-32)
4. To Simon Peter (Luke 24:34)
5. To ten apostles (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25)

### **To the Other Women**

On the way back to the sepulcher, the other women were discussing their earlier experience when they suddenly came face to face with Jesus. He told them to go tell the disciples (Matthew 28:9-10).

### **To Simon Peter**

The third appearance of Jesus and the first to a man was to Simon Peter. Apart from Paul's reference in I Corinthians 15:5 and Luke 24:34, there is no other record of the post-resurrection appearance of Christ to Peter.

### **To the Two on the Road to Emmaus**

The fourth appearance was to two disciples, Cleopas and his companion, on the way to Emmaus, a village some sixty furlongs from Jerusalem. As they walked, they discussed the happenings of the past few days. Jesus joined the two travelers and asked the nature of their discussion. Then, beginning with Moses, He interpreted passage after passage from all the prophets and all the Scripture verses that referred to the Messiah. Only after they had prevailed upon Him to abide with them and He broke bread, did they realize who He was. He then vanished. What a lesson that must have been; no wonder they said when they recognized Jesus and He disappeared, "Did not our heart burn within us on the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32).

With thrilled hearts, the duo returned to Jerusalem and made known their conversation with the risen Lord. Cleopas and his companion were admitted to the group of disciples who were barricaded behind closed doors and were careful not to admit any strangers. Only ten disciples were there—Thomas was missing. Already Jesus had appeared three times to different members of the group. They really believed that Jesus was alive now that Peter had seen Him. Peter might least expect such an honor because he had denied the Lord.

Cleopas and his friend listened to the women's report and to Peter's, and had just begun to relate their own experience when Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst. They were astonished! The group recognized Him first by His manner of speaking and by His voice. Some of His last words to them had been, "Peace I leave with you." Now His first words were, "Peace be unto you." With such loving words He had comforted them before; surely they recognized His voice.

Second, they had the evidence of sight. He said, “Behold my hands and feet, that it is I myself.” He showed them the visible nail prints in His hands and His feet. They all knew how He had died.

Third, they had the evidence of touch. The Lord invited them to touch Him. He said, “Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have” (Luke 24:39). He was not just a spirit. He did not just put on a form. His body was solid substance that could be handled. Although the world may try to deny it, Jesus was physically resurrected.

Finally, to show them He had a real body, Jesus gave them evidence that appealed to their common sense. “Do you have any meat?” He asked. He took the morsel and ate. This was unquestionable proof of resurrection! In very deed and fact, and not in vision and phantom, the Man who had died on the cross stood among them!

Many times He had spoken of His being sent on a mission into the world. His own personal commission was complete; now they were responsible for carrying the same commission to the ends of the earth. The tremendous responsibility to evangelize the whole world rested upon this small band of disciples. To undertake this staggering task, they would need power! Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (John 20:22). Did they receive the Holy Ghost at that time? Not according to John 7:36-39; 16:7. They were not indwelt with the Holy Ghost until the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2.

The disciples later told Thomas of the Resurrection and their encounter with Jesus. He was not convinced and stated that he would not believe until he saw the evidence for himself.

Just a week later, in the same lodging place in Jerusalem, under the same circumstances except that Thomas was present, Jesus again appeared to them and said, “Peace be unto you.” He immediately addressed Thomas personally: “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.” Thomas was overwhelmed by the evidence. With all doubts vanished, Thomas cried, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:27-28).

At this point John climaxed his argument that should convince even the most rebellious that Jesus is the mighty God. Need we any further proof that Jesus Christ is the mighty God, the everlasting Father, clothed in flesh—becoming a Son over His own house?

## **APPEARANCE TO SEVEN DISCIPLES BESIDE THE SEA OF GALILEE**

Some days had passed and Peter, a man of activity, had naturally grown impatient and wanted to do something. He announced to the others, "I go fishing." The others joined him. They toiled all night but caught no fish.

As daylight approached, a figure on the beach called to them across the stillness of the water: "Children, have you anything to eat?" When they answered negatively, He instructed, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat." In a few minutes the net held such a multitude of fish they could not draw it into the boat. At that point, John recognized the stranger and exclaimed to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Peter sprang into the sea and swam ashore.

