

NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

* * * PRESENTATION OF KING MESSIAH TO ISRAEL * * *

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Soli Deo Gloria!
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BACKGROUND: The Gospel of Matthew was the first Gospel written, perhaps as early as AD 44, but certainly not later than AD ~50. There is a long tradition, very prevalent among the Church of the first few centuries, that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew and that it was subsequently translated into Greek. The grammatical structure of the Greek text of Matthew does bear some marks of being a translation. However, no Hebrew manuscripts are extant; neither do any Hebrew quotations from it appear in the writings of the early Church Fathers (whose quotations of Matthew are always in Greek). Thus, an original Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, apart from tradition, has little support. For this reason we must conclude that the preserved Greek text of Matthew, even if translated from a Hebrew original, is the inspired Gospel of Matthew.

MATTHEW: Matthew was a publican (i.e., a tax collector). As a *de facto* representative of the Roman government, he would have been viewed as a traitor by the average Jew. Furthermore, since publicans as a professional class were noted for their corruption, his profession was despised by all. However, there is no indication in the Gospels that Matthew himself was personally corrupt, as was noted of Zacchaeus (Luk19:2-8). Nevertheless, in true humility, Matthew never attempts to hide his background, but rather calls attention to it, always referring to himself as "Matthew, the publican"; when mentioned by Mark and Luke, they simply refer to him as "Levi".

While Matthew is a very long Gospel, it is actually shorter than the Gospel of Mark (the shortest of the Gospels) if the lengthy discourses of Jesus are removed. Matthew, in contrast to Mark and Luke, records the discourses of Jesus in great detail (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount, the parables of the Kingdom, the Olivet Discourse, etc.). Since it is well known that publicans were skilled scribes with a well-developed form of short hand used to record the minute details of business transactions, it has been speculated that Matthew may well have recorded the words of the Lord Jesus verbatim as He originally spoke them.

WHY 4 GOSPELS? Why are there four Gospels recording the life and earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ? While many similarities exist between the four Gospels (especially among the Synoptics), significant differences also exist. The four Gospels were written with four different target audiences in view, and present Christ from four distinctly different perspectives (see attached Chart). All so-called contradictions alleged to exist between the four Gospels are easily reconciled when it is recognized that each Gospel records similar events from its own distinct perspective, focusing on particular

details or circumstances relative to its unique purpose, while not excluding facts recorded and emphasized by other Gospel writers.

PURPOSE: The clear purpose of Matthew's Gospel is to demonstrate to the nation of Israel (i.e., Jews) that Jesus of Nazareth was their prophesied and long-awaited Messiah. For this reason it is logical and appropriate that Matthew's Gospel open the NT canon of Scripture. The devout Jew of the first century, having a command of OT Scripture and all that they prophesied concerning the Messiah, would be immediately confronted in Matthew's presentation of Jesus with an indisputable testimony that He was indeed Israel's Messiah (Ps2:2; Dan9:25), the Son of Man (Dan7:14) and the Son of God (Ps2:7); thus, the foundation is laid for him to understand and accept the remainder of the New Testament.

Consistent with this purpose, Matthew quotes from the Old Testament far more than the other Gospel writers. Matthew includes ~50 direct quotes from the OT, with more than 75 additional clear allusions to OT passages; his direct quotes are often preceded by the introductory phrase, "that it might be fulfilled..." (e.g., Matt1:21; 2:15,23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:35). Furthermore, Hebrew idioms and expressions are used throughout Matthew's Gospel. Whereas Mark and Luke often make explanatory remarks to help non-Jewish readers of their Gospels understand such expressions, Matthew leaves them unexplained (Cp., Mk12:38 with Matt23:5; Luk11:44 with Matt23:27); this is consistent with the inference that Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience, for which he logically assumed that no such explanation would be needed.

DISPENSATIONAL NOTE: An important caveat is in order before undertaking the study of any of the Gospels, but especially that of Matthew. The Dispensation of the Law ends with the death of Christ (Eph2:14-15), *not His birth*. Thus, the Gospels are a record of the Lord Jesus Christ living as a Jewish Man under the Law of Moses (Gal4:4); this is especially true of the Gospel of Matthew (e.g., Matt5:17-18). Thus, direct application of the life of Christ as recorded in the Gospels to the Church Age believer today must be considered very carefully; Christ lived the life in absolute obedience to the Mosaic Law, keeping every provision, whereas the Apostle Paul makes expressly clear in his epistles that the Christian is not under the requirements of the Mosaic Law (cf., Rom6:14-15; Gal3:23-25).

CHAPTER 1

GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ is that from Abraham (i.e., the first "Hebrew") to David, his son Solomon, down through the line of the kings of Judah, and ending with Joseph, His legal (but not biological) father. This is in contrast with the genealogy of Luke 3, which branches from David to Nathan, another son of David who did not inherit the throne, and ends with Mary; Mary, who was the biological mother of Christ as a result of the supernatural virgin birth, represents the blood line of the Man, Jesus Christ.

- [1] Messiah is specifically said to be both a "son of David" and a "son of Abraham", being the Seed heir promised in the covenants God made with them (Gen13:15; 1Chr17:11-14; Luk1:32-33; Gal3:16).

This designation of Christ as the "son of David", the "son of Abraham" also serves as the outline to the Gospel of Matthew. During the first half of Matthew, Christ is presented as King of the Jews and rightful heir to David's throne; during second half of Matthew, after His rejection by Israel, Christ fulfills the type defined by Abraham's son Isaac, willingly submitting to be offered by His Father.

- [2] Matthew begins his genealogy of Christ with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (i.e., Israel), the "fathers" who define the Jewish race and "to whom pertaineth" the covenants and the promises of God (Rom9:3-5). From Jacob the line to Jesus goes through his son Judah, who was prophesied to be the tribe from which the kings of Israel would come (Gen49:10).
- [3] A sordid affair is detailed in Genesis 38 where Judah's sons are killed by the Lord without issue, and his only surviving heir is an illegitimate son that results from harlotry/incest with his deceased son's Canaanite widow! This gives rise to a line of descent that, according to the Law, is disqualified for 10 generations (Deut23:2).

It should be noted that David is the 10th generation from the bastard Perez, which is part of the reason why, when the people of Israel cry out to have a king like all the other nations (1Sam8:19-20), God directs the prophet Samuel to anoint the *Benjamite* Saul as king rather than David's father Jesse (1Sam9:16-17).

Women in the Genealogy of Christ. It is remarkable that four women appear in Matthew's very Jewish genealogy of Christ: **Tamar** (v3), **Rahab** (v5), **Ruth** (v5), and **Bathsheba** (though unnamed, referred to as "her that had been the wife of Uriah", v6). Inclusion of these women is a picture of the unfathomable grace associated with the coming of Messiah (Jn1:14,17), as all four were specifically excluded by the Mosaic Law. Tamar and Rahab were both harlots, condemned by the Law (Deut23:17); Tamar was a Canaanite, Rahab was an Amorite, and Ruth was a Moabite, peoples

excluded by the Law (Deut7:1-3; 23:3); and Bathsheba was an adulteress, also condemned by the Law (Lev20:10).

It is also interesting, and perhaps significant, that three of these four women, Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth, were Gentiles. Gentile brides are prominent in the OT and are often types of the Church (e.g., Rebekah, Leah and Rachel, Asenath, Moses' Cushite wife, Ruth, Solomon's first wife).

- [5] Boaz had no problem taking Ruth the Moabitess as his wife, which may be explained in part by the fact that his mother was Rahab the Amorite. Ruth was David's great-grandmother.
- [6] Though all the men listed in vv6-11 were kings of Israel (and after the kingdom was divided, of Judah), it is David who is uniquely identified as "the king". In Matthew's genealogy, the line of Jesus is traced through David's son Solomon, who inherits the throne of his father David and defines the Judean dynasty (2Sam7:12; 1Chr17:11). Thus, Matthew's genealogy establishes the legal claim of Jesus to the throne of David (Luk1:31-33).
- [7] With Rehoboam, the kingdom of Israel was divided, and the kings after him ruled over the House of Judah.
- [8] Verse 8 is the first instance of an "omission" in the genealogy, and is widely used by liberals to assert that all genealogies in the Bible (especially those in Genesis 5 and 11) must necessarily contain similar omissions; by this technique they desire to insert additional time into what otherwise would be short, tight chronologies.

Three generations (Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah) are omitted between Joram and Uzziah. This omission is known because of the inspired, historical record preserved in 2 Kings 8-15. Joram's son Ahaziah resulted from his diabolical marriage to Athaliah, the daughter of wicked King Ahab of Israel and his sorceress, Phoenician wife Jezebel. When Athaliah's son Ahaziah is killed, she usurps the throne of Judah and rules as Queen, and she attempts to destroy all the remaining royal seed (a Satanically-inspired plot). Her infant grandson Joash is hidden from her and raised secretly in the Temple, being restored as the rightful king of Judah when he is 7 years old. His son Amaziah inherits the throne after his death.

The omission here of 3 generations would seem to have great theological significance. The LORD viewed Joram's marriage to the sorceress Athaliah as a gross act of rebellion (1Sam15:23), which allowed Satan a door of opportunity by which he almost achieved the extermination of the royal line of Judah, which would have thwarted the plan of God by preventing the prophesied coming of Messiah! Though it was Athaliah who put the royal seed to death, the LORD held Joram responsible for this diabolical plot (2Chr21:4-6). For this sin, his name was "blotted out" by God to the "third and fourth generation" (Deut5:9; 29:20). Thus, rather than a casual omission that might give support to the notion that the Biblical genealogies are anything other than tight

chronologies, the omission here is seen to be particular and unique.

- [11] Jeconiah is actually Josiah's grandson. Three of Josiah's sons (Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah) also reigned as kings, but are mentioned here only as "his brethren". Jeconiah (a.k.a., Jehoiachin) began to reign at eight years old, but was so wicked he was removed from the throne after only 3 months (2Chr36:9). Furthermore, the LORD pronounced a blood curse on the line of Jeconiah such that none of his seed could ever prosper on the throne of David (Jer22:28-30).

Had Jesus been the natural, biological son of Joseph (v16), He would be subject to this curse. The virgin birth, however, gives Jesus legal claim to the throne of David, while exempting Him from the blood curse on Jeconiah's seed.

- [12] Zerubbabel, whose name means "sown [or born] in Babylon", led the first contingent of captive Jews from Babylon back to Judah (Ezr2:1-2). Zerubbabel was the grandson of Jeconiah and heir apparent to the Davidic throne, but never served as king in Jerusalem; he is consistently referred to as "governor of Judah" (e.g., Hag1:1,14).

- [16] Though the English can be ambiguous, the Greek is emphatic. The Greek pronoun "of whom" is *feminine* and singular. Thus, the text clearly asserts that Jesus was born of Mary, not Joseph. No explanation for this peculiarity is given here, but the stage is set for the miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ that is presented in the next section.

The Greek title "Christ" is equivalent to the Hebrew *Messiah*, meaning "the anointed one".

- [17] It is apparent that Matthew has constructed his genealogy to produce a somewhat artificial symmetry, presumably to aid in memorization; it is probably more than a coincidence that Matthew's arrangement into groups of "14 generations" corresponds to the numerical value of David's name (*DVD*; 4+6+4=**14** in Hebrew).

However, we know that his genealogy is (very) slightly abridged because the omissions (discussed above in v8) are given explicitly in the detailed historical narratives of Kings and Chronicles. There is no warrant for concluding that this genealogy, like all others given in the Bible, is anything other than what it naturally appears to be (i.e., a literal, tight chronology).

THE MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION OF JESUS CHRIST

- [18] The remainder of this chapter, vv18-25, is an elaboration of v16. Mary and Joseph were espoused, but had not consummated their marriage, when Mary was "found with child of the Holy Spirit".
- [19] Joseph naturally assumes Mary is guilty of adultery, which carries the death penalty under Mosaic Law (Lev20:10). However, being a

"righteous man", Joseph desires to divorce Mary discreetly, so as not to call public attention to her presumed sin and its consequences, which the Law allowed (Deut24:1).

Note that Jewish espousal, prior to consummation, is considered marriage, and requires a formal, written divorce to dissolve. This formality of Jewish marriage gives rise to the so-called "exception clause" in Jesus' teaching on divorce, which is peculiar to Matthew's Gospel written to a Jewish audience (Cp., Matt19:9; Mk10:11-12; Luk16:18; Rom7:2-3; 1Cor7:11-12,39).

- [20] Undoubtedly Mary had explained to Joseph the supernatural circumstances of her conception, but it was too incredulous for him to believe. The appearance of an angel with a message for him from the LORD was necessary for Joseph to relent. Note that the angel addresses Joseph as the "son of David", calling attention to his royal heritage.
- [21] God makes clear to Joseph, as He does separately to Mary (Luk1:31), that the child is to be named "JESUS" as previously prophesied (Cp., Zech6:11-12). "Jesus" is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, which means "Jehovah saves". That the mission of Jesus will be to "save His people from their sins" is an allusion to Isa53:5-11.
- [22] Matthew calls attention to the fact that the virgin-birth of Messiah is in accordance with the prophecy of Isa7:14.
- [23] The Greek word here translated "virgin" is *parthenos*, which just like the English is technical and specific, indicating one who has never engaged in sexual intercourse.
- Jesus would also be known as "Immanuel", which means "God with us". This title calls attention to the incarnation/hypostatic union, that Jesus is God come in the flesh (Jn1:1,14; Philip2:5-8; 1Tim3:16; 2Jn7); thus, Matthew emphasizes the Deity of Christ in the very opening chapter of his Gospel.
- [24] Submitting to the LORD, Joseph took Mary in her already-pregnant condition as his wife. This righteous act, however, committed both he and Mary to a life of shame, as all presumed that the birth of Jesus was illegitimate, resulting from unlawful premarital sex between Mary and "perhaps" Joseph (Cf., Jn8:19,41).
- [25] Though Joseph immediately took Mary as his wife, they did not consummate the marriage until after the birth of Jesus, who is called "her first-born son". After Jesus' birth, however, Mary and Joseph had normal marital relations, which resulted in the natural birth of additional children (e.g., four sons are named and multiple daughters are indicated in Matt13:55-56).

CHAPTER 2

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

- [1] Associated with the birth of Jesus, "wise men" came "from the east to Jerusalem". The English "wise men" is from the Greek *magoi*, so they are also referred to as "the Magi". The Magi were an ancient, hereditary caste of scholars and political advisors from Babylon, and subsequently Medo-Persia. They had special expertise in astronomy and the interpretation of dreams (Cf., Dan2:2); it was over this caste of scholars the Hebrew prophet Daniel was appointed by King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan2:48; 5:11).
- [2] The Magi's question, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?", would have been particularly offensive to Herod. Herod was not even Jewish, but Idumaeen (i.e., an Edomite, a descendent of Esau/Amelek/Agag, the ancient enemies of Israel and a race of people God had commanded Saul to exterminate, 1Sam15:3); he had married into the line of the Hasmonaeen priest-kings of Judah, but had purchased his position as King of Judea from Rome. He was very insecure in his purchased position and executed anyone he viewed as a threat to his rule (including his favorite wife and a number of his own sons).

What was the star? Many have asserted that the star was purely a supernatural phenomenon, perhaps a manifestation of the *Shekinah* glory of God; however, nothing in the text of Matthew supports this assertion.

The English "star" is a translation of the Greek *aster*, used 24 times in the NT, which in narrative passages always refers to a natural astronomical object (i.e., a star, planet, meteorite, comet, etc.); it is used figuratively to speak of men and angels (e.g., Jude13; Rev1:20; 12:4,7), but its figurative use in these cases is clear in context.

That the star appeared suddenly and unexpectedly to the Magi, who were expert astronomers, must rule out the possibility that it was a comet or conjunction of planets, both of which were known to, and even predictable by, eastern astronomers of that time. The best suggestion is that the star of Bethlehem was a supernova, an extremely rare and totally unpredictable event. Of course, its timing to occur in conjunction with the birth of Messiah was supernaturally ordained by God.

The much more interesting question is how the Magi knew to associate the appearance of this star with the birth of a king in Israel. The answer must come from linking the prophecies of Balaam and Daniel (Num24:17; Dan9:25). Balaam was a prophet from Mesopotamia (Deut23:4), and some have suggested that he was an ancient member, or possibly even a founder, of the Magi; of course, Daniel was appointed by King Nebuchadnezzar as head of the wise men of Babylon (Dan2:48; 5:11), which would have included the Magi. Thus, these prophetic scriptures would have been available to the Magi, and their expertise in observational astronomy would have alerted them to the significance of a sudden, unpredicted

appearance of an unusually brilliant star at about the time of Daniel's prophesied coming of "Messiah, the Prince".

- [3] Herod and "all Jerusalem with him" were terrified at the arrival of the Magi in Jerusalem. First, dispel any myths you may have acquired from your childhood Sunday School classes. The Magi weren't three dusty and decrepit old Bedouins arriving by themselves on camels—it is silly to think that such individuals would ever have gained access to King Herod. On the contrary, the Magi were great in number, came with a large caravan of servants and supplies capable of supporting a desert journey of several months, and which undoubtedly included a formidable military escort (i.e., Persian cavalry, not camels!).

They would have been regarded as nobles, if not an official envoy, of the Parthian Empire, and as such would have been granted an immediate audience with King Herod. As Judea existed at this time in a precarious buffer region between the Roman Empire to the west and the Parthian Empire to the east, Herod was acutely aware that a political misstep on his part could easily spark a border conflict.

- [5] The Jewish chief priests and scribes summoned by Herod knew the Scriptures well, and immediately cite Micah 5:2 as prophesying Bethlehem as the city "where the Christ should be born".
- [6] This is a quotation of Micah 5:2. Note that Herod, the chief priests and the scribes (i.e., experts in the Scriptures) understand the prophecy of Micah 5:2 to be literal. The Messiah will literally be born in the town of Bethlehem, specifically noted to be that Bethlehem in Judah (not to be confused with another Bethlehem in Zebulun, Josh19:15). Likewise, we should always interpret prophetic passages in the Bible in a plain, normal, literal manner, unless the immediate context of the passage gives a clear and obvious reason for interpreting it otherwise.
- [7] It is assumed that the time of the appearance of the star coincided with the birth of Messiah. The time required for the Magi to organize and complete the roughly 600-mile journey from Persia to Jerusalem has no doubt taken many months, if not a year or more. Herod needs the date of the star's appearance to know the age of the child.
- [8] Of course, Herod has no intention of worshiping the child; rather, he is Satanically-motivated to learn the identity and location of this potential rival to his throne so that he might destroy Him.
- [9] The reappearance of the star, possible for supernova, identified to the Magi the "house" (v11) where the child was located. Though the English rendering "the star... went before them" seems to suggest that the star moved in an unnatural way that actually guided the Magi, this is not what is indicated in the Greek.

Here the Messiah is referred to as "the young child", distinct in both English and Greek from "the babe" (i.e., infant) visited by

the shepherds (Luk2:16), indicating that considerable time has passed since birth.

- [11] Note that the visit of the Magi occurs when "the young child" and His mother Mary are in a "house" (i.e., not the stable where the birth and the visit of the shepherds took place). The visit of the Magi did not occur the night of Christ's birth, as we consistently portray in our nativity scenes, but many months (or as much as two years) later.

Note also that there are three gifts given, but nothing is indicated regarding the number of the Magi (see comments on v3 above). The gifts are each of great monetary value, fit for a king; it has been speculated that these gifts likely funded the extended stay of the child and His family in Egypt (see vv13-15). Furthermore, the gifts seem to have prophetic significance that speaks to the offices/ministries of the Messiah: Gold speaks of His office as King, frankincense as His office as High Priest, and myrrh as His role as the Savior Who must die in the place of His people. It is significant that in the Millennial Kingdom, Gentile kings will bring King Messiah gifts of gold and frankincense (Ps72:10; Isa60:6), but not of myrrh; this indicates that Messiah continues in the offices of King and High Priest, but His death will be forever behind him (Rom6:10; Heb7:25; 9:28).

- [12] The Magi, being unaware of the local political situation, and not wanting to cause a diplomatic crisis because of their visit, might well have returned to Herod with the information he had requested of them. This God providentially prevented.

- [13] Similarly, God acted providentially to move the child Jesus and His family to Egypt, out of the reach of the Satanically-inspired King Herod.

- [15] The understanding of this prophetic reference has been the cause of considerable confusion. Matthew asserts that Christ's flight to Egypt, and subsequent return, was prophesied by the prophet Hosea (Hos11:1). The problem is that Hosea 11:1, in context, is clearly a reference to the nation of Israel, not the Messiah. This category of prophecy is literal plus typological significance.

In the OT, the LORD refers to both the nation of Israel and the Messiah as His "firstborn" (Ex4:22; Ps89:27). Matthew reveals that the history of the nation of Israel, then, is (at least in this case) a type of the personal life of Messiah; the nation going into Egypt and then returning is typologically significant, as the same will be true for Messiah. But note, even though a type is in use, the truth being conveyed is *literal*. The nation of Israel literally went and dwelt in Egypt, and literally returned; similarly, Messiah will literally dwell in Egypt, and literally return.

- [16] Herod's plot to kill the Messiah by slaughtering all the babes in Bethlehem is merely the latest tactic in Satan's strategy to thwart the plan of God (e.g., Cain, Pharaoh, Saul, Athaliah, Haman, Antiochus, Titus, Hitler, and ultimately Antichrist).

Prior to the coming of Messiah, Satan worked to prevent His birth. At His first coming, Satan acted to kill the Messiah. Now, Satan works to prevent Messiah's second coming, which must be preceded by the regeneration of the nation of Israel and their petition for His return (Matt23:37-39; Hos5:15-6:2). It was the Jewish people who were ordained by God to bring the Messiah into the world (Rom9:3-5), and it is the Jewish people who must petition Messiah's return. This is why all anti-Semitism is **Satanically-inspired**.

Herod's decision to kill all the babies two years and younger is somehow related to the information he obtained from the wise men, which has led him to believe that the child can be no more than two years old.

- [18] This is a quotation of Jeremiah 31:15. Again, Matthew is claiming a fulfillment of prophecy (v17) that has caused confusion for some. In context, Jeremiah 31:15 refers to the mothers of Bethlehem mourning over their sons being taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon. "Rachel" is a figure (i.e., synecdoche) for the Jewish mothers of Bethlehem, as she was buried there (Gen35:19). This category of prophecy is literal plus an application.

Matthew cites this past, historical, and literal event and makes a prophetic application to the present, historical and literal event that occurs in the life of Messiah. Herod's slaughter of the babes in Bethlehem brings the same type of grief and mourning to the mothers in Bethlehem as the previous event at the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Again, a literal truth is being conveyed, but it is done by way of application.

- [20] Note that the text of Scripture repeatedly refers to Mary as the mother of Jesus, but never to Joseph as His father.
- [21] So Joseph took Mary and Jesus and dwelt in the land of Egypt until informed by God to return to Israel. This sojourn in Egypt was only a few years at the most, as Herod would die shortly and his son Archelaus would assume his throne (v22).
- [22] There is no mystery regarding the childhood of Jesus. He did not visit India or the far east as suggested in some apocryphal books. He was born in Bethlehem, at age one or two was taken to Egypt for at most a few years, then returned to Israel and was raised as a normal Jewish boy by a devout Jewish family in the Galilean city of Nazareth. Luke records His participation in the Passover at Jerusalem at age twelve (Cf. Luk2:41ff).
- [23] This last verse of chapter 2 illustrates the fourth and final category of prophecy. Matthew asserts that Messiah dwelling in the city of Nazareth fulfills the prophecy, "He shall be called a Nazarene". However, no such quotation exists, *per se*, in the OT. This category of prophecy is literal plus a summation.

Saying that Messiah "shall be called a Nazarene" is a summation of all that "was spoken by the prophets" (note that "prophets" is in the plural) regarding Messiah. Countless passages in the OT exist

which prophesy that Messiah will be hated, despised, looked at with disdain and disgust, and ultimately rejected (e.g., Ps22, Isa53, etc.). Similarly, the Jews of the first century looked down upon and held in disrespect those who dwelt in Galilee in general, and the city of Nazareth in particular (Cf., Jn1:46; 7:41,52). All of this is prophetically summarized in Matthew's assertion that Messiah "shall be called a Nazarene". But again, a literal truth is being conveyed; just as the Jews literally disrespected and despised those from Galilee/Nazareth, so also Messiah will literally be disrespected and despised as well.

Review of 4 Categories of Prophecy. The four categories of prophecy, and their use by Biblical writers, are all illustrated in Matthew chapter 2. They are:

1. Literal (Matt2:6; Mic5:2)
2. Literal *plus* typological (Matt2:15; Ex4:22; Ps89:27; Hos11:1)
3. Literal *plus* an application (Matt2:18; Jer31:15)
4. Literal *plus* a summation (Matt2:23; summation of all prophets)

The important point is that, regardless of the literary device employed, the purpose is always to convey plain, *literal* truth.

CHAPTER 3

JOHN THE BAPTIST: THE PROPHET WHO ANNOUNCES THE KING

- [1] Why do all four Gospels start with the ministry of John the Baptist, not Jesus? Because God's way is that His prophet always announces the king. Just as the prophet Samuel anointed and announced both Saul and David as king, so John the Baptist is God's prophet to announce the arrival of King Messiah.
- [2] John's message is clear and simple. It is that the appearance of the long-awaited King Messiah to the nation of Israel is imminent. In preparation for His arrival, the nation must "repent" and be "born again" (Jn3:3). Why? Because when Messiah inaugurates His kingdom, only believers will enter into it (Matt3:12; Jn3:5).

The expression "kingdom of heaven" is unique to the Gospel of Matthew. Comparison with the other gospels reveals that Matthew's expression is equivalent to "kingdom of God". Consistent with Jewish tradition at this time, Matthew uses "heaven" as a replacement for "God" for his Jewish audience. After the Babylonian captivity, the development of so-called "oral law" (i.e., tradition) as a hedge of protection around the Law of Moses included reluctance to use the name of God for fear of breaking the 3rd commandment (Ex20:7). On more than one occasion, the Lord Jesus criticized the importance the Jews placed such tradition,

which came to be viewed as having authority equal to (or even greater than) the Scriptures (Matt15:3; Mk7:13).

What is "the kingdom"? The kingdom of heaven/God is **not** some ethereal notion of 'heaven' or the afterlife. Neither is the kingdom the Church and her mission during the present age. When the Bible speaks denotatively of "the kingdom", it means the literal kingdom that Messiah will establish on earth, and over which He will personally reign in bodily form from the city of Jerusalem (cf., 1Chron17:11-14; Ps2; Isa9:6-7; Luk1:31-33; Rev12:10). It is the coming of this kingdom for which Jesus taught His disciples to pray (Matt6:10).

- [3] This verse quotes Isaiah 40:3, where John's role as the prophet who would announce Messiah's arrival was prophesied seven centuries in advance.

Note that in Isaiah 40:3-5, the one Whose arrival John heralds is referred to as both God (Heb., *Elohim*) and the LORD (i.e., *Jehovah*). Thus, that King Messiah is to be Jehovah God is implicit in the OT.

- [4] This description of John is remarkably similar to that of the prophet Elijah (2Kgs1:8), in the spirit and power of whom John conducted his ministry (Luk1:17).
- [5] The preaching of John in the wilderness attracted tremendous attention. There are two reasons for this: 1) John was the first prophet to appear in Israel with a word from the LORD in 400 years, and 2) because of the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-25 and the very public visit of the Magi to Jerusalem (Matt2:1-3), there was already a spirit of messianic interest and expectation growing in Israel at this time (e.g., Luk1:25-26).
- [6] John's baptism was a visible act of repentance as specified widely in the Law of Moses (e.g., Lev15); this is distinct from Christian baptism, which is a picture of identification with Christ (Rom6:3-5).
- [7] The Pharisees and Sadducees came to investigate the ministry of John and the response of the people, not to submit to John's baptism. In their self-righteousness, they do not believe they are in need of repentance.
- [8] Though the Pharisees and Sadducees gave public confession to an orthodox faith, John asserted rather that their lives evidenced no fruit that results from true conversion (Matt12:33; Jam2:14-20).
- [9] Important background here is a central tenet in Pharisaic Judaism of the 1st century; namely, their belief that, **All Israel has a share in the age to come**. John corrects this doctrinal error, just as Jesus did with the Pharisee Nicodemus (cf., Jn3:3-7). Although God's unconditional covenant with Abraham (and David) absolutely ensures the coming of the messianic kingdom and the exaltation of Israel as head of the nations in that kingdom (Deut26:18-19; Ezek37:21-28), nevertheless individual Jews must

repent and be converted in order to personally "enter into the kingdom of God" (Jn3:5).

- [10] Just as a tree in an orchard which produces no fruit serves no useful purpose, and it is hewn down to make room for a tree that will be productive, so there is no place for unbelievers in the coming messianic kingdom.
- [11] Though many Jews initially suspect that John himself is the Messiah (Luk3:15), John consistently denies this. He points his hearers to one Who is yet to come. Despite John's position of high honor as the greatest of the OT prophets (Matt11:11), Messiah will be far greater than he.

Furthermore, in contrast to John's baptism of repentance, Messiah will bring with Him two other baptisms: that of "the Holy Spirit" and of "fire". In both cases, it is Messiah Who will do the work of baptizing, in the one case *by means of* the Holy Spirit, and in the other case *by means of* fire, just as John baptized *by means of* water. Messiah's baptism "with the Holy Spirit" is in reference to the coming new ministry of indwelling of believers by the Holy Spirit (Jn14:16-17). Because of Israel's rejection of Messiah and His kingdom at His first coming, the Spirit's ministry of indwelling has been withheld from the nation of Israel and initiated for the Church during this present age which started at Pentecost (Act1:5; 11:15-16; 1Cor6:19); however, the prophecy of the Spirit's indwelling of believing Jews will take place during the Kingdom Age (cf., Ezek36:23-28; 37:14; 39:29; Joel2:28; Zech12:10).

The baptism with "fire" is a reference to judgment, expanded upon in the next verse (v12). The primary characteristic of the messianic kingdom to come is that of justice. There can be no kingdom without justice, and there can be no justice without judgment; thus, John's call to the nation of Israel to repent in preparation for the coming judgment.

- [12] The inauguration of the kingdom will be preceded by a judgment conducted by King Messiah. There will be a separation of believers from unbelievers, with only believers (whether Jew or Gentile) entering the kingdom (cf., Ezek20:33-38; Joel3:12-14; Matt25:31-46).

Here, this principle is seen under the figure of the threshing floor. The "fan" refers to the shovel used, after threshing, to pitch the mixture of wheat and chaff into the wind. This was the ancient method used to separate the wheat from the chaff. The teaching is that a separation of believers and unbelievers must take place prior to the kingdom (Cp., Matt13:36-43), with different destinies assigned to the two groups; believers will enter the kingdom, and unbelievers will be summarily dispatched to Hell (i.e., Hades) to await their final judgment (Rev20:11-15). This is the same figure used of the world-wide judgments during the 7-year Tribulation period that precedes the return of Messiah to begin the Millennial Kingdom (Cp., Rev14:14-20).

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

- [13] The importance of the baptism of Jesus is reflected in the fact that it is recorded in all four gospels (cf., Mk1:9-11; Luk 3:21-22; Jn1:31-34).
- [14] John as the greatest of the OT prophets is always diligent to defer to the pre-eminence of Jesus as the Messiah (Cp., Jn1:30; 3:30).
- [15] The baptism of Jesus has been the source of much misunderstanding. It could not have been a baptism for personal repentance, as He was without sin. Neither was it Christian baptism. The answer lies in the essence of baptism, which is identification. In submitting to John's baptism, Jesus willingly identified with sinners who desired to repent of sin in preparation for the arrival of Messiah and His righteous kingdom; He identified with those who were hungering and thirsting for righteousness (Matt5:6).
- [16] The very definition of the Greek *baptizo* is "to immerse, or submerge", and baptism by immersion in the Jordan river is the most natural understanding of this verse.
- [17] Here an assembly of the triune Godhead is clearly presented. The Father speaks from heaven to His Son, Who is attended by the Holy Spirit.

It should not be overlooked that the Spirit of God comes upon Jesus, and it is never said that the Spirit departs from Him. While Jesus never ceases to be fully divine, even after the incarnation, nonetheless in His earthly ministry Jesus voluntarily lives as a Man filled with and led by the Holy Spirit, never making use of His personal power as God to succeed as a Man (Philip2:5-8); rather, He submits to the will of God the Father (Matt26:39; Jn4:34; 6:38; Heb10:7), relying on power from God the Holy Spirit (this is particularly evident in the Gospel of Luke, which portrays Jesus as the Perfect man; e.g., Luk2:27; 4:1,14); in this way, Jesus fulfills every demand of righteousness as a Man. The Apostle Paul has this in mind when he writes that "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" (Heb4:15; see also Heb2:18).

CHAPTER 4

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

- [1] As the "second Man" and the "last Adam" (1Cor15:45,47), Jesus must be "tempted" as was the first Adam. Here, "tempted" is used in the sense of "trial" or "examination", as in the testing of gold in order to demonstrate its genuineness (1Pet1:7).

Note on the impeccability of Christ. It is not possible for Jesus to fail this test, nor sin in any way at any time. The Biblical teaching is that **Jesus** the God-man, much more than merely being

able not to sin (*posse non peccare*), **is not able to sin** (*non posse peccare*). However, the impeccability of Christ, rather than lessening the significance of the tests, actually intensified them; Christ could not give in to the temptation and sin (thus getting relief), but had to endure the tests until completed.

- [2] We should not underestimate the dire physical condition of Jesus the Man after 40 days of fasting; Satan tempts the Lord at his point of greatest human weakness. Nevertheless, Jesus resists the Devil as a Man filled with the Holy Spirit (Isa11:2), not by exercising the attributes or prerogatives of Deity. The redemption of mankind must be accomplished by a Kinsman-Redeemer, thus a member of the human race (cf., Heb2:14-18; Lev25:48).
- [3] Satan understood that Jesus was/is "the Son of God", equal with God, indeed God Himself (Jn5:18). Satan's temptation is for Jesus to use His divine attributes and act independent of the will of God the Father, which was the primeval sin of Satan himself (Isa14:12-14). In His role as the Last Adam, Christ must willingly submit to God the Father as a Man. This temptation falls into the category of "the lust of the flesh" (1Jn2:16).
- [4] Jesus resists the Devil as a Man by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, which teaches that it is better to obey God's revealed will than to satisfy physical desires. Interestingly, the context of the quoted verse in Deuteronomy is Moses' teaching on how God sustained Israel by supernaturally providing manna in the wilderness.
- [5] Whether Satan actually transported Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem, or this was accomplished via some sort of a vision, is not known.
- [6] This temptation plays upon a common misunderstanding of the Jews. Because of Malachi 3:1, the Jewish expectation was that Messiah would appear suddenly in the sky and descend into the Temple. Satan's temptation implies that if Jesus were to do this, the people would recognize Him as Messiah. Satan quotes Psalm 91:11-12 to support his contention that God would not allow harm to come to His Messiah. However, in his quotation Satan leaves out the phrase "in all thy ways"; thus, the promise extends to Messiah only as He remains in the will of God. This temptation falls into the category of "the pride of life" (1Jn2:16).
- [7] Again, Jesus resists the temptation as a Man, quoting Deuteronomy 6:16. We cannot expect God's provision or protection when we are walking outside His will.
- [8] It is God's clearly revealed will for His Messiah to rule all the kingdoms of the world (Ps2).
- [9] Satan, as usurper after Adam's fall, is presently ruling the world (Jn12:31; 2Cor4:4; Eph2:2), and its kingdoms are his to offer Jesus. However, this offer is a path that would bypass the cross (Heb12:2), leaving mankind unredeemed, and would be accomplished by the worship of a creature. This temptation falls into the category of "the lust of the eyes" (1Jn2:16).

- [10] The worship of one creature by another is absolutely forbidden (Rev19:10; 22:8-9), but the worship of a creature by the Creator is blasphemy. Again Jesus resists the temptation as a Man, quoting Deuteronomy 6:13 and/or 10:20. God alone is to be worshipped. Jesus as the perfect Man serves God and submits to His will.
- [11] In each of these temptations, Jesus resists the Devil as a Man, relying on direction from and the promises of Scripture. God's Word promises us as believers that if we resist the Devil, he will flee from us (Jas4:7).

Review of the temptations of Adam/Christ. Satan tempted Jesus in His role as the "Last Adam" in every respect that Adam and Eve were tempted (1Jn2:16). At every point at which Adam failed, Christ succeeded (Heb4:15).

Adam/Eve —Genesis 3	Christ —Matthew 4
1. You may eat of any tree (3:1).	You may eat by changing stones to bread (4:3).
2. You will not die (3:4).	You will not hurt Your foot (4:6).
3. You will be like God (3:5).	You will possess all kingdoms (4:8-9; Cf. Gen14:22).

JESUS BEGINS HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY IN GALILEE

- [12] Matthew makes it clear that the public ministry of Jesus began after John the Baptist was put in prison.
- [13] Luke records that Jesus began His public ministry in His hometown of Nazareth, but moved to Capernaum after the Jews of Nazareth refused to receive His message (Luk4:16-31). Capernaum is located on the Sea of Galilee, on the border between the land assigned to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali.
- [14] Matthew calls attention to the fact that Jesus' ministry in this region of Israel is a fulfillment of messianic prophecy.
- [15] Vv15-16 are a quotation of Isaiah 9:1-2.
- [17] The message Jesus preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand", is identical to that of John (Matt3:2).
- [18] Jesus was recognized by the Jews as a rabbi (i.e., "teacher"; Jn1:38,49; 3:2; 6:25). Rabbis, as teachers, had disciples.
- [19] The unusual aspect here is that Jesus takes the initiative to call Peter and Andrew to become His disciples; normally, the request was made by the would-be disciple, "Rabbi, may I follow you?". Rabbis selected only the 'best and brightest' students to disciple.

[20] Because of the way in which Jesus called His disciples, some have speculated that these young men whom Jesus drew to Himself had previously been turned down by other rabbis. That the disciples immediately leave their work and families to follow Jesus suggests they had a dormant but strong desire to follow a rabbi.

Jesus' call to Peter and Andrew was not their first encounter with Him. They had been intently following His public ministry, and in fact Andrew already suspected that Jesus was the Messiah (Jn1:40-41).

[21] James and John are also called to be disciples of Jesus from the town of Capernaum.

[22] They also immediately accept the call of Jesus the rabbi, leaving both work and family behind.

[23] Jesus attended synagogue every Sabbath, where He read and taught the Scriptures (Luk4:16-21). Now He begins preaching "the gospel of the kingdom". This is not the gospel of grace (1Cor15:1-4), but the 'good news' that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt4:17). That is, King Messiah has arrived in the Person of Jesus, and His promised kingdom of righteousness can begin if the nation will "repent, and believe the gospel" (Mk1:15).

[24] The "healing of all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" were signs to the nation, validating Jesus' claim to be the Messiah (Isa35:5-6; 42:7; Jn20:30-31).

[25] These signs and wonders performed by Jesus were so remarkable that the news spread throughout the region, attracting many. Even the religious leadership in Jerusalem take note of it, sending a delegation to investigate (Mk7:1). However, most are merely attracted by the miracles and are not drawn to Jesus by a recognition of the validity of His claims to be Messiah or personal repentance (Cp. Jn2:23-24).

CHAPTER 5

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (Chs. 5,6,7)

[1] Christ gave the discourse of Chs. 5-7 on a mountainside in Galilee; thus it has come to be known as "the Sermon on the Mount". Christ delivered His teaching while sitting, which is the custom within Rabbinic Judaism.

[2] "He... taught *them*". Much debate has transpired over the issue of "to whom is the Sermon on the Mount addressed?" Was it "His disciples" or "the multitudes" of v1? I think the answer is both. When Christ wanted to teach only His disciples, He would do so privately (Matt13:34-36). That this lesson to His disciples is conducted in a very public setting suggests He wants all to hear the message.

Theme of the Sermon on the Mount. Both John and Jesus had been preaching publicly that the nation of Israel must repent in preparation for the inauguration of the Kingdom, for only the righteous will be allowed to enter. This naturally raises the question, "What is the standard of righteousness?" The Pharisee would answer that righteousness is defined by the Law of Moses—which is **not** true. The teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount corrects this error. God's standard of righteousness greatly exceeds the requirements of the Law (and can only be fulfilled by God Himself in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by grace imputed to sinful man on the condition of faith; Cf., Rom1:15-16; 3:21-22; 2Cor5:21).

THE BEATITUDES

- [3] The word translated "blessed" is the Greek *makarios*. To be blessed is not to be 'happy'. To be blessed has the idea of one who is 'fortunate' or 'favored'. Clearly, one who is being "persecuted" and "reviled" (vv10-11) will not be 'happy' in these circumstances, but he can nevertheless rejoice to know that God has favored him in a way that will bring future blessing (Cp., Act5:41).
- The "poor in spirit" are those who have humbled themselves (Philip2:3ff), and who recognize their spiritual depravity (Luk18:13). This is a characteristic of the saved, who will inherit the Kingdom (Isa66:2).
- [4] Notice that in the Beatitudes, the promised blessings are future. Future blessing/reward is promised for *present* righteousness. The true follower of Christ is one who lives by faith, suffering loss now for the promise of future glory.
- [5] Meekness is not weakness, but power put in submission to another (i.e., God). Meekness was a virtue exhibited by both Moses (Num12:3) and Jesus (Matt11:29). The meek will be exalted by Christ to positions of authority in the earthly Kingdom.
- [6] A characteristic of the saved is to "hunger and thirst after righteousness", which cannot be filled in our present mortal bodies (Rom7:15-25), but will be in resurrection bodies in the Kingdom (1Cor15:42-50).
- [7] Only those who have experienced God's forgiveness and are born again can forgive others (Eph4:32).
- [8] Life in the Kingdom, under the provisions of the New Covenant, will be lived out of internal, pure motivations rather than merely external compliance with "Law".
- [9] Only the justified have peace with God (Rom5:1). The "Son of God" is the "Prince of Peace" (Isa9:6).
- [10] Those who live lives of righteousness will be persecuted. Willingness to endure persecution "for righteousness' sake" is evidence of spiritual rebirth (Cp., Matt13:21).

- [11] Note that this blessing is not promised to all who suffer for any reason, but for those who suffer for Christ's sake.
- [12] The promised blessing is future (i.e., "great is your reward in heaven"). The Bible knows nothing of the so-called "prosperity gospel". Christ promised that His disciples would be hated and persecuted even as He was (Jn15:18-20). It is a certitude that all who would "live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2Tim3:12).

THE SIMILITUDES

- [13] Those who possess the characteristics outlined in the Beatitudes (vv3-12) will have an influence on the world around them. To illustrate this Christ uses "salt" as a metaphor for the righteous (i.e., the believer). Salt was used in the ancient world as a preservative, but it also has the effect of making one thirsty. So also the righteous living among the fallen world are a restraint to wickedness, and at the same time serve to create in the unbelieving world a thirst to know more about these who are so different. However, just as salt that loses its saltiness can no longer serve its purpose, and is discarded, so a believer failing to live a life of righteousness in the midst of a perverse generation is not fulfilling his God-ordained purpose and is in danger of being set aside (Cp., 1Cor9:27).
- [14] The metaphor of "light" is also used of the believer.
- [15] The purpose of light is to provide illumination and guidance, to reveal what would otherwise be hidden; so also is the purpose of the believer (Philip2:15-16).
- [16] What is the purpose of a believer's good works? Certainly not to merit salvation, which they could never do (Eph2:8-9); rather, the good works of a believer are for the purpose of glorifying God (Eph2:10).

THE LAW OF MOSES NOT THE STANDARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

- [17] Jesus was a Jewish Man born under the Law of Moses (Gal4:4), which He kept perfectly.
- [18] Rather than saying the Law of Moses shall never pass away, this verse promises that the Law will pass away once it has been fulfilled (i.e., kept perfectly).
- [19] The issue being considered is not entrance into the Kingdom (i.e., salvation), but position/reward in the Kingdom, which is based on works.

The Doctrine of Rewards. The teaching that the believer will be rewarded for his service for Christ is widely de-emphasized today. Many believe it is somehow unspiritual to teach rewards as a motivation for service, even though this is precisely what the

Apostle Paul did (1Cor9:24-27). Furthermore, to those who would say, "I don't care about rewards; I'll just be happy to be there [i.e., in the Kingdom, or Heaven]", what they are unwittingly saying is that they are not concerned about glorifying God (v16).

- [20] In this verse is the first occurrence of Jesus' declaration, "I say unto you", which is repeated often in this discourse. The Jews were amazed at the personal authority Jesus claimed in His teaching (Matt7:28-29), in contrast to the prophets who declared, "Thus saith the LORD". That Jesus is Jehovah is implicit.

No one kept the Law of Moses like the Pharisees. While certainly not keeping it perfectly, they did a great job! The problem is that the Law of Moses is all about externalities (merely 613 commandments), with the result that the Pharisees could do a fair job of keeping it as a work of the flesh, totally apart from being "born again". But Christ says that "except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees", you can't enter into the Kingdom (which is reserved for those who are born again; Jn3:3,5).

In the remainder of this chapter, Christ elaborates on how the demands of true righteousness exceed the requirements of the Law. This is not, as some have suggested, Christ giving the "true" interpretation of the Law. The Law was totally external and could not produce righteousness, even for those who would keep it. Remember, earthly and material blessings were promised to those who kept the Law, and physical curses were promised to those who would not keep it (Cf., Lev26; Deut28. The Law never promised eternal life (i.e., salvation) to those who kept it, nor did it threaten the damnation of those who did not.

In contrast with the Mosaic Covenant, which regulated external behavior, life in the Kingdom will be governed by the New Covenant, which is all about inward motivation (Deut30:6; Jer31:31-34; Ezek36:25-27). As such, the Sermon on the Mount has direct application to life in the Kingdom, where the New Covenant will be fulfilled, but also indirect application to life during the Church Age since believers today enjoy blessings of the New Covenant (2Cor3:6).

REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW CONTRASTED WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS

- [21] "Thou shalt not kill" was the external requirement of the Law of Moses (Ex20:13).
- [22] The internal requirement of righteousness is to not even be angry with, or in conflict with, our brother.
- [26] Justice in the Kingdom will be perfect (e.g., Isa65:19-25).
- [27] "Thou shalt not commit adultery" was the external requirement of the Law of Moses (Ex20:14).
- [28] The internal requirement of righteousness is to not even lust after another in our heart.

- [29] Vv29-30 are instances of hyperbole, as physical mutilation was prohibited under the Law (Lev19:28). The figure is used to emphasize the seriousness of sin.
- [31] "Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement" was the external requirement of the Law of Moses (Deut24:1).
- [32] The internal requirement of righteousness is not to divorce under any circumstances, save one; the so-called "exception clause" peculiar to the Gospel of Matthew will be treated later when the issue of divorce is addressed at length by the Lord (Matt19:3-12).
- [33] "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thy oaths" was the external requirements of the Law of Moses (Lev19:12; Num30:2).
- [34] The internal requirement of righteousness is not to take oaths as all.
- [37] Righteousness demands that all statements be true, and all commitments be honored, regardless of whether an oath was taken or not.
- [38] "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" was the external requirements of the Law of Moses (Ex21:22ff). The Law allowed equal retribution against one who had personally injured another.
- [39] The internal requirement of righteousness is to suffer personal injury without retribution.
- [41] Roman law at this time allowed a Roman soldier to compel a civilian to render service for a maximum of one mile (e.g., Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the Lord's cross, Mk15:21).
- [43] "Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate [the LORD's] enemy" was the external requirement of the Law of Moses (Lev19:18; Ps139:21-22); that is, love those who love you (v46; Prov8:17). The Law had no requirement to love your enemy.
- [44] The internal requirement of righteousness is to love everyone, and to bless even those who hate and persecute you.
- [45] Our example is God (v48). Does not He love and bless even those who hate Him?
- [48] It is interesting that *perfection* was God's original requirement of Abraham (Gen17:1), before the Law of Moses, but was not repeated or included in the Law; thus, in one sense, the 613 commandments of the Mosaic code was a rule of life for Israel in which God demanded less of them than He had from Abraham.

This verse is the culmination of Christ's teaching on righteousness. The very Person and character of God is the standard of righteousness. Righteousness is not some quality independent of God, to which He just so happens to conform.

Rather, the character of God is the very definition of righteousness. Righteousness is what God is! Thus, we don't look to the Law of Moses for our standard of righteousness, but to God. This is one of the primary themes of the Sermon on the Mount. This was the essential problem of the Pharisees (v20), who had the audacity to accuse Jesus (i.e., God) of breaking the Law! Jesus' reply when accused of breaking the Sabbath was that, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt12:8; Mk2:28; Luk6:5).