After eating, Jesus singled out Peter, to whom He had given the keys to the kingdom, and asked, using his old name as a reminder, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" In calling him "Simon, son of Jonas," Jesus reminded Peter that he had not yet attained the place in Christ to which he was called. He was not yet that solid rock. Bewildered, Peter replied, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee." Thereupon Jesus instructed, "Feed my lambs."

A second time Jesus turned to Peter and questioned, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Again Peter replied, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee." This time Jesus instructed, "Feed my sheep."

And a third time Jesus asked Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Peter was grieved in his spirit and replied, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." And a second time Jesus stated, "Feed my sheep."

The three repetitions of this question reminded Peter that he had thrice denied the Lord. Peter had been humiliated by his failure and had repented bitterly on the same night as the denial. But the question remained, "Do you love Me more than these?" Peter had much in common with the others—they had worked together before their call to discipleship; they had followed Jesus together; they were persecuted together; they fished together. Did Peter follow Jesus because of the fellowship of the disciples or was he motivated by a deeper love of Christ?

We should ask ourselves the same question. What holds us to the church? Do we have a genuine love for God? Or do we attend to fellowship with friends and loved ones? Are we simply in a routine that has become a comfortable lifestyle after all these years? Is it advantageous for our business dealings to be known as a church attender? Do we love Him more than the natural things we receive by following Him?

Peter answered, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21:15). The term Peter used the first time means "to be fond of." "Yes, Lord, I'm fond of you." This was a lesser love than Jesus wanted. Why was Peter's commitment less? Perhaps he did not trust himself to love the Lord with the intensity it would take to go "even unto death" for the Master. He had failed so miserably before when he boasted of how much he loved Jesus.

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs," "Feed my sheep," and "Feed my sheep." There is a great lesson to be learned here.

Jesus brought His “reassigning” of Peter’s call to apostleship to a conclusion by pointing out to him the way to martyrdom for the kingdom and bidding him to follow the Master in it. He pointed out that when Peter was old, he would stretch forth his hands in dependence and weakness and another would gird him with divine strength and lead him in kingdom bondage into a death he would not naturally choose. Peter was now called upon to follow Jesus, not in the mere abandonment of his previous occupation as a fisherman, or even to become a fisher of men, but to participate in disgrace, peril, and a martyr’s death.

Peter then queried Jesus about John, wondering if he also would be called upon to follow Jesus to a martyr’s death. Jesus answered, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me” (John 21:22). A disciple’s service is personal and individual.

## **THE APPEARANCE TO THE ELEVEN AND THE GREAT COMMISSION**

Jesus now assigned to His disciples the great task of the kingdom, that of world evangelization. His power and authority now were far beyond that of His earthly life—they were boundless, including heaven and earth. The disciples were to remember that no earthly power had the right to countermand the order or impede the carrying out of the commission He assigned to His kingdom forces.

The commission with which He sent them was now made plain: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Mark and Luke’s account of the commission states the disciples were to baptize “in my name.” There is no conflict between their accounts and Matthew’s. Matthew used the titles attributed to the one God who was speaking. Having their understanding fully enlightened (Luke 24:45; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 19:5), the disciples went forth, baptizing in the name of Jesus for the remission of sin.

## **THE LAST APPEARANCE AND ASCENSION**

Jesus ascended to Heaven from the Mount of Olives. Over five hundred people were there to see Him physically rise into the heavens. Before He departed He stated, “John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). The disciples still misunderstood, looking for a temporal kingdom, and asked, “Lord, will you now restore unto us the kingdom?”

Jesus answered, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons . . . but ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Acts 1:7-8). The disciples must first be equipped with power to make their witnessing effective. They themselves must be born again (John 3:5; Acts 2:38). They were commanded to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high.