CHAPTER 6

EXTERNAL RELIGIOUS PERFORMANCE REBUKED

Having completed His extended discourse contrasting the external requirements of the Law of Moses and the internal requirements of righteousness, Christ continues by rebuking external religious acts (especially as practiced by the Pharisees) which, apart from true conversion, have no spiritual benefit; in doing so, Christ moves from the teaching of the Pharisees to their hypocritical deeds.

- [1] Almsgiving was an important religious deed in Pharisaic Judaism, performed publicly "to be seen" before men. Christ rebukes not their act, as almsgiving is inherently good, but their motive. Here, "alms" is being used figuratively (i.e., synecdoche) to encompass any external religious work. The Lord asserts that "righteous" deeds performed from impure motives will receive no reward from God.
- [2] "when thou doest thine alms..." It is not the deed that the Lord condemns, but the motivation for the deed.
- [3] Almsgiving should be so casual, non-ostentatious and frequent that even the one who gives quickly forgets his deed.
- [4] Righteousness is not a matter established between a person and other men, but between the person and God. The motive of a righteous man is to please God alone; God promises to reward pure motives, not external works.
- [5] The same principle applies to prayer as to almsgiving. Prayers that are offered publicly with the motive "that they may be seen by men" are of no spiritual benefit and will receive no reward from God.
- [6] Positive instruction on how to pray will be given in vv9-13. Christ precedes this, however, with instruction on how not to pray. Personal prayer offered publicly is condemned by the Lord (e.g., Luk18:10-12).
- [7] Also condemned by the Lord is prayer that includes "vain repetitions"; that is, saying the same thing over and over again. This was a common practice in paganism and still is in Islam and Roman Catholicism.

- [8] God knows what we need before we ask. When we pray, we are not bringing to God's attention something of which He is not already aware. Nevertheless, He wants us to ask Him in prayer as an expression of our recognition that He is the source of our provision, as well as His desire for communion with us (1Thess5:17).

INSTRUCTION IN PRAYER

This prayer, often referred to as "the Lord's Prayer", is not a prayer the Lord Himself would pray since it includes a petition for forgiveness of sins (the true Lord's Prayer can be found in John 17), but is a model prayer for his disciples. In Luke 11:1, Jesus gives this prayer in response to the request from His disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray".

While there is nothing wrong *per se* with reciting this prayer verbatim (saving the caveat of v7), that is not the point of the Lord's giving it. This prayer teaches us for what it is appropriate to pray as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ and children of God the Father.

- [9] Prayer is to be addressed to God the Father by born-again believers. Believers, in union with Jesus Christ (i.e., the Son of God) become the children of God and can approach Him in the most intimate of terms made possible by that unique relationship (Rom8:14-16). Such a relationship of the devout Jew with God as his Father was never dreamed possible under the Law.

"Hallowed by Thy Name" is not a petition, but a confession of our recognition of God's exalted position (Ps111:9).

- [10] The very first petition is for the Kingdom to come. This is the Millennial Kingdom that Messiah will bring. Notice what is true of the Kingdom: the Kingdom is a time when the will of God will be done on earth, even as it is today in Heaven. Obviously, this Kingdom is yet future.

It is interesting that although the Messianic Kingdom has been promised to come by the sure Word of God (Dan2:44), and will do so irrespective of our prayers, we are nonetheless instructed to pray for it.

- [11] It is appropriate to pray for God's daily provision. The believer's walk of faith requires daily, moment-by-moment dependence upon God (Cp., 2Cor5:7; Gal2:20; Jas4:8).
- [12] In the epistles this order is reversed; we forgive others because God has forgiven us (Eph4:32). Remember that this prayer is the prayer of a believer, so salvation is not in view. This verse is not teaching that forgiveness of our sins (i.e., our salvation) is dependent on our "work" of forgiving others. It is teaching that for the believer to be in fellowship with God, he must confess his sins against God (1Jn1:9) as well as forgiving those who have sinned against him (Cp. Matt5:23-24).

- [13] God does not tempt anyone to sin (Jas1:13). This prayer is to be delivered from "the evil one", which is Satan. God has promised not to allow us "to be tempted above that ye are able" as well as making "a way to escape" from every temptation we face (1Cor10:13).

Finally, the believer ascribes all power and glory, including the coming of the Kingdom, to God alone; in contrast, Satan as usurper wants to claim these for himself.

The prayer ends with *Amen*, which is the transliterated Hebrew word for "truth" (Cp., Isa65:16; Rev3:14).

- [14] Jesus follows up the model prayer with additional instruction, reiterating that the internal demands of righteousness, and not the external requirements of the Law, are the standard.
- [15] Vv14-15 elaborate the petition of v12. Again, requirements for a believer's fellowship with God are in view, not his salvation.
- [16] Fasting was required by the Law on certain occasions, such as the Day of Atonement (Lev23:26). However, the Pharisees has greatly expanded upon the Law's requirements for fasting, which had become a great source of pride for them (Luk18:11-12). The Lord reiterates that external religious rites apart from true conversion are of no spiritual benefit.

Note that with the fulfillment of the Law, fasting is no longer required (Col2:16-17).

- [17] Take steps so that your fasting is not apparent to men.
- [18] The believer living a life of faith seeks to please God alone. In contrast, the Pharisees by their ostentatious external works of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting showed that they valued the respect and commendation of men more than of God.

PRIORITIES IN THE LIFE OF THE DISCIPLE

- [19] Material prosperity/wealth had become important to the Jew. This was understandable to some extent, as material prosperity was a promised blessing of the Mosaic covenant (Lev26:3-5; Deut28:2-12), so the Jew had come to view wealth as a visible sign of God's blessing. However, the Law's promise of material prosperity was only earthly and temporal, not eternal (Cp., Luk12:16-20); for this reason, "treasures upon earth" should not be a priority or a pursuit of the believer.
- [20] The priority and pursuit of the believer ought to be "treasures in heaven", those rewards promised that will endure forever.
- [21] The problem with wealth is the temptation to the one who possesses it to depend upon it rather than upon the God Who is the source of it (Jer9:23; Matt19:23-24).

- [22] This verse highlights the motive or aim that drive the believer. If his aim is "single" (i.e., pure, proper, unmixed, undivided; Cp. Matt6:33), he can expect blessing from God—if not temporal, certainly eternal (1Cor3:14).
- [23] If the believer's aim is "evil" (i.e., not "single", but improper, mixed, divided), he cannot expect blessing from God in this life, nor reward in heaven (1Cor3:15).
- [24] A believer's loyalties cannot be divided. Love for God and service for Him must be the priority of the believer. Love and devotion to God cannot be mixed with a love of riches.
- [25] Whereas vv19-24 focused on treasure in heaven and earthly reward, and how this must be the priority of the believer, vv25-34 address the issue of this present life and the needs we have in it. Is it irresponsible or careless for the believer to be so focused on pleasing God and obtaining His promised heavenly reward? Will his earthly needs go unmet? The Lord's answer is NO.
- [26] This is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If God daily provides food for the birds in His creation, He will surely do so for His children as well.
- [27] God is our source of provision. No matter how hard we might work, our life and its sustenance is in the hand of the Lord (Jas4:14-15). Thus, worry/anxiety is futile; it accomplishes nothing.
- Note that this passage does not condemn responsible planning for the future, which the Lord commands elsewhere (e.g., Luk14:28-32). The issue is recognition that, despite our planning and working, our lives are ultimately in the hand of God Who loves us and has committed to provide for us.
- [30] Thus, to worry is to doubt that God loves us and has committed to care for us. Worry is a lack of faith (where faith is believing what God has promised; Rom4:18-21).
- [32] Here, "Gentiles" is used as a figure for those who do not know God (i.e., unbelievers); the motivation of unbelievers is materialism. God is not naïve, unaware of the real material needs the believer has.
- [33] But God's promise is that for the believer who aligns his priorities and daily pursuits with God's ultimate purpose (i.e., the coming Kingdom and its standard of righteousness), God will provide for his physical needs (Cp., Luk10:38-42).
- [34] Thus, there is no place for worry regarding physical needs for the child of God who is walking with Him (Philip4:6-7; 1Pet5:7).

CHAPTER 7

The final chapter in the Sermon on the Mount is an extended contrast of the true and the false way.

HYPOCRITICAL JUDGMENT CONDEMNED

- [1] Now, in the context of the "righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matt5:20), the Lord condemns judgment.
- [2] At issue in the judgment of the Pharisees was their hypocrisy (v5); they did not judge themselves (cf., 1Cor11:31) with the same standard they used for others (Matt23:3; 13-35).

Judgment, when exercised, must be consistent and according to God's standard of righteousness. "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (Jn7:24).

- [5] In the figure, removal of the mote from another's eye is not forbidden, but should occur only after one has applied the same standard to himself.
- [6] However, there is no point in criticism or judgment where it is not wanted or beneficial. Both "dogs" and "swine" were despised by the Jew as unclean; they seem to be used here as metaphors for the wicked (Cp., Philip3:2). We shouldn't waste our time in judging the fallen, unregenerate world for not being righteous—it's more likely to make us a target for persecution than have a reforming effect on them.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAY

- [7] The Lord had earlier in the sermon given instruction on how to pray (Matt6:5-13); now He gives encouragement to pray.
- [8] God the Father desires for His children to ask Him for those things that they need. God is not bothered by requests from us, and when we go to God with our petitions we find He is both able and willing to hear us.

Similarly, James says that "ye have not, because ye ask not" (Jas4:2); of course, James quickly adds that at other times we "receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (Jas4:3).

- [9] God our Father wants to give us the things we need (i.e., "bread", "fish").
- [11] Vv9-11 are another example of arguing from the lesser to the greater. If a human father loves and desires to do good things for his children when they ask him, how much greater is the love of God the Father for His children, and how much greater is His desire for their good.

THE GOLDEN RULE

- [12] The principles of righteousness outlined in the Sermon on the Mount are summarized in this verse, often called "the golden rule". If we would treat others as we desire to be treated, we

would encompass all that was previously required in the Law and the teaching of the prophets (Rom13:8-10); all else is merely detail that falls within this overarching principle.

ONLY TWO WAYS

- [13] Jesus affirms that there are only two ways, called in Psalm 1 the way of the "blessed man" versus the way of the "ungodly". The way of the ungodly is "broad", which includes those like the Pharisees who emphasize only external conformity to legal requirements; this way results in "destruction" (i.e., Hell).
- [14] The "narrow" way recognizes internal transformation (i.e., regeneration) is necessary to meet the righteous demands of God, and Jesus says of this "way" that it is "hard", and that there are "few there be that find it" (there is no way to get around the very plain teaching of Jesus that most people are **not** saved; cf., Gal4:27). The narrow way is *exclusively* through the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn14:6; Act4:12). The narrow way results in "life" (i.e., eternal life, which included entrance into the Kingdom).

BEWARE OF COUNTERFEIT RIGHTEOUSNESS

- [15] After His discourse on true righteousness, which is the requirement for entrance into the Kingdom, Jesus gives a warning about false prophets and counterfeit confessions. Our evaluation of prophets/teachers must not be based on externalities, because the ministers of Satan are masters of deception (2Cor11:3,13-15).

As it is the objective of the wolf to devour the sheep, it is the objective of false prophet to destroy the righteous. One reason the "narrow way" is "hard" to find is because of the work of false prophets/teachers (cf., Matt13:4,19).

- [19] In His time, God will judge false prophets (Matt25:46; Rev20:14-15).
- [20] We "know" true or false prophets by judging their fruit, not their heart (which no man can know; 1Cor4:5).

As is the case with most of the Sermon on the Mount, this is directed at the "scribes and Pharisees", who were the prominent teachers in Israel appeared to the average Jew as righteous men (Matt5:20). Jesus says their teaching regarding Messiah and His Kingdom is meant to deceive; He repeatedly pointed out that the "fruit" of the scribes and Pharisees was hypocrisy (Matt23:1-36).

- [21] Similarly, mere profession is not evidence of regeneration.
- [22] Many will profess to follow the Lord and attest to their sincerity with an abundance of works in His name (e.g., the Pharisees). Such are works of the flesh for self-justification at best, or at worst empowered by demons in order to deceive (1Jn4:1). Remember, Judas preached the kingdom with power (Matt10:4-8), and the coming

of Antichrist will be with "all power, signs, and lying wonders" (2Thess2:9).

- [23] The works of a professor, even if apparently miraculous, are not conclusive. At issue is whether one is *known* by the Lord, where "know" is a Hebrew idiom connoting an intimate, personal relationship (Ps1:6; Jn10:14; 1Cor8:3; 2Tim2:19).

RESULTS OF THE TWO WAYS CONTRASTED

- [24] Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with a parable contrasting the results of the "two ways". The "wise man" is one who builds his "house" (i.e., his life) on a sure foundation of "rock" (i.e., the revelation of God; 1Cor3:11).

Note that Jesus has presented His teaching, that is "these sayings of mine", as just as authoritative as the Law of Moses (e.g., Matt5:22,28,32,34,39,44).

- [25] The believer who has built his life on the Word of God can weather any storm (Matt16:18). He is fully prepared and perfectly equipped for every necessary work, because the Scriptures are entirely sufficient (2Tim3:16-17).
- [26] The sufficiency of Scripture is under attack today like never before, with the widespread belief and teaching that the Word of God must be supplemented with so-called "truth" from other sources (e.g., secular psychology, philosophy, historical geology, evolutionary biology, modern science in all its forms).
- [27] Any departure from the revelation of God as our only source of truth (Prov1:7; 9:10; Isa8:20; Jn14:6; 17:17; Col2:2-3) is likened to a "foolish man" who built his "house" (i.e., life) upon the "sand"—a foundation that is unsure and will not endure.

CONCLUSION OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

- [28] The Sermon on the Mount is concluded.
- [29] His hearers were "astonished at His doctrine" (i.e., teaching). Their astonishment was apparently not only with its content as with its delivery; Jesus taught from a position of Personal authority, in the very place of Jehovah, unlike the scribes who at best claimed the authority of "Thus saith the LORD".

CHAPTER 8

THE CREDENTIALS OF KING MESSIAH (CHS. 8-9)

Following Christ's discourse on the principles of the Kingdom (Matt5-7), Matthew **chapters 8-9** present the mighty works of Jesus as credentials of King Messiah prophesied in the Scriptures. That widespread healing would be associated with the arrival of Messiah was well-established from the Old Testament (e.g., Isa35:4-6; Mal4:2).

Miracles Unique to Messiah. More important than the multitude of healings, however, was the type of healings Jesus performed. The Pharisees divided miracles into two categories; those that anyone could perform if so empowered by God, and those that only Messiah would do. In the second category, there are three main miracles: 1) cleansing of a leper, 2) healing of one born blind, and 3) casting out a dumb demon.

THE CLEANSING OF A LEPER

- [1] The great multitude that heard the Sermon on the Mount are witnesses to this miracle.
- [2] Three things in this verse call for particular attention. First, for the first time in the New Testament, Jesus is addressed as "Lord" (the Greek *Kurios*, equivalent to the Hebrew *Adonai*, a divine title). Second, the leper "worshipped" Jesus, and that worship was received without rebuke. Third, the leper confesses his belief that Jesus can cleanse him of leprosy. All three of these things point to the deity of Christ.

Recognizing Jesus as Lord, there is no question as to whether He has the power to heal; the issue is whether He is willing to heal.

Leprosy. In the Bible, especially the Old Testament, leprosy is used as a symbol for sin. Physiologically, leprosy is an internal bacterial disease that in latter stages manifests itself outwardly as a sort of decay of the skin. Similarly, sin begins as internal corruption that in time manifests itself outwardly. In the Old Testament, there was no cure for leprosy (or sin); **only God could heal one with leprosy** (2Kgs5:7).

- [3] Christ heals the leper with a touch. In the Law, the unclean renders anything it touches unclean as well; here, with Christ the God-Man, Who is not only holy and righteous but the very source of holiness and righteousness, the opposite occurs.
- [4] Jesus commands the cleansed leper to follow the requirements of the Law and present himself to the priests. This He said would be a testimony to "them" (i.e., the priests). And what a testimony

it must have been—it was not something that could have passed by them unnoticed.

For ~1,500 years, the Levitical priests had memorized detailed procedures to be performed on the occasion of a leper healed (Lev14), but had never once used them; for this reason, the cleansing of a leper came to be considered a miracle that only Messiah would perform. With the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, lepers arrived daily at the Temple testifying to the priests that Jesus of Nazareth had healed their leprosy. This was a totally verifiable miracle, as individuals were classified as lepers by the priests (Lev13), who then recorded their names as those who were compelled to "dwell alone, outside the camp" until the time when they could demonstrate that they had been cleansed (Lev13:45-46).

HEALING OF THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

- [5] In the Roman army, a centurion is an officer over 100 men. It is implicitly understood that a centurion is a Gentile.
- [6] The news of the healing ministry of Jesus has been heard throughout the area, attracting even this Gentile. As with the leper, the centurion addresses Jesus as "Lord".
- [7] Jesus offers to "come" to the home of the centurion in order to heal his servant.
- [8] Again addressing Jesus as "Lord", the centurion professes his faith in Jesus to heal, even from afar, clearly understanding Jesus' works to be miraculous.
- [10] Jesus commends this Gentile for his "great faith", setting it in contrast to Israel (i.e., the Jews) who are in much better position to recognize Jesus for Who He is (because of the Scriptures), yet for the most part do not.
- [11] Here Jesus says that "many shall come from the east and west", that is, lands outside of Israel (i.e., Gentiles) to share in the Kingdom with resurrected Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the "fathers" of the Jews, with whom God made the covenants).
- [12] Even more shocking than Gentiles sharing in the Messianic Kingdom assertion that "the sons of the Kingdom" (i.e., Jews) would be "cast out" (cf., Ezek20:35-38).
- That many Gentiles would share in the Kingdom, while many Jews would be excluded from it, was a direct assault on the theology of the Pharisees, who taught that "all Israel has a share in the age to come".
- [13] Jesus concludes His teaching by healing the centurion's servant, even "as thou hast believed".

HEALING OF PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

- [14] Peter was married, with all due apologies to Roman Catholic dogma which teaches that Peter was the first Pope (utter nonsense), for here we see his mother-in-law is "sick of a fever".
- [15] Jesus heals her with a touch. It is interesting, and perhaps noteworthy, that the immediate response of this one healed by Christ is to serve Him.

Significance of those Jesus healed. The first three healings recorded in the Gospel of Matthew are a **leper**, a **Gentile**, and a **woman**, three classes allowed no significant part in Jewish society, and over which the Pharisee considered himself superior.

- [16] In the evenings especially (i.e., after work), the multitudes bring the sick to Jesus, and He heals them all.
- [17] Matthew asserts that the widespread healing ministry of Jesus was a fulfillment of Messianic prophesy by quoting Isaiah 53:4. In so doing, Matthew affirms that it is the Messiah Who is the subject of Isaiah 53 (which is denied within orthodox Judaism today).

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

- [18] Christ's healing ministry was attracting tremendous crowds. So much so that he decides to cross over to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. It is noteworthy that, while Jesus did heal wherever He went, healing was not the focus of His ministry (cf., Mk1:32-39).
- [19] The scribe addresses Jesus as "Master", meaning Teacher. Although Jesus had accepted disciples, he doubts the motives of this scribe in wanting to follow Him.
- [20] Apparently this scribe wanted to attach himself to a well-known Rabbi whose fame was rapidly spreading through the region. Jesus makes clear that if it is this kind of ambition that is motivating the scribe, he will be disappointed, as he will be following one who does not even have a home in which to sleep (cf., Jn7:53-8:1).

The Son of Man. This is the first occurrence of the title "Son of man", which Jesus uses of Himself more than any other title. This title emphasizes His true humanity, but much more than that it is an unequivocal assertion that He is **Messiah** (Dan7:13-14). Though rejected, Jesus' claim to be Messiah, both Son of Man and Son of God, was clearly recognized by the Jewish leadership (Cp., Matt26:63-65).

[21] A second would-be disciple confessed that he desired to follow the "Lord", but only after the death of his father (likely to ensure his inheritance).

[22] Jesus makes clear that His call takes precedence over earthly, temporal concerns, and His disciples must make following Him their greatest priority.

JESUS DEMONSTRATES DOMINION OVER THE CREATION

[24] The timing of this tempest is probably not a coincidence. It may have been caused by God to serve as a test for the disciples, or (more likely) a Satanic attempt to destroy the Messiah.

[25] The disciples are terrified at the power of the storm, truly fearing for their lives. This is not likely an overreaction, as at least four of the disciples were professional fishermen who made their living daily sailing on the Sea of Galilee.

It is interesting to note that the disciples always refer to Christ as "Lord", never "Jesus".

[26] Jesus' rebuking of the wind and the sea may not have been a "miracle" *per se*; rather, it may have been Him, as an unfallen and perfect Man (i.e., the "last Adam"; 1Cor15:45), exercising dominion over the creation as God originally intended for Adam and his race (Gen1:26). This is a preview of the coming Kingdom, when the creation, including the so-called forces of nature, will be in perfect submission to glorified men.

The Lord considers his disciples' fear of the storm as a lack of faith. Why? Because they either do not believe, or now doubt, Who Jesus really is. If Jesus is Jehovah, God come in the flesh as a Perfect Man, then no harm can come to Him (or those in the boat with Him) unless He ordains it. A Man walking in the perfect will of God need fear nothing, and as a sinless Man Jesus cannot die unless He wills it (Jn10:18; Rom5:12; 6:23).

[27] Christ's dominion over the creation seems to impress the disciples more than His works of healing.

JESUS CASTS DEMONS INTO SWINE

[28] Gadara was on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. In the Old Testament this area was known generally as "Gilead", and specifically as "Bashan", and was originally assigned to the Tribe of Manasseh; from earliest times, this area was associated with demonic activity (Deut3:13). At this point in history, Gadara is largely inhabited by Gentiles, attested to by the significant swine industry seen here (v30).

[29] The multitude of demons speak to Jesus through the two possessed men. Several things are noteworthy: 1) the demons recognize Jesus, 2) they know who He is (i.e., the Son of God), 3) they know that He has authority and power over them, and 4) they know that

He will judge them at a future appointed time. Thus, the demonic host understands and acknowledges much more regarding Jesus than most of the men of Israel.

The Son of God. When used idiomatically, the Hebraism "the son of" expresses the idea of "the same essential nature as". Thus, the title "Son of God" emphasizes the undiminished deity of Jesus (Jn5:17-18). It is also an unequivocal assertion that He is **Messiah** (Ps2:2,6-8). Though rejected, Jesus' claim to be Messiah, both Son of Man and Son of God, was clearly recognized by the Jewish leadership (Cp., Matt26:63-65).

- [30] According to Mark, the number of swine was about 2,000 (Mk5:13). The raising of swine in this region was most likely an activity of Gentiles, although it is not out of the question that Jews in an extreme state of rebellion could be involved (e.g., Luk15:15).
- [31] Most assume that demons are fallen angels, though this is not explicitly taught in the Bible. In the Gospels, demons strangely seek embodiment, even in animals, rather than existence as disembodied spirits.
- [32] Here Jesus demonstrates authority over the demonic host, expelling them from these two men by mere command.
- [34] In the face of this mighty miracle, the people of Gadara implore Jesus to leave. Why? A frequent suggestion is that they are distressed at the financial loss of their swine caused by Jesus, and fear further loss if He remains, which is certainly possible. A second possibility is that they believed the testimony of the demons (confirmed by the miracle), that Jesus was "the Son of God" (i.e., deity in the flesh), and it is always an abhorrent experience for sinful man in an unreconciled state to stand in the presence of the holy God (e.g., Isa6:5; Luk5:8).

CHAPTER 9

HEALING OF A PARALYTIC AND THE POWER TO FORGIVE SINS

- [1] Because of His rejection in Gadara, Jesus and the disciples return to the west side of the Sea of Galilee, to Jesus' "own city" (i.e., Capernaum; Matt4:13).
- [2] A paralyzed man is brought to Jesus by his friends, and because of "their faith" Jesus declares, "Thy sins be forgiven thee". These certainly had faith, for they *believed* that Jesus had the power to health their friend, and so believing they had brought him to the Lord.

Apparently, this man's paralysis was the result of divine discipline due to personal sin; thus, the first step in his healing is resolution of the sin problem (Jas5:14-16).

- [3] Now Jesus had made this declaration in the presence of the "scribes", and He knew they considered it to be *blasphemy*. Blasphemy includes the appropriating of powers or prerogatives that are God's alone by a mere creature; in this case, God alone can forgive sins (Ps130:3-5; Dan9:9; Mk2:7). Of course, Jesus is not a mere creature, but the unique God-Man, and rightly possesses

divine power and prerogative—thus, Jesus has the authority to forgive sins.

- [4] Jesus knows that the scribes do not believe Him to be God.
- [5] Jesus is about to perform a miraculous sign in order to validate His message, that He has the power to forgive sins. Validation of a message is always the purpose of signs and wonders when performed by God (Jn20:30-31).

Jesus asks which statement is easier to “say”, “thy sins be forgiven thee”, or “arise and walk”. Obviously, it is easy to make either statement. But the command to “arise and walk” can be immediately verified, whereas “thy sins be forgiven thee” cannot.

- [6] Jesus commands the paralytic to “Arise” in order to validate the message that “the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins”. Thus, Jesus’ message really is that the Son of Man (a messianic title) is Jehovah God.
- [7] Jesus’ miracle of healing the paralytic, confirmed by the fact that he instantaneously arises and walks, validates His message that: 1) Jesus is Messiah, 2) Messiah has the authority to exercise divine prerogative to forgive sins, and 3) Jesus the Messiah is Jehovah God.
- [8] However, the import of the message is lost on the multitude. Rather than accepting that Jesus is Jehovah God, they rationalize that God has condescended to share His divine power and prerogative with a mere man. Thus, it is the scribes who are guilty of blasphemy!

The Strategy of Unbelief. This is a perfect illustration of the age-old, never-changing pattern of unbelief, and this strategy on the part of unbelievers is why miracles, signs and wonders by themselves (i.e., apart from the Word of God) don’t produce saving faith (cf., Luk16:31). Unbelief will always either put forward a perverted interpretation of the manifest work of God in order to fit it into its system of unbelief, or modify its system of unbelief to accommodate it. This is the precise point made by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1 (note Rom1:21), and the outworking of it can be observed throughout the Bible record (e.g., Act14:6-11) as well as in our modern world today—**the strategy of unbelief never changes.** A recognition of this explains why an apologetic strategy based on *evidences* will generally not be effective; such an apologetic strategy is never used in the Bible (yet has been the preferred approach of the Church for most of the past 2,000 years).

THE CALL OF MATTHEW

- [9] Jesus calls Matthew, a tax collector (he likely collected customs on the commercial traffic associated with the Sea of Galilee), to

"follow me". Matthew was certainly an unlikely disciple, but he did follow Jesus, in contrast with the more likely would-be disciples who did not (Cp., Matt8:19-22).

- [10] According to Luke 5:29, this dinner was a "great feast" given by Matthew following his acceptance of the call to follow Jesus. At this banquet with Jesus and His disciples were the former associates of Matthew, "tax collectors and sinners", groups held in contempt by the Pharisees; tax collectors were considered to be collaborators with the Romans (and were often corrupt), and "sinners" were those who did not keep the Law according to the prescriptions of the Pharisees.
- [11] The Law did not forbid eating with "tax collectors and sinners", but the traditions of the Pharisees added to the Law did.
- [12] Jesus replies that He came to heal those who are "sick" (i.e., lost). The self-righteous Pharisees do not think they are "sick" because of their law-keeping (Luk18:11). These "tax-collectors and sinners", however, know they are sick (Luk18:13).
- [13] Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6, with the point that merely following external religious rituals (i.e., bringing the required sacrifices), apart from a contrite and compassionate heart, does not please God (Ps51:16-17). Even the Law required the Pharisee to love his neighbor (Lev19:18).
- [14] A similar issue is raised by the disciples of John, who were not Pharisees, but followed many of the traditions of the Pharisees (e.g., weekly fasting).
- [15] Jesus' response indicates it may have been appropriate for the disciples of John to fast, since their prophetic ministry was one of calling a stiff-necked and rebellious nation to repentance in advance of Messiah's arrival. Now, however, Messiah has arrived. Messiah is compared metaphorically to a bridegroom, whose arrival is cause for feasting, not fasting. When Messiah is rejected and killed, however, fasting will again be appropriate.

PARABLES CONTRASTING NEW AND OLD COVENANTS

- [16] Jesus gives two parables which contrast the New and old (i.e., Mosaic) covenants.
- [17] The point of both parables is that the Kingdom being offered by Messiah, to be governed by the New Covenant, supercedes and renders obsolete the old dispensation governed by the Mosaic Covenant and its Law. The New Covenant is not something extra to be added to the Law, but completely replaces it. The Pharisees in the Gospels have a real problem accepting this; decades later, the Jews still do, and the Epistle to the Hebrews is written as a lengthy apologetic addressing this issue (Heb8:13).

JAIRUS' DAUGHTER AND THE WOMAN WITH AN ISSUE OF BLOOD

- [18] Jesus is approached by Jairus, the ruler of a synagogue (Mk5:22), who "worshipped" Jesus. Jairus believes that Jesus can raise his dead daughter; thus, he has faith.
- [20] On the way to raise Jairus' daughter, Jesus encounters a woman who had had an issue of blood for 12 years (it is interesting that Jairus' daughter is said to be 12 years old; Mk5:42). Mark's account adds that this woman has exhausted all of her money on physicians, who could not heal her. This devout woman had been ceremonially unclean for 12 years, and as such her life would have been severely constrained (Lev15:25-27).
- [21] The woman believes she will be healed by touching the "hem" of Jesus' "garment". Why? Understanding this reveals much about what this woman believed. Jewish men were required by the Law to wear a mantle, on the corners of which were affixed blue tassels (Heb., *tzitzit*) to remind them of the commandments (Num15:38-39; Deut22:12). As a Jewish man living under the Law (Matt5:17; Gal4:4), Jesus would have worn such a mantle in public. The Greek word translated "hem" refers to these tassels affixed to the corners of Jesus' mantle; it is these the woman believes have healing power.
- Her belief comes from Malachi 4:2, where Messiah is said to come "with healing in His wings". The Hebrew word translated "wings" refers to the corners of the Jewish man's mantle where the tassels are affixed. Thus, this woman believed Jesus is the Messiah, and she believes the verse of Scripture that says Messiah's tassels have healing power to be literally true!
- [22] Jesus commends the woman's faith and declares that she will be healed.
- [23] Arriving at Jairus' house, Jesus finds the professional musicians hired to play dirges already present.
- [24] Jesus declares Jairus' daughter to "sleepeth"; this does not mean the maid is not literally dead (she is), but is a euphemism used in Scripture for the death of a believer (e.g., Jn11:11; 1Cor11:30; 1Thess4:13-15).
- [25] Jesus heals the maid with a touch. Notice that Jesus heals in different ways almost every time. I think He probably did that intentionally, to emphasize that it is not some procedure that heals (and might be repeated by others), but a Person.
- [26] Jesus' healing ministry had been wide-spread up to this time, but this is the first time (at least in Matthew's Gospel) He has raised someone from the dead. Messiah has power not merely over sickness and disease, but over life and death (Rev1:18), which the Old Testament teaches is a power that belongs to God alone (Ps68:20).

HEALING OF TWO BLIND MEN

- [27] Two blind men follow Jesus seeking to be healed. They petition the Lord as "the Son of David", a messianic title (2Sam7:12-16; Matt1:1).
- [29] Jesus heals them on the condition of faith. While Jesus' healings were absolutely physical and literal, they also typologically point to 'spiritual' healing (Isa53:5; 1Pet2:24); as such, they are always predicated on faith alone (a work is never required; Cp., Eph2:8-9).
- [30] Jesus' charge to the men is apparently based on His desire not to continue to attract large crowds who have come for nothing more than physical healing (Cp., Mk1:32-38).

CASTING OUT OF A DUMB DEMON

- [32] Jesus has cast out many demons up to this point, but this instance is special because it is the first encounter with a "dumb" demon. The Pharisees can cast out demons (Matt7:22), but their procedure requires them to ascertain the name of the demon in order to exercise power over it (much like Roman Catholic exorcisms); Jesus in some instances casts out demons in this manner as well (Mk5:9; Luk8:30). However, this procedure is impossible in the case of a man who is "dumb". This led to the teaching by the Pharisees that the casting out of a "dumb" demon is a miracle that only Messiah will perform (refer to Miracles Unique to Messiah, p. 28).
- [33] This miracle is recognized to be unique, as the "multitudes marveled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel".
- [34] The Pharisees are confronted with a real problem at this point. Their own teaching identifies this miraculous work as a unique, Messianic sign. Jesus' miracle has been seen by the multitude, and the fact of it cannot be refuted. Does this lead the Pharisees to concede that Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah? Unfortunately, NO. Instead, they modify their theology in order to accommodate this new data into their system of unbelief (refer to The Strategy of Unbelief, p. 33). They assert that Jesus has cast out this "dumb" demon "through the prince of the demons" (i.e., Satan). This attributing of the work of God to Satan is *blasphemy*, which will come to a climax in Matthew 12.

JESUS' COMPASSION FOR THE MULTITUDES

- [35] The healing ministry of Jesus validates His office and message.
- [36] However, only the message can save. Jesus' heavy heart is for the multitude who have been attracted to Him because of the healings, but have not repented at His message.
- [37] As a man, Jesus can only be in one place at a time (although in His divine nature He is omnipresent; Cp., Matt18:20); thus, there

is a need for additional laborers in order to reach more of the nation with the message of the gospel of the Kingdom (v35).

- [38] This prayer for more laborers to be sent out is the context for the calling and commissioning of the Twelve (i.e., the Apostles, or "sent ones"), which opens the next chapter.

CHAPTER 10

THE TWELVE APOSTLES CALLED AND COMMISSIONED

- [1] The calling of the Twelve to be "apostles" is in the context of Jesus' own lament for more laborers (Matt9:37-38). An "apostle" is *one who is sent as an official representative of another, and with the power and authority of the one who did the sending*. An "apostle" is to be distinguished from a "disciple", which simply means 'student, pupil, or learner'. As His apostles, Jesus gave the Twelve power to cast out demons and heal all sickness and disease just as He did.
- [2] The apostles are listed in pairs, possibly designating the two-by-two manner in which they were sent out (Mk6:7). In every listing of the apostles throughout the gospels, Peter is always first and Judas is always last. Peter and Andrew are brothers, as are James and John. Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist (Jn1:35,40).
- [3] Bartholomew was also known as Nathanael (Jn1:45-49). Thomas was also known as Didymus (Jn11:16). Matthew is the author of this Gospel, and in humility calls attention to his questionable profession. Thaddæus was also known as Judas, the son of James (Luk6:16; Act1:13).
- [4] Simon the "Canaanite" (KJV) is not an ethnic designation. The word is a transliteration of an Aramaic word which means 'zealous'; it should be rendered "Simon the Zealot". Simon was a member of a Jewish political sect known as the 'Zealots', which was an underground resistance movement that opposed Roman authority over Israel.
- Judas was also an apostle, who exercised the same supernatural powers given to the others (Cp., Matt7:21-23). The designation "Iscaiot" means 'from Kerioth', which was a Judean city; apparently, all the apostles were from Galilee except Judas.
- [5] Jesus forbids the Twelve to go to the Gentiles (or even the Samaritans); this is in contrast to His commission after His resurrection, where He instructs the apostles to go to "all nations" (Matt28:19-20).
- [6] The message at this time is for Israel only. Jesus has come as Messiah to be King of Israel (Luk1:31-33), and it is Israel alone who must receive Him (Cp., Matt15:24). This does not mean the Gentile nations will be left out; rather, the Gentiles are promised to be abundantly blessed through Israel (Gen12:3; Isa60:3; Rom11:13-15).

- [7] The message the Twelve preach throughout Israel is identical to that of John (Matt3:2) and Jesus (Matt4:17), "The kingdom of heaven is at hand".
- [8] As apostles who officially represent the Messiah, and come in His power, the Twelve will work miracles to serve as signs authenticating their message. As Jesus, they are to heal all who come without charge (i.e., a lesson in grace).
- [9] As the apostles go throughout Israel, they are not expected to fund their own ministry.
- [10] They are not even to take the provisions they will need. It is expected that those to whom they minister should provide for their needs (Cp., 1Cor9:7-11).
- [11] Just as Jesus had no home (Matt8:20), the apostles are to reside as guests with those who support their work.
- [13] Vv12-13 promise a blessing on the homes into which the apostles are welcomed and reside (Cp., 2Sam6:11; 2Kgs4:8-37).
- [14] In contrast, a curse is threatened on those who will not receive the apostles.
- [15] Here is the negative side of the doctrine of rewards. Just as not all believers will receive the same reward for their labors, because their labors differ (1Cor3:11-15), not all unbelievers will receive the same punishment. While all unbelievers will be punished for eternity (i.e., the time of punishment is the same for all), their degree of suffering will depend upon the extent of their sin. For Israel not to receive her Messiah and His apostles is a greater sin than that committed by Sodom and Gomorrah (cf., Luk12:47-48).

JESUS PROPHECIES NEGATIVE RESPONSE TO THE APOSTLES

- [16] Jesus is not naïve. He knows the message of the apostles will not be received by Israel at this time, even as His own preaching will be rejected. While the apostles are instructed to be "wise as serpents" (Gen3:1), they were also commanded to be "harmless as doves"; that is, they (i.e., the apostles) are not to attempt to institute the Kingdom of God by force (which is in contrast to the theology of Roman Catholicism).

In vv16-23 (really, through the end of the chapter), Jesus speaks prophetically. The prophecy includes not only this present offer of the Kingdom to Israel by the apostles, but also their second offer (recorded in the Book of Acts) and extends even to the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom by the remnant of Israel during the Tribulation (Matt24:14)—at which time it will finally be received. The Church Age, as a parenthesis in the Kingdom program of God, is not in view in this prophecy.

- [17] This does not occur during the first offer of the Kingdom, but does during the second offer (e.g., Peter, John, James, Stephen, Paul in Book of Acts; note Matt22:4-6).
- [18] For example, this is true of Paul in Acts 24-26.
- [20] This is illustrated in the profound, extemporaneous discourses given by Peter (Acts 2,3), Stephen (Acts 7), and Paul throughout the Book of Acts.
- [21] The message of the gospel (both that of the Kingdom, and later of Grace) is an offence to the unregenerate; the receiving/rejecting of it will even divide families.
- [22] Here the prophecy fast-forwards to the preaching by the remnant during the Tribulation; those who "endureth to the end" of the Tribulation will be "saved", in the sense of being physically rescued/delivered by the personal return of Christ.
- [23] It is in the midst of the world-wide preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom by the remnant during the Tribulation that "the Son of Man" will come to finally institute the Kingdom of God on earth (Dan7:13-14; Matt24:14).

Note that this verse teaches explicitly that the Kingdom of God will not come before Christ returns. The Kingdom is not in existence on earth today (*in contrast to* theology of **Amillennialism**), nor will our labor produce it (*in contrast to* theology of **Postmillennialism/Reconstructionism**).

COMFORT FOR THE LABORERS

- [24] Jesus' prophecy that the labors of the apostles will not be 'successful' requires a message of comfort and encouragement from the "Master" to His "disciples".
- [25] The apostles will not be judged on their 'success' in conversions. "It is enough" (i.e., 'sufficient') that they be found to be "like [their] Master", and "like [their] Lord"; they will be judged according to their faithfulness to their Lord and His message (1Cor4:1-4). Most did not repent at the preaching of the Lord Himself, and most will not repent under the preaching of His disciples. If the Lord is accused of being demon-possessed, they should expect to be also; what they should not expect is to be loved and received by the unregenerate world (Jn15:18-20).
- [26] Though the world will hate and persecute them, they are not to "fear them". In His appointed time God will judge the wicked and reward the faithful according to His perfect justice—it is this eschatological hope that was to sustain the efforts of the apostles then, and ours today, not a promise of success or reward in this present life.
- [27] That is, herald the message of God, else how will others know (Rom10:14-17).

- [28] The most that men or angels can do is kill the body—this is not to be feared by the Lord's disciples. God alone has the power to punish the soul eternally, and He alone is to be feared.
- [29] God is always aware of, cares for, and ordains the time of death of even the "sparrows"; thus, the sovereignty and providence of God over every detail of His creation is emphasized.
- [30] Similarly, but even more so, there is no detail regarding His children of which the Father is not intimately aware.
- [31] This is yet another argument from the lesser to the greater; what is true of the sparrows is true infinitely more so for the Lord's disciples, who are the Father's children.
- [32] Those who know the sovereign Lord, therefore, are obligated to testify (i.e., witness) of Him before men; faithfulness to this obligation will bring reward (1Cor4:1-2; 3:11-14; 9:24-25).
- [33] Unfaithfulness to this obligation will bring loss (1Cor3:15; 9:27).
- [35] The Messiah's coming, and His proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom, is an offence to the unregenerate, just as the proclamation of the gospel of grace will be (1Cor1:18-25; Gal5:11); both inherently cause division and conflict.
- [37] The spiritual bond far surpasses natural, even family bonds (cf., Matt12:47-50). The believer has vastly more in common with another believer than he does with an unbelieving relative, even a father, mother, son or daughter. It is for this reason that a believer is commanded to never marry, or enter into any close relationship with, an unbeliever (1Cor7:39; 2Cor6:14-17).
- [38] In the Roman empire, convicted criminals were required to carry their own cross to their place of execution, thus signifying that in the end they have submitted to that power against which they formerly rebelled. So a disciple of Jesus Christ must submit to Him. The call to follow Jesus is a call to personally take up a "cross". As the cross is an instrument of death, the disciple of Jesus Christ must die to self.
- [39] Remarkably, this is the most-repeated verse of the New Testament (Matt10:39; 16:25; Mk8:35; Luk9:24; 17:33; Jn12:25).
- [42] The words used in vv40-42 to describe the standard of judgment to be applied regarding the reception of the Lord's disciples point us clearly to the "Sheep and Goat" judgment that takes place at the Lord's return (Matt25:31-46; note v), the purpose of which is the selection of those who will enter the Kingdom (Matt25:34).

CHAPTER 11

JESUS EULOGIZES JOHN THE BAPTIST

- [1] Following the calling and commissioning of the Twelve, they were sent out in pairs (Mk6:7) and Jesus went separately "to teach and to preach".
- [2] Matthew has previously mentioned that John had been cast into prison (Matt4:12), later explaining that John's imprisonment was because he had preached against Herod's unlawful relationship with his brother's wife (Matt14:3).
- [3] Some see here a wavering of John's faith; he, the herald of the Messiah, is in prison, and the nation is on the verge of formally rejecting the Messiah; this was not how John expected the scenario to unfold. John sends two of his disciples to Jesus to ask, "Art Thou He that should come?" (i.e., are you the Messiah?).

There is actually much more here than the superficial question of John and response by Jesus. John and Jesus are both Rabbis with comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures, and this interchange includes a subtle communication. John's question is an allusion to the coming of Messiah as recorded in Zechariah 9:9. By alluding to this Scripture, John expects that Jesus will know that in this Messianic passage it is prophesied that Messiah will "set forth Thy prisoners" (Zech9:11). Thus, included in John's superficial question to Jesus is also, "Are you going to get me released from prison?"

- [4] Rather than just saying "Yes", Jesus instructs John's disciples to remind him that He is daily performing all the works prophesied of the Messiah. Thus, Jesus answers "Yes" in the most powerful of ways.
- [5] Jesus' response includes His own allusion to Scripture which He expects John will know (Isa35:5-6; 42:7; 61:1-2). The OT verses to which Jesus alludes include as a work of Messiah that He will "bring out the prisoners from prison" (Isa42:7). However, Jesus' paraphrased list in this verse make no mention of this work; thus, John will understand Jesus' response to be, "No, you will not be released from prison".
- [6] Jesus ends with an exhortation, meant directly for John, that he keep his faith in Jesus as Messiah, even while knowing that it is not God's will for Him to deliver John from his present persecution (Cp., Matt13:21). This exhortation from the Lord applies to every believer (Jn15:20; 2Tim3:12).
- [7] With John's end in prison certain, Jesus eulogizes John in advance of his death. Jesus asks the multitudes, which had gone into the wilderness to hear his preaching, what they had traveled so far to see? "A reed shaken with the wind" refers to something weak and vacillating, easily moved or broken (Eph4:14-15); this was not John.

- [8] Furthermore, John did not profit materially from his teaching and prophetic ministry, as did the present Jewish leadership (especially the priests). In fact, his message brought him persecution, not prosperity.
- [9] All would have confessed John a prophet. Jesus asserts that John was "more than a prophet".
- [10] John was the prophet sent by God to herald the arrival of Messiah. In fact, John's own coming as the Messianic herald was the subject of prophecy, to which Jesus points by quoting Malachi 3:1.
- [11] Here Jesus testifies that John was the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets, since it was his privilege to announce the arrival of King Messiah! Notwithstanding, a greater privilege yet is extended to all who would actually enter the Kingdom of Messiah. John's prophetic ministry ended with rejection and martyrdom; every believer in the Kingdom will rule and reign with Messiah (Rev20:6), and thus be *positionally* greater than John.
- [12] Note that the period of time in view is from John's announcement that, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt3:2), to that present moment. The nation of Israel, especially its leadership, is preventing the inauguration of "the Kingdom of Heaven" by resisting the King (i.e., Jesus). The phrase, "the violent take it by force" has the idea of 'taking it *for themselves*', or 'resisting it [as offered by Jesus] by means of force'.
- [13] John's prophetic ministry, in effect, closes Old Testament revelation. The climactic message of "all the prophets and the law" was the coming of Messiah (Deut18:18-19; Dan9:24-25), Who would fulfill the Law (Matt5:17).
- [14] The meaning here is that John 'could have been' Elijah, who is prophesied to come before Messiah (Mal4:5), in the sense that, if the nation had received John and repented at his message, he would have accomplished the ministry of restoration that is the purpose of Elijah's return (Mal4:6). However, John and his message were not received, so the return of Elijah to fulfill this ministry of reconciliation is still expected prior to the Second Coming of Messiah (Cp., Act3:21).
- [15] Those who "hear" the message are obligated to "hear" it, in the sense of 'hearken' or 'obey' (Cp., Rev2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; note Luk12:47-48).
- [16] Jesus compares the present generation of Israel with children who cannot be satisfied, no matter what they are given.
- [17] Even if exact opposites are offered, both are rejected. John and Jesus were very different in their persons and behavior (though their messages were identical; Cp., Matt3:2; 4:17), but the people have rejected both.
- [18] John and his disciples, according to the tradition of the Pharisees, fasted regularly (Matt9:14). Furthermore, as one under the vow of a Nazirite from his very conception (Luk1:15), John

never drank wine (Num6:3-5). Nevertheless, John was condemned as one possessed with a demon.

- [19] Jesus in his person and behavior was the very opposite of John. Jesus totally ignored the traditions of the Pharisees; He and His disciples never fasted (except as the Law required, which was only on the Day of Atonement), they drank wine, and they associated with "tax collectors and sinners". None of these behaviors were forbidden by the Law, but Jesus was, nevertheless, no more accepted by the people than was John.

JESUS CONDEMNS GALILEAN CITIES FOR REFUSAL TO REPENT

- [20] The official, national rejection of Jesus as Messiah will come in Matthew 12. However, the tide has already begun to turn. Jesus pronounces a coming judgment on the cities that have seen His "mighty works" and refused to "repent".
- [21] Chorazin and Bethsaida are two of the prominent cities on the Sea of Galilee that have been blessed to witness most of the "mighty works" of Jesus. As such, their degree of responsibility is great (Luk12:47-48). There is no question regarding the authenticity or power of the works to convict, for if the pagan Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon had been blessed to see them, the sovereign and omniscient Lord Jesus says that they would have repented.
- [22] As believers will not all be rewarded equally, so not all unbelievers will be punished equally. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luk12:48).
- [23] Similarly for the Galilean city of Capernaum, a city in which Jesus personally dwelt (Matt4:13). Had the wicked, Canaanite city of Sodom been blessed to see the same works of Messiah that Capernaum had, it would have repented, which would have stayed the judgment of destruction it received.
- [24] Because of its position of greater privilege, in "the day of judgment" Capernaum will be condemned more harshly than Sodom.

God's grace is never obligatory, neither its offer nor the duration of the offer. The sobering truth underscored in this passage is that God does not extend His offer of grace to nations, cities, or individuals indefinitely. Nor do all receive the same degree of revelation from Him, although all receive sufficient revelation (Rom1:18-20). For this reason Scripture exhorts us to never delay in responding to God (Isa49:8; 2Cor6:2).

JESUS OFFERS PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

- [25] As the nation of Israel as a whole becomes more fixed in its rejection of Jesus as Messiah, His ministry and message begins to turn toward the individual. Though the nation will reject Messiah, resulting in judgment on the nation and a postponement of the Kingdom, individuals may still personally repent and accept Messiah.