Then suddenly, while Jesus was blessing them and they were looking steadfastly at Him, they saw that His feet were no longer touching the ground. They were all spellbound with

wondering awe as He floated up and up until He was enveloped in a cloud and disappeared. As they stood gazing at the vacant sky, two men in white apparel said, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Then in response to the divine command, 120 returned to Jerusalem and went to the Temple praising and blessing God. When the Day of Pentecost was fully come, Jesus came again to be with them in the form of the Holy Ghost, for the Holy Ghost is Christ in us, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). He is here today. His life continues in His church.

## MISSIONARY SPOTLIGHT:

# Reverend and Mrs. Robert McFarland



By Lois McFarland Truman, PhD

Robert McFarland and Marjorie Guinn became engaged when they were both students attending Apostolic Bible Institute in St. Paul, Minnesota. However, Reverend S. G. Norris, the school president, was not in favor of this marriage, thinking there were too many differences in their backgrounds. Robert was used to hard physical labor working on a farm near a small, country town in Indiana. Marjorie was a pampered, city girl from St. Louis. Fortunately, God saw beyond the surface and knew they both had more in common than it appeared. Immediately following their beautiful wedding in St. Louis (1944), they drove to Richmond, Indi-

ana, to begin pastorate of a newly formed congregation.

For the next ten years, God blessed their ministry with significant church growth, and also added three children to their family, Robert Lee, Lois Marie, and Edward Ray. In 1954, Robert had a dream of a man in a foreign country asking for help. Marjorie saw a picture in the newspaper of a man dressed in the type of clothing Robert described from his dream. The man was from Libya, North Africa.

After much prayer, they resigned from their church in 1957 and began traveling to churches to raise funds for their move to the Middle East. The city of Jerusalem was divided between Israel and Jordan, and God opened the door for the McFarlands to move to East Jerusalem (Jordan) in 1959. This move was a sheer walk of faith, as there was no foreign missions system for income. Each missionary family, though endorsed by the United Pentecostal Church organization, was responsible for finding their own means of support, and for making their own travel/living arrangements.

The children stayed with family members in the States during the three months required by Jordan for children to receive visas after the parents were in the country. Stella Guinn, Marjorie's mother, had never been out of the United States, but bravely traveled with the three children—Bob just turned 14, Lois not quite 13, and Ed 10—spending the night in Cairo, Egypt, and then on into Jerusalem. In those days, the airport runway also served as the same highway that the McFarland children traveled to and from school each day. Whenever a plane was ready to land or take off, railroad gates came down across the highway at both ends of the “runway” until the plane taxied or flew off, the gates raised, and the traffic continued.

Shortly after their arrival in Jordan, the McFarlands began working with Canadian Margaret Hogg, who lived in Bethlehem where she held services in her home. During a Sunday service, the very man who had been asking for help in Robert's dream walked into the meeting. He was the grandfather of the core family who continues the work to this day in that area. That family has lived through severe persecution, but continues steadfast in the Apostles' Doctrine. Many people have planted and watered the precious seed over the years, and God continues to give the increase.

The Lord was also opening many doors in Egypt through Boshra Sedra. He contacted the McFarlands, explaining he had several women needing to be baptized, but he, being a male, was forbidden to baptize women. Robert gave Marjorie some tips on "how to baptize" and she headed to Egypt where she did her first baptisms.

The McFarlands made trips when possible to minister in Egypt, and have many stories of miracles and healings. One evening prior to service, the McFarlands were praying in a small room, each kneeling at a small stool. When they left for service, a young man came screaming after them, holding two dead scorpions. The larger one was found and killed right under Robert's stool where he had prayed, and the smaller one under Marjorie's stool where she had prayed. Both scorpions were full of deadly poison. As the word quickly spread about these two people who had escaped death, the crowd greatly increased in attendance. It was the beginning of a wonderful congregation in that village.

Many Sunday afternoons, Robert would go to different areas for Bible studies with the young men. A particular area was known for practicing heavy witchcraft and superstitious beliefs. On one occasion, Robert and some of the young men with him witnessed a group of men in a circle, arms intertwined, dancing and chanting around a wicker basket in the center of their circle. A wooden twig was tied to the basket. As the men worked themselves into a frenzy, chanting and shouting, they would ask the basket, "What is your name?" Without anyone being within three feet of the basket, the twig raised upright and wrote "Sha-tonn" (Satan in Arabic) in the dirt. Special prayer requests were made for God to shed His true light into the darkness. God heard and answered prayer, and as of this writing, people from that very area are continuing to be baptized in the name that is above every name! Amen!