Recognizing and accepting Jesus as the Son of God is not a matter of intelligence (1Cor1:26-27); it is not intellectual, but moral. A relationship with Christ is readily available for the one who comes with the faith of a "babe", who trusts in the revelation of God, while it is withheld from those who have sought wisdom apart from God's revelation.

- [26] This is within the sovereignty and providence of God (Isa46:9-11; Eph1:5).
- [27] An allusion to the *transcendence* of God, which elaborates on the thought of v25. God, in both the Persons of the Father and Son, as Creator are distinct from the creation. The creature can never know the Creator unless He reveals Himself.
- [28] Thus, independent of how the nation corporately responds, Jesus calls individuals to "come unto Me". Those who "labor and are heavy laden" are Jews who have struggled, and failed, to live under the Law (Rom3:19-20; Gal2:16; 3:11). To those who will come to Him, Jesus promises "I will give you rest"; with this promise, given by Jehovah to His servant Moses (Ex33:14), Jesus asserts His Deity.
- [29] Jesus' call to "learn of [i.e., from] Me" is a call to discipleship. A disciple binding himself to a Jewish rabbi was spoken of idiomatically as being 'yoked' to a Master. Just as a yoke binds two beasts of burden together, when used idiomatically it speaks of two (i.e., the rabbi and the disciple) being intimately bound together, laboring together, for a single purpose.

Jesus' assertion that He is "meek" and "lowly" are Messianic allusions (Num12:3; Deut18:15-18; Zech9:9).

- [30] In responding to the call of Jesus, the disciple is not being asked to exchange one burden for a different but similar burden. The requirements of the Law were impossibly hard, but the real frustration was that in the end the Law could offer no rest since it could not ultimately deal with sin (Heb10:1-4); this Messiah will accomplish for His people (Heb10:5-18), and offer it to them on the condition of faith alone (Heb10:38). The yoke of the Law was indeed 'hard' and its burden 'heavy', but Messiah's yoke is "easy" and His burden "light".

CHAPTER 12

CONTROVERSIES OVER THE SABBATH

- [1] Akin to gleaning, the Law permitted travelers to pluck what grain they needed for a personal meal from a field on their way (Deut23:25).
- [2] The tradition of the Pharisees held that "plucking wheat from its stem is reaping, rubbing the wheat heads between one's palms is threshing, and blowing away the chaff is winnowing"; thus, by

doing this on the Sabbath, the Lord and His disciples had violated the Law (20:8-11), *according to the interpretation of the Pharisees.*

- [3] Jesus' response to the Pharisees begins with calling their attention to an illustration from the life of King David, whom they honored.
- [4] When in dire need of food for himself and his men, David ate showbread from the Tabernacle (1Sam21:1-6), which the Law reserved for priests alone (Lev24:9).

Did David break the Law in doing this? It depends on how one prioritizes the commandments within the Law, which was a raging debate between the two rabbinical schools of the day (Hillel and Shammai). Even the Pharisees recognized that situations arise in which one cannot simultaneously keep all the commandments; thus, in such cases one had to know within the Law which commandments were 'more important' than others. As will be seen subsequently (vv11-12; but especially in Matt22:39), Jesus' prioritization of the commandments was such that David did not break the Law by his action.

Typology of King David. Jesus' allusion to this event in the life of David likely has great typological significance in the present context. The event took place after David had been anointed and presented, *but rejected*, as King. The leadership of Israel (i.e., Saul) was persecuting him, and would eventually attempt to find a way to kill him. The pattern (i.e., type) is that the King is always rejected by the nation at the first offer, but accepted at the second. Stephen points out that this pattern was true for Joseph, Moses, and David (Acts 7). Thus, as the antitype, Jesus will be rejected as King by Israel at His first coming, but accepted at His second coming.

- [5] Jesus uses a second illustration from Scripture to highlight the error of the Pharisees' traditional interpretation of Sabbath Laws; that being the activities of the priests performed in the Temple on the Sabbath, mandated by the Law (e.g., Num28:9-10,18-19), which would be considered violations of the Law *according to the interpretation of the Pharisees.*
- [6] The real issue is one of authority to interpret. Jesus', "But I say unto you" asserts His authority as the Lawgiver. By authorizing His disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath, Jesus has provided the divine interpretation of the 4th commandment.
- [7] Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 for the second time in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt9:13); mere external compliance to the Law, apart from a heart which desires to show mercy, does not please God because it does not meet His standard of righteousness (Ps51:16-17).

- [8] The heart of this issue is "the Son of Man is Lord". That is, Jesus is Jehovah God, Who is in His Person the very standard of holiness and righteousness. What Jesus does is righteous, **by definition**, for the Person of God can be nothing other than righteous. (Remember, 'righteousness' is not an attribute that exists independent of God, to which God can be 'objectively' compared; God in His Person and character *defines* the attribute of righteousness).
- [9] Jesus always attended synagogue on the Sabbath (Luk4:16).
- [10] Knowing that Jesus would come to synagogue, and knowing that He always healed whenever there was a need (Matt9:35), this man with a withered hand was undoubtedly planted by the Pharisees in order to create a situation in which "they might accuse him".
- [11] Here Jesus alludes to the implicit need for prioritization of commandments within the Law. Even the Pharisees recognize that helping an animal ought to be permissible on the Sabbath.
- [12] (Another of Matthew's arguments from the lesser to the greater). Thus, "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath days". That is, prioritization of commandments within the Law should not put ceremonial requirements above doing "good".
- [13] To validate His teaching, Jesus heals the man, in the synagogue, in the presence of many witnesses, on the Sabbath.
- [14] The signs and miracles being performed by Jesus indisputably validate His claim to be Messiah. Since in hardened unbelief the Pharisees are not willing to accept Jesus as Messiah, they must get rid of Him—thus, they begin plotting to kill Him.

THE HEALINGS CONTINUE

- [15] Not yet wanting to elevate the confrontation with the Pharisees to a point of crisis, Jesus withdraws. However, multitudes follow Him because of His fame as a healer, and "He healed them all".
- [16] Those following Jesus are doing so for the healings alone—they have not accepted His gospel of the Kingdom which the healings validate. Jesus does not want the message of the miracles alone to be spread. He does not want to instigate a popular uprising centered on Jesus the Healer.
- [17] Matthew asserts that this response of Jesus is a fulfillment of prophecy. Verses 18-21 are a quotation of Isaiah 42:1-4.
- [18] In the Isaiah text, the pronoun "My" refers to Jehovah. Jehovah says that Messiah is His servant, His elect, His beloved (i.e., Son), in whom He is well pleased, and on whom He will put His Spirit; these were all visibly and audibly confirmed publicly to Israel at Jesus' Baptism (Matt3:16-17). If Messiah is rejected by Israel, He will turn to His program with **the Gentiles**.

- [20] The point of the quoted prophecy of Isaiah is that Messiah will not force Himself as King and Kingdom upon Israel at this time; His offer must be voluntarily accepted by the nation.
- [21] This verse is Matthew's summary conclusion of the quoted Isaiah passage. It is laden with irony; whereas the nation of Israel is going to reject their own prophesied Jewish Messiah and His kingdom offer, He will be accepted by the Gentiles.

CASTING OUT OF ANOTHER DUMB DEMON
(AN INDISPUTABLE MESSIANIC SIGN)

- [22] Though Jesus had cast out a demon from a dumb man at least once before (Matt9:32-34), on this occasion it precipitates a crisis because of the large crowds and their comprehension of its implications, since it was a well-know teaching of the Pharisees that this miracle was an indisputable Messianic sign (see Miracles Unique to Messiah, p. 28).
- [23] In light of the teaching of the Pharisees, the multitude that has witnessed the casting out of a dumb demon by Jesus as the natural question, "Is not this the son of David?" Here, "son of David" is reference to King Messiah promised to Israel in the Davidic covenant (2Sam7:12-16; Ps89:18-37).

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN: ISRAEL REJECTS THE MESSIAH

- [24] The Pharisees now have a problem. The multitudes are on the verge of concluding that Jesus is the Messiah. Since they have previously taught that only Messiah will cast out a dumb demon, they must either agree that Jesus is Messiah or offer an alternative explanation of the miracle.

Their alternative explanation is that Jesus is not Messiah, but He had been empowered to perform this unique miracle by "Beelzebub, the prince of the demons". Historically, "Beelzebub" was the name of a Canaanite god who was chief of the demons, but had come to be used by Jews as a synonym for Satan.

- [25] Jesus responds by logically evaluating the explanation of the Pharisees.
- [26] It makes no sense that Satan would empower Jesus to do damage to his own (i.e., Satan's) kingdom.
- [27] The Pharisees themselves perform exorcisms, and they attribute the power to do so to the Spirit of God, not Beelzebub.
- [28] The natural explanation for Jesus' ability to defeat Satan's kingdom is that He does so by the power of the Spirit of God; thus, the conclusion that Jesus is King Messiah come offering the Kingdom to Israel is the logical conclusion.
- [29] The "strong man" is Satan, and the "strong man's house" is the world in general, Israel in particular. Messiah, in order to

inaugurate His reign as King, must first throw out the usurper, Satan (Jn12:31). Jesus' miraculous work is consistent with the purpose of God, not the purpose of Satan. The Pharisees' alternative explanation does not logically follow.

- [30] A critical decision has been precipitated. The nation must choose between the only two possible explanations for the works of Jesus: 1) He does them by the power of Satan, and thus He is a false prophet and not the Messiah, or 2) He does them by the power of the Holy Spirit of God, establishing unequivocally He is the Messiah. A choice must be made, and a refusal to choose for Jesus as Messiah is equivalent to choosing against Jesus as Messiah.
- [31] For the nation at this point to choose to accept the Pharisees' explanation and attribute Jesus' works by the power of the Spirit of God to Satan is to commit the unique sin of "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit".

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a national sin, not a personal sin. Whereas individuals from this generation may repent and believe on Jesus as Messiah (as many will do), this will only result in *personal* salvation; national repentance for this sin is not possible.

The so-called 'unpardonable sin' of "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" was a national sin committed by Israel at a specific time and in a specific context, both of which no longer exist. **It is not a sin that can be committed by an individual today.** Rather, today "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men".

- [32] With the commission of this national sin, the Messiah's offer of the Kingdom has been officially rejected. The national sin of this generation will not be forgiven, and the nation will be surely judged (see Luk19:41-44). Thus, the Kingdom is postponed; it will not come in "this age" (i.e., to this generation), nor in "the age to come" (i.e., the Kingdom is deferred until after the Church Age).
- [33] This figure teaches that the nature of men determines their decisions. Good men (i.e., regenerated men) must make "good" choices, and corrupt men (i.e., unregenerate men) must make "corrupt" choices. For this reason John, Jesus, and the apostles all preached that the first step in making the nation ready for the arrival of the King and His Kingdom must be the personal repentance of individuals leading to regeneration. Only a nation of regenerated Jews will accept Messiah as King.
- [34] Jesus calls the nation a "generation of vipers" (i.e., serpents). Ironically, rather than Jesus being empowered by the Serpent, Satan, it is actually the nation of Israel that is under demonic influence.
- [35] The only solution is regeneration. Since men always choose according to their natures, it is their natures that must be changed (Eph2:1-10).

- [36] Since the words men speak are a resultant fruit of their natures, they will be a suitable basis for condemnation in "the day of judgment" (Rev20:11-15).
- [37] For believers, the sin of careless words has been paid through the death of Christ so that there will be no condemnation (Rom8:1); nevertheless, even the careless words of believers, unconfessed and unforgiven (1Jn1:9), can result in the loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1Cor3:12-15; 2Cor5:10).

THE SIGN OF RESURRECTION

- [38] For the Pharisees to demand of Jesus a "sign" at this point is nothing more than a raw affirmation of their **hardened unbelief**. According to their own theological teaching and professed convictions, *Messiah alone*, when He comes, will cleanse the leper, give sight to the one born blind, and cast out dumb demons (see Miracles Unique to Messiah, p. 28); in the very presence of the Pharisees, Jesus had performed all of these miraculous, messianic signs (and more). To ask for 'another' sign is ridiculous, for Jesus has already performed the very signs the Pharisees previously affirmed would be definitive evidence.

Unbelief's Demand for Proof. Analogous to the Pharisees' demand for a "sign" is the daily encounter in our contemporary culture with professed skeptics who continually demand 'more' proof (e.g., for the existence of God, for the truth of the Bible, etc.). For centuries Christian apologists have attempted to provide one proof after another, all of which are rejected by the unbeliever as 'unconvincing'. Scripture clearly teaches, however, that the existence of the God of the Bible and His power are "clearly seen" by all men, who are "without excuse" when they deny this (Rom1:20). Rather than a never-ending exercise in "answer[ing] a fool according to his folly" (Prov26:4) by capitulating to his demand for one proof after another, it is better to transfer the burden of the argument onto the skeptic, and bring to light his heart of unbelief, by demanding of him an answer to the question, "What proof/evidence are you prepared to accept?". The answer is that the natural man is not prepared to accept any proof, even a totally valid one.

- [39] Jesus says that only one additional "sign" will be given, "the sign of the prophet Jonah".
- [40] The sign of the prophet Jonah is **resurrection after three days** (Jon1:17). This sign will be given to this generation who will see the resurrection of Christ after three days, and to the Tribulation generation who will see the resurrection of the two witnesses after three days (Rev11:3-13).
- [41] Refusal to repent after this final sign will bring tremendous condemnation to the nation of Israel. If Nineveh, a *Gentile*

nation, repented at the preaching of Jonah (Jon3:5-10), how much more should Israel repent at the preaching of her own Messiah.

- [42] If "the queen of the south", a queen of the *Gentile* nation of Sheba, acknowledged the blessing and wisdom Solomon had received was from God (2Chron9:1-12), how much more should Israel confess that the power of her own Messiah comes from God.

REFORMATION INSUFFICIENT, REGENERATION NECESSARY

- [43] In concluding his discourse with the Pharisees, Christ likens Israel to a "man" from which an "unclean spirit" has been cast out. Israel's history was one of idolatry, until God's discipline on the nation in the Babylonian captivity.
- [44] At His coming, Christ found the nation "empty, swept, and garnished"; they had ceased worshiping false gods, and were garnished with a human righteousness that comes from external law-keeping (Cp., Matt5:20-48). However, they had not embraced worship of the true God.
- [45] Such a spiritual vacuum is a dangerous condition. Failure to fill the man from whom the unclean spirit departed with the Spirit of God allows the unclean spirit to return. And "the last state of that man is worse than the first"; this likely refers to the return of the nation of Israel to the ultimate form of idolatry during the coming Tribulation, that is worship of the Antichrist (Jn5:43; Rev13:11-18).

By way of application to us, the lesson is that the fleshly work of reformation by the natural man is insufficient. As Jesus instructed the Pharisee Nicodemus, regeneration is necessary in order to inherit the Kingdom (Jn3:1-7).

REGENERATION GIVES RISE TO NEW RELATIONSHIPS

- [46] At this point, Jesus' brothers (James, Joseph, Simon and Judas; Matt13:55) are not believers (Jn7:5).
- [47] Here, Jesus' brothers desiring access to Him present a picture of the nation of Israel, His "kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom9:3).

Roman Catholicism's View of Mary. The Roman Church's view of Mary is not Biblical, seen here in two aspects: 1) Mary has no special access to Jesus, and 2) Mary did not remain a perpetual virgin, but had normal marital relations with Joseph after the birth of Jesus, resulting in both sons and daughters.

- [50] With the rejection of Jesus as King Messiah by the nation of Israel, unregenerate Jews have no relationship with, or access to, Christ. Relationship with Christ will not be reckoned according to the flesh, but according to faith (Jn1:11-13).

IMPORTANT TURNING POINT: Chapter 12 represents a turning point in the Gospel of Matthew. Until this point, Jesus and His apostles have been appealing to the nation of Israel to repent and believe "the gospel of the Kingdom". Now, the leadership has led the nation to officially reject Jesus as King Messiah. Whereas Israel enjoyed a privileged position relative to the offer of the Kingdom, their rejection of Jesus has changed this. Hereafter, Jesus' teaching method, audience, and subject matter will change as He prepares His disciples for His coming death and the Church Age that will intervene prior to His return.

CHAPTER 13

THE KINGDOM PARABLES

- [1] On "the same day" refers to the very day of Israel's official national rejection of Jesus as Messiah (Matt12). Jesus' actions appear to be very symbolic; He went out of the "house" (just used figuratively of Israel; Matt12:44) and "sat" (i.e., to teach) by the "sea" (widely used figuratively for the Gentile nations; e.g., Dan7:2; Rev13:1; 17:1). Jesus' ministry, which heretofore has been to Israel alone (Matt10:5-6), has now broadened to specifically include the Gentiles.

PARABLE OF THE FOUR SOILS

- [3] The first parable given regards a "sower [who] went forth to sow". Note that in each case, the same sower (i.e., farmer) sows the same seed indiscriminately; the difference is the type of soil and the fruit produced in it. This parable will be interpreted by the Lord in vv18-23.
- [4] The seed that falls on the "wayside" (i.e., hardened pathway) is "devoured" by "fowls" and produces no fruit. The activity of the fowls in this parable indicates that an intelligent, external force is working to destroy the efforts of the farmer.
- [5] The seed sown on "stony places" results in an immediate response.
- [6] However, the initial response cannot be sustained and produces no fruit.
- [7] The seed sown among "thorns" is "choked" and produces no fruit.
- [8] Some seed, however, falls on "good ground" which produces **fruit**, although not all soils even of "good ground" produce the same quantity of fruit.
- [9] The one "who hath ears to hear" (i.e., the believer illuminated by the Holy Spirit; 1 Cor2:12-14) is expected to "hear" (i.e., understand) the Lord's teaching in this parable.

This same phrase which emphasizes the importance of understanding these parables is also used by the Lord Jesus Christ in His letters to the 7 churches in Asia (Rev2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22),

suggesting the 7 Kingdom Parables of Matthew 13 and the 7 Letters to the Churches of Revelation 2-3 are linked (i.e., they both treat prophetically the course of the Church Age).

EXPLANATION OF THE PARABLE

- [10] The disciples note that Jesus' method of teaching before the multitudes has changed; He now teaches "in parables".
- [11] Parables, rather than making spiritual truth 'easier' to understand, actually serve the opposite purpose; parables cannot be understood by the unregenerate, but only by those illuminated by the Holy Spirit (1Cor2:14). Thus, the truth Jesus reveals in parables "is given unto you [i.e., the disciples] to know", "but to them [i.e., unbelievers] it is not given".

Considerable misunderstanding has resulted from the expression "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven". Jesus' teaching in the Kingdom Parables of Matthew 13 concern a *mystery form* of the Kingdom. As used in the New Testament, a **mystery** denotes a truth that can only be known by revelation, but which was not revealed in the Old Testament—it is revelation unique to the New Testament (Cp., Rom16:25-26; Eph3:3-4). It is not the coming Messianic Kingdom of righteousness on earth that is here designated a mystery, as that Kingdom was a grand subject of extensive revelation given in the Old Testament. What was not explicitly revealed in the Old Testament was the postponement of the Kingdom, which gives rise to an inter-advent age, during which Christ "will build [His] Church" (Matt16:18). The parables of Matthew 13 regarding the "mystery of the Kingdom of heaven" describe the prophetic course of this inter-advent age.

- [12] To the one who has accepted and believed the revelation given by God, more light will be given. To him who has rejected what God has already given, no more light will be offered; in fact, even what he was previously given will become unclear. Light rejected is followed by darkness, not additional light (Cp. Jn3:19-21). Thus, the Lord's teaching by way of parables is at the same time a blessing for the believer and a judgment on the unbeliever.
- [13] From this point forward, Jesus will address the unbelieving multitudes only in parables.
- [14] Matthew says this is a fulfillment of Isaiah 6:9-10 (literal *plus* an application; see Review of 4 Categories of Prophecy, p. 10).
- [15] Just as God instructed Isaiah beforehand that his message would not be received by the nation, the same is true of Christ.
- [16] But the Lord's disciples (i.e., believers) can and will understand the parables.
- [17] And by understanding the Lord's parables, believers receive additional revelation from God regarding His Kingdom program, revelation that the Old Testament saints did not have.

- [18] Jesus expects His disciples to understand the parable. For this parable, and the parable of the tares among the wheat, the Lord provides the interpretation, which is to serve as the basis for our understanding of the five parables not interpreted.
- [19] Verses 19-23 give the Lord's interpretation of the parable of the four soils (vv3-8). The seed sown is "the word of the kingdom". The sower of the good seed is revealed in the next parable to be "the Son of man" (v37). The four soils represent the "heart" of individuals who hear the word. The fowls who devour the seed are "the wicked one" (i.e., Satan and his ministers).
- The seed sown on the "wayside" represents people with a hardened heart of unbelief; Satan and his ministers easily blind them to the truth of the word (2Cor4:3-4).
- [20] The seed sown in "stony places" represents people who initially respond to the word.
- [21] However, the response is superficial. With little soil (mostly stones), there can be no root. When "tribulation and persecution" come (Jn16:33; 2Tim3:12), it is revealed that their response was not genuine.
- [22] The seed sown among the "thorns" likewise represents hearers who initially respond to the word. In this case, however, it is not persecution that reveals their response to be disingenuous, but "the care of this world" and "the deceitfulness of riches" (i.e., worldliness and materialism; 1Jn2:15; Matt6:24).
- [23] The seed sown in the "good ground" represents those who hear, understand, and receive the word. Their response is seen to be genuine in that it "beareth fruit". However, note that not all genuine believers produce the same quantity of fruit.

Summary of the Parable of the Four Soils. This parable teaches that during the course of this age the Lord Jesus Christ will work (though his Church; Matt16:18) to preach the gospel indiscriminately to "every creature" (Mk16:15). Though the gospel message be identical, it will be received differently by different individuals; the **world**, the **flesh**, and the **Devil** will be forces that work against individuals receiving the word. The majority of individuals will not genuinely believe (Cp., Matt7:14).

PARABLE OF TARES AMONG THE WHEAT

- [24] The second parable also involves the sowing of seed. The man who sowed "good seed" in this parable is identical to the sower in the first parable (v3); the seed that this man sows is all "good", but in the first parable the emphasis was on the fact that not all hearers receive the "good seed".
- [25] The emphasis of this parable is that simultaneously with the sowing of the "good seed", an enemy actively works to sow a corrupt seed which produces "tares" rather than "wheat".

- [26] This counter sowing of a corrupt seed is so subtle that it is not recognized at first, but after the seed sprouts and growth progresses the differences begin to become apparent.
- [27] There is no problem with the seed sown by the "householder"; the seed he sowed was indeed "good".
- [28] The tares are the result of the enemy's sowing of a corrupt seed.
- [29] However, attempting to separate the tares from the wheat at this stage of growth, after they have already become intimately mixed, would result in damage to some of the wheat. The "tare" used in the illustration here is widely regarded to be the *darnel*, a weed grass that looks remarkably similar to wheat in early stages of growth, but which produces a kernel much smaller than wheat that is of little or no nutritional value.
- [30] For the sake of preventing damage to the wheat, resulting in the loss of some of it, the separation of the tares from the wheat is best deferred until harvest time; the differences in the mature kernels produced by the wheat versus the tares are so different that distinguishing between the two is straightforward at this time and their separation can be reliably accomplished.

The Lord provides the interpretation of this parable for His disciples in vv36-43.

PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

- [31] The third parable involves yet another instance of a "man" sowing "seed" in his "field". To be consistent with the divine interpretation supplied by the Lord for the parables of the four soils and the tares among the wheat, we must conclude that the "man" is again the Son of man and His servants (v37), the "field" is the world (v38), and the sowing of seed is the preaching of the word of God (Mk4:14). In this parable, the seed sown is likened to a "mustard seed".
- [32] The "mustard seed" is "the least of all seeds". The mustard plant is common in Israel. Under normal conditions, it grows to be a small bush no more than a few feet in height; its limbs are too insubstantial to support the weight of a bird, much less the nesting of many in it.

The idea of the parable is that the mystery form of "the kingdom of heaven" during the inter-advent age will grow to take on uncharacteristically and unnaturally large outer proportions, so broad that it even gives sanctuary to the "birds of the air" which are the ministers of Satan (vv4,19; 2Cor11:13-15; Eph2:2). Thus, the enemies of Christ, the gospel of grace, and the Kingdom program of God will be found within the very structure that purports to believe (i.e., Christendom). This is consistent with the teaching in the NT epistles that the visible church at the end of the age will be apostate (2Thess2:3; 1Tim4:1; 2Tim3:1-5; 2Pet3:3-7; Jude).

PARABLE OF THE WOMAN AND THE LEAVEN

- [33] The fourth parable largely involves figures not included in any of the other Kingdom parables, including those the Lord interpreted; nevertheless, they are figures easily understood. First, "leaven" is *always* used as a type of sin in the Bible (Ex12:15; 1Cor5:6-7), and Jesus speaks of it figuratively as the false "doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees". Second, "three measures of meal" is the fellowship offering which Abraham prepared for the LORD (Gen18:6), which had to be unleavened (Lev2:11). The woman who "hid" leaven in the fellowship offering indicates that during this age false doctrine will be subtly introduced (cf. Gal2:4; 2Pet2:1; Jud4) into the teaching of the word, until the whole of Christendom is apostate. It should be noted that both in Israel and in the Church, authoritative teaching by a "woman" is forbidden (1Cor14:34-36; 1Tim2:12).

INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE OF TARES AMONG THE WHEAT

- [34] Again, after the rejection of Messiah by the nation, Jesus only addressed the multitudes in parables.
- [35] Matthew indicates that the parabolic teaching of Jesus is a fulfillment of messianic prophecy (Ps78:2). Note that the things Jesus is teaching regarding the inter-advent age "have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (i.e., it is a *mystery*, meaning it was not revealed in the Old Testament).
- [36] When meeting privately with His disciples, however, the Lord explains (at least some of) His teaching in parables.
- [37] In vv37-43 Jesus explains the parable of the tares among the wheat. The "man" who sowed the "good seed" is "the Son of man" (i.e., Jesus and His disciples).
- [38] The "field" where the man sowed the good seed is the "world"; that is, the preaching of the word is to be performed indiscriminately to the whole world. The "good seed" produces true believers, while the "tares" produce "children of the wicked one".
- [39] The work of sowing the tares among the good seed is Satanic, performed by the Devil and his ministers. The "harvest" time, when the separation of true believers from professing believers can be straightforwardly accomplished, is the "end of the age". The "reapers" are God's holy "angels" who assemble men for the judgment (Matt24:31).
- [40] The judgment to take place at the end of this present age (which culminates in the return of Christ) will result in the damnation of unbelievers present on earth at that time (Matt25:31-46).
- [41] Consistent with the teaching of John the Baptist, the inauguration of the Kingdom must be preceded by a judgment, as only the righteous will enter.

- [42] The "furnace of fire" is a Jewish idiom for *Gehenna*, the place of eternal judgment.
- [43] Only "then" (i.e., at the end of the age, and after the judgment of God) will the "righteous" enter into "the Kingdom". The Kingdom is not present during the inter-advent age, but comes at the close of it.

PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

- [44] The fifth parable again involves the "man", who is Christ. The peculiar "treasure" is an Old Testament figure for the elect from Israel (Ps135:4), and the "field" as before is the world. This parable teaches that Christ will sell "all that he hath" (i.e., die) to purchase the whole world (Jn3:16; 1Jn2:2) in order that He might redeem the Jewish elect (1Pet1:18-19). During this inter-advent age, however, Israel is "hidden", in that the nation has been temporarily set aside (Rom11:1-26).

PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

- [45] The sixth parable is similar to the fifth, but the object of Christ's redemptive work is different. The merchant "man" is again Christ. In the parable Christ seeks and finds a "pearl of great price". Oysters were levitically unclean, so pearls were not valued by Jews. The figure of a "pearl", thus, has a Gentile connotation. During this present age, Christ is specifically seeking out from the Gentiles "a people for His name" (Act15:14).
- [46] Again, Christ sells all that He has (i.e., dies) to redeem the Gentile elect (Act20:28).

Note. Neither the "hidden treasure" nor the "pearl of great price" is the Church, but represent the Jewish and Gentile elect, which during the present age are united as one in the Body of Christ, the Church (Eph2:11-16; 3:3-10); both are the special objects of Christ's work of redemption.

PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET

- [47] The seventh and final parable speaks of the judgment to come at the end of this present age. The Kingdom program of God (i.e., Christendom) during this age sweeps into "every kind", a mixed multitude including those who are true believers as well as those who affiliate themselves with the people and program of God, but are not believers (Matt7:21-23).
- [48] When the net is "full", all the elect of God from this present age, both Gentile and Jew, have been saved (Rom11:25-26). At this time Christ will return and institute His Kingdom. However, since only the righteous will enter, a judgment is necessary to separate the "good" from the "bad".

- [49] This judgment which precedes the institution of the Kingdom will take place at "the end of the age".
- [50] Again, the "furnace of fire" is a Jewish idiom for *Gehenna*, the place of eternal judgment.
- [51] The Lord's disciples "understood" His teaching in the Kingdom parables. In them, Jesus employed figures and idioms common from the Old Testament, which would have been recognized by devout men familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures. They can be understood by us as well, if we study them with that Old Testament context in mind.

Summary of the Kingdom Parables. The Kingdom parables give a prophetic panorama of the course of the Inter-Advent (i.e., Church) Age, during which the King is absent, the Kingdom is postponed, the nation of Israel is set aside, and God is "[visiting] the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name" (Act15:14). According to Pentecost, "We may summarize the teaching as to the course of the age by saying: 1) there will be a sowing of the Word throughout the age, which 2) will be imitated by a false counter-sowing; 3) the kingdom will assume huge outer proportions, but 4) be marked by inner doctrinal corruption; yet, the Lord will gain for Himself 5) a peculiar treasure from among Israel, and 6) from the church; 7) the age will end in judgment with the unrighteous excluded from the kingdom to be inaugurated and the righteous taken in to enjoy the blessing of Messiah's reign."

THE HOUSEHOLDER

- [52] Whether the "householder" is an eighth parable or simply a conclusion has been debated; the latter seems to be better. The point here seems to be that Christ, in His Kingdom teaching, "bringeth forth out of His treasure things new and old". That is, some of what He has taught is "old"; certainly, that there was to come with Messiah a righteous kingdom, preceded by judgment, was known from the Old Testament. However, much of what He has taught is "new", in the sense that the full understanding that the Messiah would be rejected by Israel, His Kingdom postponed, and an inter-advent age inserted during which good and evil coexist within the Kingdom program of God, was not revealed in the Old Testament.

JESUS' LAST VISIT TO NAZARETH

- [54] Jesus returns to Nazareth, the city where He was raised and where His family still lives. Remember, He had opened His public ministry in Nazareth (Luk4:16-30) and was not received.

Upon returning to Nazareth, He attends the same synagogue He has attended for the better part of 30 years. The people are "astonished" at His teaching because of the "wisdom" it reveals.

- [55] Yet, knowing that Jesus has never studied under a rabbi (Jn7:14-15), they cannot bring themselves to acknowledge His authority. Jesus' four brothers (i.e., children of Joseph and Mary born after Jesus) are mentioned by name, and even they do not accept Him and His teaching (Jn7:5); Jesus also had at least two sisters, whose names are not given (v56).
- [56] Where did Jesus learn the Scriptures? As a man, Jesus was not born automatically knowing the Bible; His comprehensive knowledge of Scripture came from personal study—not at the feet of a rabbi, but directly from God the Father Who taught Him every morning (Isa50:4).
- [57] That one they knew so well, who had no worldly credentials, would teach them from personal authority (Matt7:28-29) offended them. This gave rise to Jesus' familiar statement which has become a proverb even in the modern western world—a prophet's own family and own hometown are generally that last accord him the honor he deserves.
- [58] Because of their unbelief, Jesus "did not many mighty works" in Nazareth. To those who reject the light, additional light is withheld (Matt13:12).

CHAPTER 14

THE MINISTRY OF THE REJECTED KING BEGINS

- [1] The fame of Jesus has become so wide that it has even come to the attention of Herod, tetrarch over Galilee. This is Herod Antipas, son of the late King Herod the Great (who had slaughtered the babes of Bethlehem 30 years before). This is the Herod that Pilate will recognize as having jurisdiction over Jesus as one of his subjects (Luk23:6-7).

HEROD MURDERED JOHN THE BAPTIST

- [2] Herod fears that this Jesus is his old nemesis, John the Baptist, who he murdered, risen from the dead.
- [3] Herod had imprisoned John for preaching against his personal immorality.
- [4] John condemned Herod for living in sin with Herodias, who was his own niece and the wife of his brother Philip (who was still alive). Herod was estranged from his own wife, the daughter of Aretus, king of Arabia. Thus, Herod's relationship with Herodias is "not lawful" for a number of reasons.
- [5] Herod had wanted to execute John, but refrained from doing so because the Jews recognized him to be a prophet. He was, in fact, the greatest of all the prophets (Matt11:9-11).

- [6] Herodias' daughter, by Herod's brother Philip, was Salome (whose name is not given in the New Testament).
- [7] Because Salome pleased Herod on his birthday, he offered her a royal gift.
- [8] This circumstance had been engineered by her mother, Herodias, who had beforehand instructed Salome to demand the murder of John.
- [9] Herod recognizes the set up too late, and since his offer was made before a multitude of guests present, he cannot relent.
- [11] Thus, Herod has John beheaded, and the head is delivered to Salome and the wicked Herodias (who many have observed to be remarkably similar to the Old Testament "Jezebel").
- [12] The disciples of John, after burying his body, went to inform Jesus of John's death.
- [13] Jesus is sorrowed by the news, although He had already anticipated it (Matt11:2-19). He departs in an attempt to grieve privately, but is followed (as usual) by the multitudes who have brought their sick for healing.
- [14] Because of the Lord's compassionate heart, He heals their sick, even during a time of great personal distress.

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

- [15] Jesus has attempted to flee into the wilderness in order to privately grieve over the news of John's murder. However, the multitude has pursued Him into the desert. The disciples realize that the crowds need to be sent away so that they can get back to their villages in order to eat.
- [16] In reply, Jesus directs His disciples to feed the people. This miracle of the Lord is more about instructing His disciples than it is about feeding hungry people (Mk8:17-21).
- [17] The disciples are astonished at the Lord's command, as they have "but five loaves, and two fishes". In fact, this is the total amount of food available from the entire crowd (Jn6:9).
- [18] "Bring them here to Me". The disciples are being taught to look to the Lord to supply that which is needed.
- [19] Jesus gives thanks to God for the food he has, which is a pattern believers have followed for millennia. After thanks, Jesus gives the bread to the "disciples", who are responsible to feed the "multitude". The miracle that occurs in multiplying the food somehow happens as the disciples distribute the bread among the multitude.
- [20] Though the initial source of bread numbered only 5 loaves, "all" ate and were fully "filled". Afterward, "twelve baskets full" were counted as remaining. The implication is that there was more

bread left after the feeding than before (i.e., there is no limit to the nourishment that God can miraculously supply).

There may be something significant in the numbers associated with this miracle, 5 loaves with 12 baskets of fragments remaining (cf. Mk8:19); precisely what that significance is has stymied Bible students for 2,000 years.

- [21] The "five thousand" fed counted the adult "men" only; including the "women and children" that were present, the crowd may have numbered fifteen to twenty thousand.

Significance of the feeding of the five thousand. The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four gospels. The miracle is performed for the instruction and training of the Lord's disciples. He is teaching them that, after he is gone, their ministry will be one of spiritually feeding people (Jn21:15-17; 1Pet5:1-2). It will be the Lord Himself Who is the source of the spiritual nourishment, but He will feed people *through* His disciples. It will be the responsibility of the disciples to come to Christ for the supply, which is inexhaustible, but then to deliver it to the people.

JESUS WALKS ON WATER

- [22] After the miraculous feeding, Jesus sends His disciples in a boat across the Sea of Galilee while He personally dismisses the crowds. It seems as if the Lord wanted His disciples to be alone in order to ponder the significance of what they have just witnessed.
- [23] The Lord now spends time in personal prayer.
- [24] The disciples, alone in the boat, encounter a storm.
- [25] The "fourth watch of the night" is between 3 and 6 am. By this time the disciples have rowed 25-30 furlongs, or just over 3 miles (Jn6:19). To His disciples who are in the midst of a storm during the darkest part of the night, Jesus comes miraculously "walking on the sea".
- [26] The disciples fear the figure on the water is a ghost.
- [27] The Lord attempts to calm their fears by assuring the disciples that, "it is I, be not afraid".
- [28] Peter, apparently wanting assurance that it is indeed the Lord, challenges Jesus to "bid me come unto Thee on the water".
- [29] The Lord honors Peter's request, and Peter left the boat and "walked on the water" to Jesus.
- [30] But once on the surface of the turbulent water, with the wind buffeting him, Peter's boldness quickly evaporates. Beginning to sink, Peter calls to the Lord, "Lord, save me".

- [31] Immediately the Lord saves Peter, but rebukes him for his "little faith" and his "doubt".
- [32] Once in the boat, "the wind ceased" and presumably the water began to calm down. As with other instances of Jesus exhibiting power over the forces of nature, rather than being a miracle *per se*, this may be the exercise of dominion over the creation by the perfect and unfallen Man (1Cor15:45,47) that was God's original design (Gen1:26).
- [33] In response, the disciples "worshiped" the Lord, acknowledging His Deity, and confess that "of a truth, Thou art the Son of God", acknowledging He is the Messiah (Ps2:2,7).

Significance of the disciples alone in the storm. This lesson is meant to teach the disciples that where the Lord sends them (v22), He is with them (Matt28:20; Heb13:5), even if He is not seen. The believer's spiritual power in any "storm" will come by "looking unto Jesus" (Heb12:2), that is, to "walk by faith, not by sight" (2Cor5:7).

HEALING IN GENNESARET

- [34] Jesus and the disciples arrive in Gennesaret, a town on the Sea of Galilee southwest of Capernaum.
- [35] In general, the people in this region have already rejected Christ's preaching (Matt11:20-24). However, His fame as a healer still attracts the sick.
- [36] It is interesting that the sick believe they will be healed by touching the "hem" of Jesus' garment, as that would appear to be a recognition of Jesus as Messiah (Mal4:2; see notes on Matt9:21).

CHAPTER 15

CHRIST REJECTS THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION (i.e., LEGALISM)

- [1] The renown of Jesus as a possible Messiah has even drawn scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem to the Galilee to confront Him.
- [2] The Pharisees challenge Jesus over the fact that His disciples "wash not their hands" when they eat. This was not a matter of hygiene.
- [3] Rather, ceremonial 'hand washing' was a "tradition", a requirement added to the Law by the Pharisees (Mk7:3-4). The Lord uses this occasion to rebuke their traditions in general, which in practice superceded the requirements of the Law, and in many cases contradicted the requirements of the Law.
- [4] As an example of their tradition contradicting the Law, Jesus points out that the Law requires a man "honor [his] father and mother" (Ex20:12) under penalty of death (Ex21:17; Lev20:9).

- [5] The tradition of the Pharisees, however, allowed for a man to 'dedicate' a portion of his goods 'to the LORD', such that they had to be kept separate. Although this sounded spiritual, it had come to be used as a 'loophole' allowing support to be withheld from one's parents.
- [6] In practicing this tradition, God's commandment to "honor thy father and mother" was violated.
- [7] Centuries before the prophet Isaiah had preached against this same kind of attitude.
- [8] This is a quotation of Isaiah 29:13.
- [9] When the "commandments of men" (i.e., religious requirements demanded by men, which are not required by God) are taught as "doctrine", the Lord is worshiped "in vain". God is not honored or pleased when men invent additional requirements that go beyond, or even contradict, His commandments. Thus, Jesus condemns *legalism*, which often infects the Church today as overtly as it did Israel in the first century.

PARABLE OF THE HEART OF MAN

- [10] To elaborate on His condemnation of legalism, the Lord gives "the multitude" a parable (v15).
- [11] Man is not defiled by what goes into his mouth; rather, his inherently depraved nature is revealed by what comes out of his mouth. It is foolish to believe that a mere, external ritual (i.e., hand-washing) can accomplish spiritual cleansing.
- [12] How often are spiritual leaders "offended" when their teaching is evaluated against the standard of the Word of God (cf. Act17:11).
- [13] This is an allusion to the parable of the tares among the wheat; Jesus is implying that the Pharisees are "children of the wicked one" (Matt13:38), false teachers being used (albeit unwittingly) by Satan to oppose God.
- [14] Of the Pharisees, Jesus commands His disciples to "let them alone"; as in the parable, God will judge them in His time. In repeatedly rejecting the light the Lord has given them, they are hardened in their unbelief.
- [15] On behalf of the disciples, Peter asks the Lord to explain the "parable" (v11).
- [16] It is the disciples, as much as the Pharisees, that need to understand the Lord's lesson regarding the authority, or lack of it, of 'tradition'.
- [17] Spiritual defilement does not come from that which is external to the body, even if it is put into "mouth".

- [18] But that which comes out of the mouth (i.e., our words) is a reflection of the heart, the spiritual condition of the inner man.
- [19] And the heart of an unregenerate man is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer17:9).
- [20] It is the unregenerate heart of man in rebellion against God that is the cause of his spiritual defilement, not his neglect of a religious ritual such as 'hand-washing'.

THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN

- [21] Jesus and the disciples head north from the Galilee into the "coasts of Tyre and Sidon"; this region is outside Israel proper, in the land known as Phoenicia.
- [22] Here, this woman is said to be "of Canaan", but in Mark's gospel she is said to be "Syrophenician" (Mk7:26). This is not a contradiction; the woman was a Syrophenician (i.e., Phoenician), but the Jews at the time of Christ referred to them idiomatically using the ancient reference "of Canaan".
- The important point is that she is a Gentile, not a Jew, appealing to Jesus on the basis of His Jewish, Messianic title, "Son of David" (1Chron17:10-14).
- [23] Jesus ignores the woman's appeal, because as a Gentile she has no access to Him as the Jewish Messiah. The disciples show no compassion for the woman, likely because she is a Gentile; however, recall that when Jesus had commissioned the apostles to preach the "gospel of the Kingdom", He had explicitly directed them not to take it to the "Gentiles" (Matt10:5-7).
- [24] Jesus points out that as the Jewish Messiah, His ministry is to "the house of Israel" alone (Matt10:6).
- [25] Now the woman's appeal to Jesus changes. She "worshiped Him" and addressed him using the divine title "Lord". The woman changes the basis of her appeal from that of a Gentile addressing the Jewish Messiah, to a creature addressing her Creator.
- [26] In this analogy, the "children" are the Jews, and the "dogs" are the Gentiles. It is not "meet" (i.e., appropriate) to give to Gentiles that which God intends for the Jews.
- [27] This Gentile woman acknowledges the "Truth" of the word of the "Lord". But then she asserts that even blessings intended for the Jews can/should have a derivative effect on the Gentiles. This observation is profoundly significant, as it correctly recognizes the source of Gentile blessing; the blessing is from God, but it is mediated through the unconditional covenants that God has made with the Jews (Gen12:3; Rom11:13-27).
- [28] Jesus heals the woman's daughter on the basis of her "great faith".

Significance of the encounter with the Syrophenician woman. The proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom by the Lord and His disciples to the nation of Israel is over. The Lord is now preparing His disciples to minister to both Jew and Gentile on the basis of personal faith.

MORE HEALINGS

- [30] Everywhere the Lord went, even in Gentile territory, His fame as a healer preceded Him. The Lord healed all the sick brought to Him.
- [31] In response, these Gentiles "glorified *the God of Israel*", particularly significant in contrast to the Jews who have not.

THE FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND

- [32] According to Mark 7:31, this event takes place in the area of the Decapolis, the region southeast of the Sea of Galilee, which was *Gentile* territory. Thus, the difference between the feedings of the five thousand and the four thousand is that of providing for Jewish and Gentile multitudes, respectively.
- [33] Though the disciples witnessed the Lord feed the five thousand previously, for some reason the possibility of him doing so for this multitude does not enter into their thinking, perhaps because this multitude is Gentile.
- [34] The disciples have only 7 loaves and a few fish (i.e., their personal resources are inadequate to feed the multitude).
- [36] Again, Jesus' model is to provide bread for the multitude through the agency of His servants, the disciples.
- [37] Again, all ate until "filled". The remaining "seven baskets full" (i.e., just as much as when the feeding began) suggests the inexhaustible supply of the Lord's provision.
- [38] In this occasion, "four thousand [Gentile] men" were fed. Including the "women and children" who were present, the crowd may have numbered ten to fifteen thousand.
- [39] Following the miraculous feeding, Jesus and the disciples depart in a boat to "Magadan", a variant spelling of 'Magdala', a city farther the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Significance of the feeding of the four thousand. The significance of this miracle is the same as that of the feeding of the five thousand (see comments on p. 59), and reinforces that previous instruction. However, in repeating this miracle among a Gentile multitude, Christ is highlighting for His disciples that their upcoming ministry during the inter-advent age will be to both Jew and Gentile (Matt28:19-20; Mk16:15; Jn10:16).

CHAPTER 16

THE PHARISEES REBUKED

- [1] The "Pharisees, with the Sadducees" again demand a "sign" from Jesus (see comments on Matt12:38, pp. 48-49).
- [2] Jesus calls their attention to the fact that they easily discern natural signs (i.e., coming weather).
- [3] But they have failed to "discern the signs of the times", the long-before prophesied and indisputable Messianic signs Jesus has been working before them and the nation, which are infinitely clearer than the coming weather.
- [4] In light of the great multitude of definitive signs already given by the Lord, and already rejected by the nation under the leadership of the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus has previously declared that "there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah" (i.e., His own resurrection; Matt12:39-40). Jesus' denial of this additional request reinforces His previous declaration that this "wicked and adulterous generation" has committed "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit", which "shall not be forgiven", "neither in this age, neither in the age to come" (Matt12:31-32).

DISCIPLES STILL THINKING LIKE THE PHARISEES

- [5] It happened that at this time the disciples had forgotten to bring bread, which was apparently a point of discussion among them, overheard by the Lord.
- [6] Jesus uses the occasion to teach a spiritual truth, "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees".
- [7] The disciples fail to recognize that Jesus is speaking of "leaven" figuratively in order to teach spiritual truth; they think He is entering into their conversation regarding the forgotten bread.
- [8] Jesus called the disciples "ye of little faith". Much like the Pharisees and Sadducees (although to a lesser degree), they have failed to fully discern the Messianic signs of Jesus.
- [10] Jesus calls to their recollection His immediate past occasions of miraculously providing needed bread to multitudes of both Jews and Gentiles.
- [11] With this backdrop, how foolish for the disciples to be concerned over forgotten bread. Have they not recognized that the Lord is the source of infinite provision for those who follow Him? If He has miraculously provided bread for the multitudes in their times of need, would He not do even more so for His own disciples.
- [12] With this rebuke, the disciples understand that Jesus was using "leaven" figuratively as a reference to the false "doctrine" (i.e., teaching) of the "Pharisees" and "Sadducees" (Cp.,

Matt13:33). That is, the Pharisees and Sadducees have asserted that Jesus' works and signs have not unequivocally validated His Messiahship; in being concerned over their supply of bread, the disciples are unconsciously acting the same way.

PETER'S CONFESSION OF AS MESSIAH

- [13] Caesarea Philippi was a Roman city steeped in pagan worship; it was the northernmost point in the travels of Jesus. The city was located at the base of Mount Hermon. A distinguishing feature at Caesarea Philippi is a massive and imposing rock face (in Greek, *petra*), from under which emerges a small stream that is the source of the Jordan river.

In this city that was central to Roman idolatry in Israel, Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?"

- [14] Some considered Jesus to be "Elijah", or "John" who had come in the spirit and power of Elijah, whose return the Scriptures prophesied (Mal4:5-6). Others considered Him to be "Jeremiah, or one of the prophets", who came from God to call the nation of Israel to repentance and were persecuted for it. While all these suggestions are somewhat flattering, they fall far short of Who Jesus, in the essence of His nature, really is.
- [15] Jesus' question is addressed to all the disciples (the "ye" is plural). He is challenging them to personal faith, which both then and now rests on the foundation of knowing and confessing the truth of **Who Jesus is** (1Jn5:1,4-5,20)
- [16] Peter responds, and His confession asserts two points: 1) "Thou are the Christ" confesses Jesus' Messiahship (Ps2:2), in Whom are fulfilled all the covenant promises of God (Gal3:16), and 2) "the Son of the living God" confesses Jesus' Deity (Ps2:7; Isa9:6; Jer23:5-6; Mic5:2).
- [17] Jesus acknowledges that Peter's confession is true, and that such an understanding of the truth comes only as a result of a Divine work (Jn6:44,65; 1Cor2:10-13).
- [18] Jesus' statement in this verse involves a word play. Peter's name, *petros* (masc.) as used here in Greek (or *cephas* in Aramaic; Jn1:42), means 'little rock, or stone'. But the "rock" upon which Jesus asserts that He "will build [His] church" is *petra* (fem.) in the Greek text, which means 'a large rock', or even 'a great rocky cliff' (such as the distinctive cliff face at Caesarea Philippi).