As political tension in the area increased, the McFarlands had to leave quickly Jordan on very short notice. However, God opened a door in Marion, Indiana where Robert's father, Lester, had just resigned his church due to failing health. The church voted Robert in as their pastor, and the family moved into the parsonage. Shortly thereafter, the Indiana District elected Robert as their new superintendent, so the McFarlands relocated to the state parsonage on the Indiana Campground. Robert's goal was to visit every church in the state of Indiana at least one time during each year, which he was able to do, even as the number of churches increased. He was then elected as the general secretary of the United Pentecostal Church, creating another move for the McFarlands to St. Louis, Missouri, where they had been married over thirty years prior.

After seven years as the general secretary of the United Pentecostal Church International, the Lord began calling Robert once again to serve in a slightly different mission. He resigned his position as general secretary to become the regional director for Europe and the Middle East. The McFarlands pulled out their luggage once again to begin traveling overseas. Many close to them

believe these were the happiest years of their lives, mixing and mingling with their beloved missionary family. Robert's goal was to see a legally registered work in every country.

As stated in Foreign Missions Division's 2007 *Insight*, "Although their [McFarlands'] time in the Middle East in the mid-1950s was brief, their acquaintance with King Hussein eventually led to the registration of the UPC in Jordan in 1997."<sup>64</sup>

Following a trip to the Middle East with Robert Lee, his oldest son and missionary appointed to Israel/Palestine, Robert was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. The groundwork Robert laid resulted in a registered biblical college in Israel/Palestine. Even though Robert went to be with the Lord prior to the dedication of the college, the three McFarland children, along with their mother, attended the glorious celebration in 2005.

Each of the McFarland children and their families continue the legacy handed to them from their parents, and are involved in various aspects of working in the harvest field.



## ENDNOTES

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3. Farrar, *Life of Christ*, vol. 1, 28.
4. Pentecost, *The Word and Works of Jesus Christ*, 94.
5. Morgan, *The Crises of the Christ*, 163.
6. Pentecost, 102.
7. Pentecost, 114.
8. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels*, 90.
9. Shepard, 90-91.
10. Shepard, 94.
11. Shepard, 118.
12. Shepard, 128-29.
13. Edersheim, 122.
14. Shepard, 152-53.
15. Pentecost, 164.
16. Edersheim, 612-13.
17. Reynolds, "Life of Christ III," *International Alpha Bible Course*, 8.
18. Pentecost, 211.
19. Pentecost, 218.
20. Edersheim, 175.
21. Reynolds, 15.
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23. Pentecost, 247.
24. Pentecost, 254.
25. Pentecost, 262.
26. Shepard, 339.
27. Edersheim, 312-13.
28. Shepard, 348.
29. Farrar, 86.
30. Pentecost, 296.
31. Pentecost, 325.
32. Farrar, *Life of Christ*, vol. II, 119.
33. Shepard, 416.
34. Pentecost, 338-339; cf. Edersheim, 414pp.
35. Edersheim, 436.
36. Pentecost, 349.
37. Shepard, 452.
38. Pentecost, 359.
39. Pentecost, 364.
40. Pentecost, 376.
41. Pentecost, 382.
42. Edersheim, 469.
43. Pentecost, 383.
44. Shepard, 500.

45. Pentecost, 390.
46. Pentecost, 393.
47. Pentecost, 398.
48. Pentecost, 398.
49. Pentecost, 415.
50. Shepard, 570.
51. Edersheim, 575.
52. Shepard, 579.
53. Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, Vol. 1, 405.
54. Shepard, 595.
55. Edersheim, 612.
56. Edersheim, 612.
57. Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, 179-80.
58. Edersheim, 624.
59. Shepard, 608.
60. Edersheim, 628.
61. Pentecost, 498.
62. Pentecost, 500.
63. Pentecost, 501.
64. Burk, *Insight: Foreign Missions Directory*, 143.

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