Here, after Jesus as Messiah has been rejected by the Jewish nation and His offer of the Kingdom to them has been (at this time) rescinded, Christ announces a new program that will be the focus of the inter-advent age: the building of His "Church". The use of the future tense, "I *will* build", indicates this is a future work; the Church did not exist in the Old Testament, nor does it even yet exist at the time of Christ's prophecy.

Much controversy has surrounded the identification of "the rock" (Greek, *petra*) upon which the Lord says the Church will be built. Many have attempted to make "the rock" either Peter (especially the Roman Catholic Church) or the Lord Jesus Himself; however, neither of these interpretations are grammatically possible in the Greek text. Furthermore, the demonstrative "this" (fem.) indicates Christ is referring to something previously mentioned. It is best to understand "the rock" upon which Christ will build His "Church" to be the veracity of Peter's confession of Jesus' Messiahship and Deity (v16) to be the foundation of the Church. Thus, whereas the nation of Israel has corporately rejected Jesus as her Divine Messiah (Jn1:11), and the Kingdom is being withheld from her, Jesus will now work with individual Jews and Gentiles, the small believing remnant that will confess Him to be both Messiah and God (Jn1:12-13), and during the inter-advent age build from them a new organism He designates as His "Church".

Finally, Christ asserts that not even "the gates of Hell shall prevail against" His program of building the Church. The English "Hell" is a translation of the Greek *hades* (equivalent to the Hebrew *sheol*) and would have been understood by the disciples as a reference to physical death. By this the Lord assures His disciples that not even death (i.e., His own death which He will prophesy in v21) will be able to prevent His work, in which they will participate as apostles (Eph2:20), of building the Church.

What is the Church? The Church is a "mystery" first revealed by Christ in Matthew 16:18; thus, it is distinct from the nation of Israel and cannot be found in the Old Testament. The Church is composed of individual, believing Jews and Gentiles (Jn1:12-13), who with equal standing (Gal3:28; Eph3:1-10) are united to Christ (Col1:24-27) by Spirit baptism (1Cor12:13; Gal3:27). It had its beginning with the coming of the Holy Spirit in His new baptizing ministry on the day of Pentecost (Act1:5), and the building of it will end with the Rapture (1Thess4:13-17). The Church is being built during the inter-advent age to be both the Body of Christ (Eph1:22-23; Col1:24) and His Bride (Eph5:31-32; Rev19:7-9).

- [19] While Peter is not the rock upon which the Church is built, he is nevertheless given a unique leadership position.

What are the "Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven"? Remember, the kingdom of heaven is used by Matthew to refer to the coming Messianic (Millennial) Kingdom; it is **not** a reference to the Church. A similar passage in Isaiah 22:20-23 aids in understanding this phrase. There, spiritual insight (referred to as "the key of the house of David") is given to Eliakim regarding discernment as to when the city of Jerusalem is ripe for judgment. By analogy, Peter is given this prophetic role as well, which relates to Israel and coming judgment of the city of Jerusalem. This is evident in Acts 2-3 where Peter, in effect, re-offers to Israel the Messianic Kingdom that the nation had rejected in the

days of Christ's ministry. Unfortunately, the nation rejected the re-offered Kingdom as well, and Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70.

An accurate translation of this passage would be as follows. **I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you should bind on earth shall itself have been bound in heaven, and whatever you should loose on earth shall itself have been loosed in heaven.** The binding and loosing logically occurs first in heaven, not on earth. Thus, in the Greek text it is apparent that the source of authority regarding the judgment to come upon Jerusalem is "heaven" (i.e., God), with Peter merely serving as God's instrument on "earth" to execute God's sovereign will.

Similar, but not related to v19, is God's choice of Peter to be the apostle to first take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10); in that instance also Peter makes clear that the authority for that work came from God (Act15:7).

Summary of Matthew 16:16-19. This very important passage teaches that the "rock" upon which Christ will build His coming Church is the profession of personal faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah, the divine Son of God, made by any individual. Peter was chosen by God to re-offer the Messianic Kingdom to the nation of Israel after the final sign to the nation, the sign of resurrection (Acts 2-3), but Peter's role is limited to that of a human instrument carrying out God's sovereign plan on earth.

- [20] Up until now, the proclamation of the "disciples" has been "Jesus, the Christ" (i.e., Messiah) offering the Kingdom to Israel (Matt10:5-7). The proclamation of this message has ended. The proclamation of the "gospel of the grace of God" (Act20:24), that of Christ crucified, buried, and risen (1Cor15:1-4), cannot yet be preached because the Lord's own "blood of the New Covenant" (Matt26:28; Heb12:24) has not yet been shed (cf. v21).

CHRIST PROPHECIES HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

- [21] This is the first time in the Gospel of Matthew that Christ has spoken of His coming death. Jesus prophesies His resurrection "the third day", the final sign of the prophet Jonah to the nation of Israel (Matt12:39-40).
- [22] Peter (and all the disciples) do not yet understand the Lord's teaching regarding the building of the Church during the coming inter-advent age. They are still focused on their expectation of the Messianic Kingdom, and fear that the death of the Messiah will end that hope. Even after the Lord's resurrection, it is the Kingdom that still occupies the disciples' thinking (Act1:6).
- [23] The Lord rebukes Peter's thinking as being *Satanic*. The death of Messiah was prophesied in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps22; Isa53; and typified in all the animal sacrifices) and must occur if God's work of redemption is to be realized (Rom3:21-26). Peter himself will in time come to recognize it as being according to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Act2:23).

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

- [24] Following Peter's failure to recognize the plan of God, and his part in it, the Lord repeats a previous teaching on true discipleship (Matt10:38-39). One who decides to follow Christ should not expect immediate glory, nor even glory in this life. For a disciple to follow Christ, he must "deny himself", even to the point of death (i.e., "take up his cross").
- [25] This is the most-repeated verse of the New Testament (Matt10:39; 16:25; Mk8:35; Luk9:24; 17:33; Jn12:25).
- [26] Of what benefit would it be to gain the whole world in this life, only to lose one's soul in eternity? True discipleship is submission to the Master and following wherever He leads.
- [27] Glory is promised to those who will follow Christ, not in this life, but in the life to come (1Cor2:9). Faithful service in this life will be rewarded in the life to come (1Cor3:12-15; 2Cor5:10; 2Tim2:12; Rev22:12).
- [28] Because of the disciples' confusion regarding the coming Kingdom, and especially their fear that Messiah's death will be the end of the hope of the Kingdom, the Lord promises to give the disciples a fore-taste of the still coming Kingdom. This He will do in the Transfiguration (Matt17:1-13).

CHAPTER 17

THE TRANSFIGURATION

- [1] It is unfortunate that a (man-made) chapter division was placed at this point, as the account of the transfiguration follows as a direct fulfillment of the Lord's promise of Matthew 16:28. Six days after the promise that "some" of the disciples would see "the Son of man coming in His kingdom", the Lord leads "Peter, James, and John" up a "high mountain" for a private vision. This high mountain was likely Mount Hermon, the highest mountain in the region, at the base of which was Caesarea Philippi (Matt16:13) where the Lord's promise was given.
- [2] There, the Lord was "transfigured" (in Greek, the root from which we get the English *metamorphosis*). Thus, His disciples see the Lord Jesus Christ in His personal glory, as He will appear in the coming Kingdom, rather than in His present humiliation.
- [3] Also appearing in the vision are "Moses and Elijah, talking with Him"; in the parallel account in Luke's Gospel, as well as in Peter's later epistle, we learn that the discussion Jesus, Moses and Elijah were having concerned His coming death (Luk9:1) and return in "power" and "majesty" (2Pet1:16). In this vision of the glorified Christ along with saints of old the disciples experienced a foretaste of the coming Kingdom (Matt16:28).

Why Moses and Elijah? Much debate has occurred over why Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ in this vision. Some have seen in these two men representatives of "the Law and the Prophets", others believers who have died in faith versus those taken to heaven without experiencing death (1Thess4:17). Many have speculated that since their conversation concerned details of the Lord's return, this event strengthens the view that Moses and Elijah will be the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-13. More importantly, the vision of Christ with Moses and Elijah, long since dead, reinforces Christ's teaching that His own death will not prevent His coming Kingdom (Matt16:18), and that continued conscious existence follows death.

- [4] Peter's desire to build "booths" for Jesus, Moses and Elijah may indicate that the vision took place during the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev23:42), which looked prophetically to the coming Kingdom when all Jews would be regathered to the Land.
- [5] The error in Peter's suggestion seems to be that of taking the pre-eminence away from the Lord (Coll:18). The Shekinah glory, the physical manifestation of the presence of God, appeared as a "bright cloud", and the voice of the Father was heard directing attention to His Son (Ps2:7); the command to "hear ye Him", rather than being distracted by the presence of Moses and Elijah, is an allusion to the messianic prophecy long before given by Moses (Deut18:15).
- [6] Hearing the voice of God made a lasting impression on Peter, who decades later makes mention of it in his last epistle (2Pet1:17-18).
- [7] Compare with Daniel 10:7-12.
- [8] After this divine correction, the disciples see "Jesus only".
- [9] See comments on Matthew 16:20.
- [10] This is a reference to Malachi 4:5-6, which prophesies that "Elijah the prophet" will be sent to Israel, "before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD".
- [11] The Lord Jesus confirms that the understanding that Elijah the prophet will come again before the Kingdom is correct.
- [12] The Lord is not saying that the coming of Elijah before the Kingdom will not literally occur in the future; in v11 He has just affirmed that Elijah "shall" (future tense) indeed come first. This is an important reason many believe that one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 must be Elijah.
- [13] The point is that the Lord's offer of the Kingdom to Israel was a legitimate offer. Had the nation received Jesus as King Messiah (Deut18:15), the events which would rapidly lead to the inauguration of the Kingdom would have been set in motion. Elijah's prophesied ministry of reconciliation (Mal4:6) could have been accomplished by John the Baptist (Jn1:16), who came "in the

spirit and power of Elijah" (Jn1:17), if the nation had repented at his preaching.

DISCIPLES FAIL TO CAST OUT A DEMON

- [14] While Jesus, Peter, James and John were on the Mount of Transfiguration (v1), a man had come to the disciples left behind requesting that they heal his epileptic son.
- [15] The man has personal faith, addressing Jesus using the divine title "Lord", and asks for healing on the basis of "mercy". The boy's epileptic condition is actually caused by demon possession (v18).
- [16] These disciples, however, apart from Jesus and the leading disciples (i.e., Peter, James and John), had not been able to heal the boy.
- [17] Jesus rebukes His disciples for being "faithless". Here, we see Jesus' concern for the development of His disciples, that they will be prepared for the ministry He has for them after He is gone; note his rhetorical question, "How long shall I be with you?" The disciples' attempt to heal failed because of their lack of faith.
- [18] Jesus "rebuked the demon", and the child was "cured".
- [19] In private, the disciples ask the Lord why they failed in their attempt to cast out the demon.
- [20] Jesus indicates their failure came because of their "unbelief". The Lord promises that with genuine faith, even faith as small as the proverbial "mustard seed", then "nothing shall be impossible" for them. The point is that "faith" is not something with inherent power, such that the size of one's faith determines what can be accomplished. Even great faith, if misplaced, has no power whatsoever. The power of faith comes from the object of one's faith, which should be God; even small faith, having the infinite and omnipotent Creator God as its object, can accomplish anything God wills (1Jn5:14-15).
- [21] The disciples' failure seems to be caused by their "faith" in a presumed power they have, rather than a dependence upon God that would be evidenced by "prayer and fasting".

Significance of disciple's failure. The disciple's failure to cast out this demon is used by Jesus as an important point of instruction. Although the Lord has delegated to His disciples power and authority in His name (Matt10:8; Mk16:17-18; 2Cor12:12), that power is not inherent to them, but comes only as they continue to depend upon Him (v20; Jn15:7).

JESUS AGAIN PROPHESES HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

- [23] The Lord reiterates His prophetic teaching to His disciples. The time is nearing when He will at the hands of men be killed. However, "the third day He shall be raised again"; for some reason, the Lord's clear teaching of His disciples to expect His resurrection was not understood, or not believed (cf. Luk24:21-26; Jn20:2-9). In contrast, the unbelieving Jewish leaders remember the Lord's promise of resurrection, and it greatly troubles them (Matt27:63).

While the Lord's teaching made the disciples "exceedingly sorry", it was not resisted as it had been previously (Matt16:22).

MIRACLE OF THE TRIBUTE MONEY

- [24] This collection of "tribute money" was an annual tax required under the Mosaic Law of all those who came to worship at the Temple. The amount of the Temple tax was "half a shekel", required of Jews "twenty years old and above" (Ex30:13-14). Since Jesus has apparently not paid the Temple tax (and Peter as well; v27), He stands accused of not keeping the Law.
- [25] Not wanting the charge that Jesus has failed in a point of keeping the Law to be sustained, Peter presumptuously asserts that his Master will pay the Temple tax. Jesus, however calls attention to Peter's incorrect presumption with the use of an analogy. Are kings required to pay the taxes they authorize? No. Furthermore, the sons of the king are likewise exempt from the king's taxes.
- [26] Here, Jesus is claiming personal exemption from the Temple tax since, as He is personally God and King, He owned the Temple (Mal3:1). Even under the Law, Jesus is the King with authority to tax, not one who is subject to the tax. Note also, this tax was required of those who came to the Temple to worship, that is, to "make an atonement for [their] souls" (Ex30:15-16); as the sinless Son of God, Jesus required no atonement for His soul, and He never participated in the Temple's sacrificial system.

Furthermore, by analogy the disciples are likened to the king's sons, who reasonably should be considered exempt from the tax as well.

- [27] Yet, for the sake of not offending those to whom He desired to minister (Cp., Rom14:21; 1Cor8:13), Jesus paid the tax. The coin obtained by means of the fish was a "shekel", which was enough to pay the "half a shekel" Temple tax (Ex30:13) for both Himself and Peter. The fact that Peter needed to pay the tax, and apparently the other disciples did not, suggests that Peter was the only disciple "twenty years old and above" (Ex30:14).

Here, the 'miracle' of the fish finding a coin and bringing it to Peter at the Lord's command may not be a miracle *per se*, but yet another example of Jesus as the perfect Man and Last Adam (1Cor15:45) exercising dominion over the creation as God originally intended for Adam and his race (Gen1:26).

CHAPTER 18

THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM

- [1] The Lord's instructions concerning His coming death (Matt16:21; 17:22-23) and the new work of building the Church (Matt16:18) have not been understood/accepted by the disciples. They still anticipate the imminent inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom, true even after the resurrection (Act1:6), and are concerned over "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" That is, as the faithful disciples of the King, what positions of honor will they be given in the Kingdom?
- [2] Jesus uses "a little child", one who had absolutely no rights according to the Law, to instruct His disciples on humility.
- [3] The disciples must change their incorrect way of thinking. Entrance into the coming Kingdom is based on the kind of faith and humility exhibited by "little children", not on works (Cp., Jn3:3; Eph2:8-9).
- [4] The "greatest in the Kingdom" will be the most humble. The greatest example of humility is Christ Himself (Philip2:5-8), and the He expects the same of His disciples (Matt23:12; 1Pet5:6).
- [5] Whereas the world neglects the humble, the Lord's disciples are to receive them in Christ's name.
- [6] The society of that day gave little or no attention to children. Similarly, the world often ignores those who live in true humility, whose greatest "work" is that they "believe in [Christ]" (Jn6:29). The Lord threatens judgment on those who "offend one of these little ones".

GOD'S CONCERN OVER OFFENSES, CONCERN FOR THE LOST

- [7] Jesus elaborates on the idea of offending others, especially "little ones", that arose in v6. In this verse the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man are seen in tension. Man will be held responsible for the wicked acts he commits, even though those acts were foreordained by God (e.g., the Jews' crucifixion of Christ; Act2:23).
- [8] See comments on Matthew 5:29-30.
- [9] Jesus is not demanding literal, physical mutilation, as that would not remove the source of the offense, which is the heart (Matt15:18-19). Nevertheless, this hyperbole is meant to emphasize the seriousness of sin and the need to remove whatever offends.
- [10] Particularly important to God is to guard "little ones" (i.e., children) from offenses. Apparently there are angels with special access to God whose ministry is centered around children.

- [11] The mission of "the Son of man" is redemptive. The love of God for man is seen in His initiative to seek to lost, whose depraved nature will never seek Him (Rom3:10-12).
- [12] The Lord's desire is that not one of His "sheep" be lost (Cp., Jn10:27-28; 17:12; 18:9).
- [14] This verse summarizes the teaching of the love of God for every individual, and particularly "little ones". This verse does not teach that all children are saved; it is not an expression of the sovereign, decretive will of God, but of the loving desire of God that all might be saved (Ezek18:23,32; 1Tim2:4; 2Pet3:9).

DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH

- [15] Here the Lord gives prophetic teaching on how offenses within the Church (i.e., between believers), which will be built during the inter-advent age (Matt16:18), are to be handled. The first step is for the one offended confront the offending brother, "alone". The Lord's desire is for private reconciliation between the two.
- [16] If the offending brother will not repent, "two or three" others should be brought in as "witnesses" (Deut19:15).
- [17] If he still refuses to "hear" from these few witnesses, then the matter should be brought before "the church". If he refuses to repent before the entire church, then the church is to treat him as a "heathen" (i.e., unbeliever) and a "tax collector" (i.e., a sinner); that is, the unrepentant brother is to be cast out of the fellowship.

Action to remove an offending brother from fellowship in a church is unpleasant. Nevertheless, God has ordained that it be done in order to check both sin (1Cor5:1-7) and false teaching (Act20:29-30; Gal2:4; Jud4) within the local church. Western churches today are weak, and this may be due in large measure to the fact that the exercise of real discipline has long since been abandoned.

Church or synagogue? Some have questioned whether this passage is teaching regarding the coming Church, or whether "church" is used in its non-technical sense of 'congregation' to refer to the synagogue. As this pattern for church discipline is later repeated in Paul's epistles (e.g., Tit3:10), it seems clear that the Lord's teaching here is related to the coming Church.

- [18] The grammatical construction of this Greek text on "binding" and "loosing" is identical to Matthew 16:19. Here, as there, the idea is that "heaven" (i.e., God) is the source of authority in this matter (i.e., discipline of believers), but that He uses the local church to act as His instrument to execute His will on "earth".
- [19] The act of corporate agreement within the church is extended beyond discipline to prayer. There is great power in the local church being unified (Jn17:21-23), even if that unity is limited to but "two or three", and petitioning God from that position.

[20] Here is a promise to "two or three" that gather together in the name of Christ. There is an access to God for believers gathered together that exceeds that available to the individual, which is why we are commanded to not forsake corporate assembly (Heb10:25).

This passage includes an important reference to the divine attribute of omnipresence as applied to the Lord Jesus Christ *after* His incarnation.

FORGIVENESS IN THE CHURCH

[21] Peter's question arises out of the context of disciplining an offending brother in vv15-18; there, the action to be taken in the case of an unrepentant offender was outlined. Peter's question addresses the other side of that process, that of the brother who does repent. However, having repented, what if he falls back into the same sin? "How often... shall I forgive him?" Peter offers "seven times", no doubt believing that this suggestion is quite gracious.

[22] Jesus' response indicates God's standard of graciousness greatly exceeds that of Peter's. The repentant brother should be forgiven "until seventy times seven". While this number of '490' is very large, it should probably not be taken to imply that the forgiveness of God has no limit whatsoever. Indeed, God overlooked the sin of Israel in neglecting to keep the sabbatical year proscribed in the Law exactly 490 times, then brought judgment (2Chr36:20-21).

[23] To reinforce His teaching, the Lord gives a parable regarding the graciousness of God and His expectation that the same graciousness be found in His servants. The parable begins with a "king" who desired to "take account of" (i.e., settle debts with) his "servants". The "king" is a type of God the Father (v35), and the king's "servants" are a type of the disciples (v35).

[24] One servant owed the king "ten thousand talents". This is an exorbitant debt, as one talent was 6,000 denarii (and one denarius was the normal pay for a day's labor; Matt20:2).

[25] It is inconceivable that this debt could ever be repaid. According to law, the king could sell all that this servant had to put toward the debt, even to the point of selling the servant and his family into slavery.

[26] This servant pleads for mercy (i.e., that he not be dealt with according to law).

[27] Because of the king's "compassion", he "forgave him the debt". That is, the king dealt with his servant according to grace, not law. By definition, 'grace' is something the king is not required to do; he could have dealt with the servant according to law and been totally just.

[28] However, after being shown essentially infinite grace by the king, "the same servant" demands from another who owes him 100 denarii

immediate payment. While 100 denarii is a very large sum for a servant, it is not so large a debt that it could not be retired if given time.

- [29] This second servant pleads for mercy, just as the first had.
- [30] However, the first servant refused to be gracious, and "cast him into prison" according to law.
- [31] Even the fellow servants, aware of what has taken place, recognize that one who has been shown grace by the king ought to in turn show grace to others.
- [32] Upon learning of the actions of his servant, the king rebukes him.
- [33] The king's expectation is that the servant to whom he had shown "compassion", and toward whom he was gracious, would himself be compassionate and gracious toward others.
- [34] Because the servant would not show grace to others, the king withdraws his grace as well.
- [35] Jesus summarizes the parable as teaching that since God the Father has shown infinite grace to us, in forgiving us a debt we could never pay, we also ought to forgive those who trespass against us (Eph4:32; Col3:13).

CHAPTER 19

TEACHING ON DIVORCE

- [1] Jesus leaves the Galilee and heads toward Judea, on the east side of the Jordan; this area is known as Perea. The Lord has begun His journey back to Jerusalem.
- [2] As usual, He attracts large crowds who have heard of His ability to heal, and "He healed them".
- [3] The Pharisees come "testing" Jesus, seeking to involve Him in the controversy between the two prominent rabbinical schools regarding grounds for divorce. Hillel taught that a man could divorce his wife for almost any reason; the Pharisees' question, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" comes from that perspective. Shammai, however, taught that divorce was permissible only for sexual infidelity.
- [4] In His answer, Jesus does not cite the provision for divorce in the Law (Deut24:1-4). Rather, He calls their attention to God's original design of the divine institution of marriage as given "at the beginning" of creation, alluding to Genesis 1:27.
- [5] This is a quotation of Genesis 2:24.
- [6] Jesus asserts the primacy of God's original design for marriage, that it be one man united with one woman for life. His implication is that divorce should not occur for any reason, which

is a more stringent position than that of either Hillel or Shammai.

- [7] The Pharisees call Jesus' attention to the provision for divorce found in the Law (Deut24:1-4).
- [8] The Lord acknowledges that "because of the hardness of your hearts", the Law "suffered" (i.e., permitted) divorce; however, this was not God's original intent for marriage.

This same pattern was seen in the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt5:17-48). The Law of Moses was not the absolute standard of righteousness (Matt5:20), the Person and character of God Himself is (Matt5:48). The Law represented a lesser standard of righteousness to accommodate a sinful people. Thus, while the Law provided an allowance for divorce, under no conditions whatsoever does divorce satisfy God's righteous standard.

- [9] Just as He did in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus personally asserts God's righteous standard, which exceeds the righteousness of the Law, with the words, "I say unto you". Jesus affirmed the permanence of marriage. In fact, for a man to divorce his wife and marry another is the sin of adultery, as it is for anyone to marry one who is divorced.

The Exception Clause. Divorce and remarriage is forbidden **without exception** in all the NT teachings (Mk10:11-12; Luk16:18; Rom7:2-3; 1Cor7:11,12, 39) except the two passages in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt5:32; 19:9). Only in Matthew does the clause, "except it be for fornication" occur. This results because Matthew's Gospel is uniquely written to a Jewish audience. The extended betrothal period prior to consummation of the marriage observed by the Jews gave rise to the possibility that "fornication" could occur during this time, for which a divorce was permitted; this was uniquely Jewish circumstance is the background of Joseph's initial intention to divorce Mary (Matt1:19).

- [10] Even the disciples are shocked at the Lord's teaching, which greatly exceeded the interpretations of the Law by both Hillel and Shammai. If there are no grounds whatever for which divorce is permissible, perhaps "it is not good to marry".
- [11] Jesus corrects this wrong thinking; marriage was ordained by God, it is good, and it is the normal, expected pattern for men and women.
- [12] It is a rare exception for only some to not marry. For most, marriage is necessary to deter lustful sin (1Cor7:2). There are some, however, who are either born or made "eunuchs", and are not susceptible to the sin of lust. Others are gifted by God with the ability to control their lusts in order to serve God in some dedicated ministry that necessitates their singleness (1Cor7:7-8, 26). The point is that lifelong singleness is the exception rather than the rule and requires a special gift from God.

JESUS BLESSES CHILDREN

[13] Many were bringing their children to Jesus for His blessing. The disciples believe this to be a distraction to His ministry, so they "rebuked" the parents.

[14] However, the Lord makes clear to the disciples that the subjects of His ministry (as well as theirs after He is gone) include children. This is because the condition for entrance into the kingdom is faith alone, and children are perfectly capable of exercising genuine faith. This stood in contrast with Judaistic thinking, which held that Jewish boys did not come under personal accountability to the Law until their bar-mitzvah (which means "son of the commandments") at age 13.

[15] So Jesus prays for the children.

Significance of Jesus ministering to children. Children are capable of hearing and believing the gospel. After Jesus is gone, the apostles are to include children as subjects of their ministry even as the Lord Himself did.

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

[16] Now one comes to Jesus, addresses Him as "Good Master", and asks the question, "What good thing [must] I do, that I may have eternal life?" In Greek, the title translated "Master" means 'teacher'. Luke's parallel account (Luk18:18) indicates that the man was a "ruler", probably meaning the ruler of a synagogue (but it is possible he was a member of the Sanhedrin), and he was rich (v22).

The question posed to Jesus is a loaded question. Already built into the question is the implicit assumption that there is something an individual can do to *merit* eternal life.

[17] Jesus first challenges the young man's designation of Him as "good". Scripture teaches that no man is good (Ps14:3), but God alone is good (1Sam2:2; Mic6:8); however, this man does not believe that Jesus is God. Whether the young ruler responds to this correction of the Lord's is not indicated.

Now Jesus answers the man's question as the Pharisees would have expected. If one wants to "enter into life" (an expression having more to do with entrance into the kingdom than to personal 'salvation'), he should "keep the commandments".

[18] This answer was expected by the young ruler, who follows up by asking "Which" commandments? Jesus responds by citing five commandments from the 10 written on the tables of stone (Ex20:12-16).

[19] He also adds the "second" greatest commandment (Matt22:39), the requirement to love one's neighbor (Lev19:18).

Is Jesus teaching justification by works? Is Jesus teaching that one who keeps the commandments merits salvation? **Certainly not.** The Bible is clear that justification cannot be merited by works of the Law (Rom3:20; Gal2:16). Jesus' approach here seems to be one of "answer[ing] a fool according to his folly" (Prov26:5); that is, forcing scoffers to think through the consequences of their beliefs. The young ruler believes that eternal life comes from keeping the commandments. Jesus will end this encounter by showing the young ruler that he has not kept the commandments, thus confronting him with the reality that he is not saved according to his own standard.

- [20] The young ruler asserts that he has kept these commandments "from my youth". And yet, he senses that something is still lacking.
- [21] Now Jesus presses harder. He adds to His previous list of commands the command for the rich young man to sell his possessions and follow Him. This gets at the greatest commandment, that of loving the LORD God above all else (Deut6:4-5; Matt22:36-8), as well as the commandment which forbids coveting (Ex20:17).
- [22] Unwilling to sell his possessions, the rich young ruler went away "sorrowful".
- [23] Jesus turns to His disciples to complete the teaching. It is difficult for the wealthy, like the rich young ruler, to "enter into the kingdom of heaven" (1Tim6:8-10).
- [24] The Lord's illustration, that of a camel going through the eye of a sewing needle (in Greek, *raphis*) is meant to stress natural impossibility (v26).
- [25] The disciples are "exceedingly amazed" at the Lord's assertion. This reflects their susceptibility to the Pharisees' teaching that wealth is a sign of divine favor.
- [26] The Lord's conclusion is that it is "impossible" for man to merit justification. "But with God, all things are possible", emphasizes that justification is a Divine work that imputes the very "righteousness of God" (Rom1:17) to man "by grace, through faith" (Eph2:8). The Apostle Paul conclude on this matter that "man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Law" (Rom3:28).

THE APOSTLES' REWARD

- [27] The Lord had just commanded the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions and follow Him. Whereas the rich young ruler had been unwilling to do this, Peter observes that he and the other disciples have indeed "forsaken all, and followed Thee" (Matt4:18-22; 9:9). Peter assumes they will be rewarded for this.
- [28] Jesus affirms that His faithful disciples will indeed be rewarded. Their reward will come "in the regeneration" (i.e., the earthly Kingdom; Act3:20-21). At this time "the Son of man" will sit on

David's throne (Matt25:31; Luk1:32-33) in fulfillment of the covenant God made with David (2Sam7:15-16; 1Chr17:11-14), and the apostles will "sit upon twelve thrones" having authority over the restored Jewish nation (Cp., Isal:26). Thus, the Lord's reign during the Kingdom will have a substructure to it, with the apostles given positions of authority, as well as Church saints (1Cor6:3; Rev3:21; 4:4; 5:10).

- [29] Indeed, the Lord promises to all those who have "forsaken" much during this age, reward in the age to come (i.e., the Kingdom); this is reward for faithfulness in addition to the gift of "everlasting life".
- [30] Thus, those who have suffered for Christ during the present age will be exalted in the Kingdom (1Cor3:14; 2Tim2:12; 1Pet5:6); and those who have lived lives of privilege during the present age, without much care for the things or service of God, will "suffer loss" at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1Cor3:15; 2Cor5:10), which will result in lesser positions in the Kingdom.

CHAPTER 20

PARABLE OF THE LABORERS

- [1] Continuing the discussion of coming reward in the Kingdom, the Lord gives a parable concerning a landowner who hires "laborers" to work in his "vineyard".
- [2] The first set of laborers are hired "early in the morning", and the landowner agrees to pay them a "denarius", which is the normal wage for a full day of labor.
- [3] The landowner hires additional laborers at "the third hour" (i.e., 9:00 a.m.).
- [4] For these laborers, no specific wage is set. The landowner simply promises to pay "whatever is right".
- [5] The landowner hires additional laborers at the sixth and ninth hours, also promising to pay them "whatever is right".
- [6] The final set of laborers are hired at the eleventh hour.
- [7] Again, these laborers are promised that they will be paid "whatever is right".
- [8] At "evening", the end of the 12-hour work day (6:00 p.m.), the "lord" instructs his steward to pay the workers, "beginning from the last unto the first" (Cp., Matt19:30).
- [9] The shocking result is that the laborers hired at the eleventh hour, who had labored for the lord only one hour, were paid a "denarius". This is the normal pay for a full day of labor. This is much more than a wage, it is a reward—it is much more than they deserve.

- [10] Seeing that those who had labored only one hour were paid a denarius, those who had labored a full day expected to be paid much more than this. However, they also are paid only a denarius.
- [11] These laborers believe this to be unfair, and they "murmured against the landowner".
- [12] On the surface, the result does not appear to be fair. Laborers who have worked for the lord dramatically different lengths of time are all paid the same.
- [13] The result is not 'fair', in that it is not equal, but it is **just**. No laborer got less than he 'deserved', for the laborers who worked twelve hours had beforehand agreed to do so for a "denarius" (v2), which was a just wage. No laborer got less than he deserved, but some got more.
- [14] In this parable the landowner represents God, Who calls laborers to work for Him with the promise to reward them with "whatever is right".
- [15] This parable emphasizes the sovereignty of God in the distribution of rewards. As the landowner was free to do with his money as he saw fit, so God is free to distribute His rewards according to His good pleasure. God's rewards will not be distributed equally; some will be recipients of God's **grace** that others are not. Unregenerate man views this as "evil". The opposite is actually true, for no man gets less than he deserves (because God is just), while some get more than they deserve (because God is good; Matt19:17).
- [16] Thus, at the coming of Christ God will sovereignly distribute His rewards to be enjoyed in the Kingdom (Rev22:12), and that distribution will most often appear to be opposite to the privilege enjoyed during the present age (cf. 2Tim3:12). Whereas "the many" (a Hebraism for 'more than the sum', a hyperbolic way of expressing 'all') are called, "few" (i.e., not all) will be special recipients of God's grace.

JESUS REPEATS THE PROPHECY OF HIS DEATH/RESURRECTION

- [17] Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. This is now the third time in Matthew's Gospel that the Lord has plainly instructed His disciples regarding His upcoming death and resurrection (cf. Matt16:21; 17:22-23).
- [18] Jesus makes clear that *in Jerusalem* (where they are heading), He will be betrayed to the chief priests and condemned to death.
- [19] Not mentioned previously is that His death will come by **crucifixion**, after mocking and scourging, at the hands of the Gentiles. Crucifixion was employed by the Romans on only the vilest of offenders, so such a revelation must have horrified the disciples. Again, His resurrection on the third day, the "sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matt12:39-40) is prophesied.

MOTHER OF JAMES AND JOHN PETITIONS CHRIST

- [20] Zebedee's children are James and John (Matt4:21). Their mother had genuine faith in Jesus as Messiah and God, "worshiping Him". In this context, she petitions the Lord on behalf of her sons. From a parallel account we know that this request came from James and John as well (Mk10:35); it was not their mother's initiative alone.
- [21] Her petition is that James and John might be granted the two positions of greatest honor in the Kingdom. Recall that the Lord has already promised them that they will sit on thrones over the tribes of Israel (Matt19:28).
- [22] As "ye" is plural, Jesus' response is addressed directly to James and John. The Kingdom positions they have requested are reserved as rewards for those who have suffered greatly and died, as Jesus will. Understanding this, they affirm that they are "able" and willing to suffer and die for the Lord.
- [23] Indeed, James died a martyr's death (Act12:2), and John lived a martyr's life (Rev1:9). However, they will not be alone in suffering and dying for Christ, and the positions they have requested are the Father's prerogative to give.

Note that Jesus did not correct the disciples' hope in a coming literal kingdom, with positions of authority in that kingdom awarded to faithful disciples (Matt19:28-29), indicating that this understanding is correct.

- [24] When "the ten" heard of James' and John's request, they were "moved with indignation"; their indignation probably came from jealousy, as they all desired what James and John had requested (Matt18:1).
- [25] This gives rise to another lesson on humility and service (Cp., Matt18:1-14). The "princes of the Gentiles" (i.e., heathen rulers) use their positions to exercise "dominion" and "authority" over their subjects.
- [26] But this is not the model for the Lord's disciples. The disciple who wants honor in the Kingdom should be prepared to be a "minister" (Greek, *diakonos*; common servant).
- [27] And the greatest honor will go to those willing to be a "servant" (Greek, *doulos*; bondsman). The bondsman was the indentured servant who, even after his required term of service had passed, willingly bound himself to his master for life out of love for him (Ex21:2-6). A "bondsman of Jesus Christ" was a favorite description the Apostle Paul used of himself (e.g., Rom1:1; Tit1:1).
- [28] The ultimate illustration of the Lord's teaching is Himself. Though, having the very nature of God, He has come "to serve" others (Philip2:6-8). Here His coming death is explained. He will not merely die at the hands of others, but intentionally "give His life" as a "ransom" (Greek, *lytron*; payment for

redemption) "for" (Greek, *anti*; in place of) "many". Here, "many" is articulated, which makes it a common Hebraism. That is, "the many" is a Hebraic figure expressing the superlative "more than the whole". Rather than teaching that the death of Christ is intended for only some (the Doctrine of Limited Atonement of Reformed Theology), it asserts that Christ's life is of infinite value and intended for all (Cp., 1Tim2:6). Note that it is Christ as "the Son of man" who will die (i.e., His human, not His divine, nature).

TWO BLIND MEN AT JERICHO

[29] The Lord and His disciples are leaving Jericho, indicating that their journey to Jerusalem is almost complete.

[30] Two blind men cry out to Jesus for healing. Their appeal to Him as "Lord" and "Son of David" (i.e., they acknowledge Him as Messiah).

In both the Mark and Luke accounts of this encounter, only one blind man is mentioned (Mk10:46; Luk18:35). Since neither Mark or Luke say there was *only* one blind man, there is no contradiction with Matthew's account. There were two, and Matthew probably emphasizes this to be consistent with the legal requirement for two witnesses which would be meaningful to a Jewish audience (Deut17:6).

[31] The rebuke of these two comes from "the multitude" which knows Jesus as a healer, but is unwilling to confess Him as Messiah.

[32] By stopping to grant their petition before all the multitude, Jesus is commending their recognition of Him as Messiah.

[33] Naturally, they request that their "eyes may be opened".

[34] Jesus heals the two blind men with a touch.

Significance of healing two blind men. The significance of this miracle is that these two blind men recognize Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, but the nation of Israel did not.

CHAPTER 21

MESSIAH PRESENTS HIMSELF AS ISRAEL'S PASSOVER LAMB

[1] Jesus has now arrived at "Jerusalem". He has come at this particular time (indeed, on this particular day) for a specific purpose, that of offering Himself to the nation as the Passover Lamb (cf. Jn1:29). The day is the 10th of Nisan, four days before Passover; on this day the Passover lambs are set aside for special scrutiny in order to ensure they meet the condition of being "without blemish" (Ex12:2-6). Jesus will spend the next 4 days in Jerusalem allowing Himself to be tested by the Jewish (and Roman) leadership.

As an aside, this could have been the day for Jesus to present Himself as King for coronation, and elements of just such a royal presentation are visible; however, the nation has already rejected Him as King Messiah in committing the unpardonable sin of "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit", for which this generation "shall not be forgiven" (Matt12:31-32). Thus, Messiah's mission to the nation as King has ended.

- [2] Jesus directs his disciples to make preparations for Him to enter Jerusalem as messianic prophecy has foreordained. Jesus will enter Jerusalem riding a donkey, not a horse, just as Solomon did (1Kgs1:38-39). The symbolic picture is a King who comes in peace, as a donkey was not a beast ridden in battle (Cp., Rev19:11). Furthermore, by riding "a colt", an unbroken animal, Jesus again demonstrates His dominion over the creation as the Second Man and Last Adam (Gen1:26; 1Cor15:45,47).
- [3] The "Lord" has the prerogative and authority to demand whatever He needs from His subjects.
- [4] Matthew calls attention to the fact that Messiah's formal entry into Jerusalem was prophesied to occur in this manner.
- [5] Quotation of Zechariah 9:9.
- [7] The disciples put their cloaks on the colt to serve as a saddle.
- [8] This great multitude of people who lay their garments and palm branches (Jn12:13) before Jesus as He enters the city are largely pilgrims who are likewise coming to Jerusalem for Passover as required by the Law (Deut16:16).
- [9] The spreading of palm branches (v8) and singing of Psalm 118 was part of the annual celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev23:40), and gives insight into what the Jews were thinking at this time; they assume that if Jesus is Messiah, He has come to Jerusalem to throw off the yoke of the Romans and inaugurate the Kingdom of God—this is what the Feast of Tabernacles prefigured. However, Jesus has not come to Jerusalem in fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, but the Passover. When it becomes apparent that He will not assert Himself as King, this same crowd will consent to His crucifixion later in the week (Matt27:22-23).

This formal presentation of Jesus as Messiah takes place on the Sunday before Passover (Cp., Jn12:1,12-13) and is referred to as 'Palm Sunday' today. It concludes Daniel's prophecy of the 69 weeks "unto the Messiah, the Prince" (Dan9:25), to the very day (Cp., Luk19:42). While His mission to Israel as King has already been rejected, His mission as the Passover sacrifice will proceed. John's identification of Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn1:29) was foreseen in Daniel's prophecy that Messiah would "make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity" (Dan9:24).

- [10] While Jesus opened His public ministry in Jerusalem, He immediately left the city when He was not received and has not been back in 3 years; thus, the inhabitants of Jerusalem are not

as familiar with who He is as the multitude that has followed Him to the city.

- [11] In reply to the question regarding the identity of Jesus, what is the response from the multitude who has following Jesus for some time, hearing His teaching and witnessing His miraculous works? Do they say He is the Lord, the Son of David, the Son of Man and the Son of God, the promised and long-awaited Messiah who has come presenting Himself as our King? Unfortunately, NO. To them, Jesus is nothing more than "the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee".

JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE

- [12] The "temple tax" (Ex30:11-16) had to be paid in the Jewish "shekel" in order to offer a sacrifice. Thus, the pilgrims who came to Jerusalem from foreign lands had to exchange their local currencies for shekels; the Temple "money-changers" provided this service (at an exorbitant rate). Furthermore, the Passover sacrifices had to be declared to be "without blemish" by the priests. An animal brought for inspection by a pilgrim was almost always found to have some defect, disqualifying it for sacrifice; however, 'pre-qualified' animals were sold at the Temple. Jesus "cast out" from the "temple of God" these who were profiting from those who had come to worship.

- [13] These words of Jesus are quotations from Isaiah 56:11 and Jeremiah 7:11.

There is no indication of any resistance from the Jewish leadership to Jesus' cleansing of the Temple. His actions were no doubt enthusiastically applauded by the tens of thousands of pilgrims present in the Temple courts; the Temple leadership probably feared a mob riot had they attempted to interfere in Jesus' righteous act.

- [14] With the corrupt merchants removed, the poor and sick Jews have access into the Temple. They come, and as always Jesus heals them.

- [15] The "children" are 12-year old boys who have come to the Temple for their first Passover (Cp., Luk2:42). Even they hail this righteous man Jesus as "the Son of David", a messianic title (Ps89:3-4). While the "chief priests and scribes" offered no resistance to the ejection of the money-changers, hailing Jesus as "the Son of David" makes them "very displeased".

- [16] The chief priests and scribes protest directly to Jesus. Surely He would not approve of these children, caught up in the excitement of the moment, hailing Him as Messiah? In response, Jesus quotes the first half of Psalm 8:2. In doing so Jesus gives His approval to the action of the children in a way most offensive to the Jewish leaders. First, in applying Psalm 8:2 to Himself, Jesus asserts that He is Jehovah, "the LORD". Second, the latter half of Psalm 8:2, which Jesus does not quote (but which would be remembered by the scribes), asserts that praise "out of the mouths

of babes" was necessary because the Jewish leadership, *being the enemies of God*, would not ascribe Messiah the praise He was due.

- [17] Each evening of passion week Jesus would go to Bethany, which was ~2 miles east of Jerusalem. Presumably Jesus lodged in the home of Lazarus, who lived in Bethany (Jn11:1).

JESUS CURSES THE BARREN FIG TREE

- [18] Returning from Bethany to Jerusalem the next morning, Jesus is hungry.
- [19] Jesus approached a fig tree in leaf, expecting to find figs. It is spring, and fig trees in Israel generally put on leaves and figs simultaneously. The point is, since the fig tree was in leaf, the natural expectation was that it would be bearing fruit—but it was not. Jesus cursed the fig tree and it withered.
- [20] The disciples "marveled" at the miraculous sign of the withered fig tree.
- [21] Jesus uses the disciples' amazement over the miracle to reiterate His previous teaching on the power of faith in, and prayer to, God (Cp., Matt17:20).

Significance of Jesus cursing the fig tree. The purpose of a fig tree is to bear fruit. Jesus cursed the fig tree that had not bore fruit at the expected time. Here the fig tree is a type or symbol of this generation of Jews that make up the nation of Israel. Israel was God's chosen nation to be the channel of His revelation, both in word and in the Person of Messiah, to the world (Rom9:4-5). As such, they were expected to bear spiritual fruit consistent with this calling (Matt3:8). In rejecting Jesus as Messiah, this generation has failed to bear the required fruit and committed the unpardonable sin for which it will not be forgiven (Matt12:31-32). This is pictured in Jesus' cursing of the fig tree and its withering (Cp., Matt3:10). Note, the curse is not on Israel as a nation forever, but upon **this generation** of Jews which has rejected Messiah (Cp., Matt12:41-42; 23:36).

JESUS' AUTHORITY CHALLENGED

- [23] Remember, Jesus came to Jerusalem on the 10th of Nisan to submit to the public inspection required of the Passover Lamb, which must be declared "without blemish" in order to qualify as an acceptable sacrifice (Ex12:3-5; 1Cor5:7; 1Pet1:19). For four days Jesus allows Himself to be publicly tested.

As Jesus enters the Temple, He is challenged by "the chief priests and the elders" to tell them the source of His authority. It is obvious that He has come into Jerusalem as Messiah, many of the people have acknowledged Him as such (to the chagrin of the leadership), and He has accepted this designation (Matt21:15-16). The Jewish leadership believe it is they who must certify the designation of Jesus as Messiah, and in this they are correct.

[24] The source of Jesus' authority is God the Father, who has sent Him (cf. Jn5:17-47). The Jewish leadership is not prepared to accept this truth, and only ask the question in order to illicit a response from Jesus they can label as blasphemy. So Jesus responds with a question of them, promising to answer their question if they answer His.

[25] As Messiah, Jesus was presented to the nation by John the Baptist, who was the prophesied messianic fore-runner (Isa40:3-5; Mal3:1). Jesus asks them what John's source of authority was, "from heaven [i.e., God], or of men?" Jesus' point is that John as the Messiah's fore-runner, and Jesus as the Messiah, have the same source of authority.

This presents a dilemma for the chief priests. If they acknowledge that John's authority was from God, Jesus will ask then ask them, "Why did ye not then believe him?"

[26] On the other hand, if they say John's authority was not from God, the multitude of people present will be enraged, as they rightly acknowledge that John was a great prophet.

[27] Since either answer creates a problem for the chief priests, they claim ignorance by saying, "We cannot tell". Since they refuse to answer Jesus' question, He refuses to answer theirs. Jesus as the Lamb has passed His first point of inspection; there are a number of others yet to come.

PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

[28] To call attention to the hypocrisy of the Jewish leadership, Jesus gives a parable. A man with two sons commands the first to go and labor in his vineyard.

[29] Initially the first son refuses; but later he repents of his refusal and labors in the vineyard.

[30] The father also goes to the second son and gives him the same command. The second son answers, "I [will] go", but doesn't.

[31] Jesus asks the question, "Which of the two sons did the will of his father?" The obvious answer is "the first" son. Though initially in rebellion against his father, he repents and does as commanded. In the same way, the "tax collectors and harlots" (i.e., sinners in rebellion against God the Father) who have repented at John's (and Jesus') preaching are now fit for "the kingdom of God".

[32] The chief priests and elders, however, are likened to the second son. Though professing righteousness, in rejecting John (and Jesus) they have not done the will of God and are not prepared for the kingdom.

PARABLE OF THE HOUSEHOLDER WHO PLANTED A VINEYARD

- [33] Jesus gives another parable. A householder plants a vineyard and makes all the necessary arrangements for its care and cultivation; he then leases it to tenant farmers for its maintenance, "and went into a far country".
- [34] At harvest time, the householder sends his servants to the tenant farmers to receive his due fruits.
- [35] But the tenant farmers refuse to give the householder the fruit he is due, beating and killing the householder's servants.
- [36] Being long-suffering, the householder repeatedly sends servants to the tenant farmers, giving them multiple opportunities to repent of their rebellion, but they do not.
- [37] But "last of all", the householder sends to the tenant farmers "his son". Since the son has the same intrinsic authority as the father (not merely delegated authority as in the case of servants), the father expects that "they will reverence my son".
- [38] Now Jesus explains the thinking of the tenant farmers. It is not that the tenant farmers do not recognize the son; indeed, they know he is the son, and they believe that by killing him they may keep for themselves what rightly belongs to the householder. The action of the tenant farmers is not taken out of ignorance or mistaken identity, but is an act of premeditated rebellion.
- [39] With this forethought as their motivation, the tenant farmers kill the householder's son.
- [40] Jesus concludes the parable by asking the natural question, "When the Lord [i.e., householder]... cometh, what will he do unto those farmers?"
- [41] The answer obvious to all is that the Lord will "destroy those wicked" tenant farmers, and "lease his vineyard to other farmers, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons".
- [42] Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23. These are the verses that immediately precede those sung by the people at His triumphal entry into Jerusalem the day before (Matt21:9).
- [43] The point of the parable is clear. God, the "householder", gave to the nation of Israel a "vineyard" that He had prepared, Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. Israel as "tenant farmers" was entrusted with caring for and cultivating the land, and rendering due fruit to God. But the nation rebelled against God. God repeatedly sent His "servants", the prophets, to call the nation to repentance, which Israel persecuted and killed. Finally, God sent Jesus the Messiah, "His Son". The nation knows full well that the identity of Jesus is the "Son", and they plot to kill Him (Cp., Jn11:46-53). For this sin, **this generation** of the nation of Israel will be destroyed (by the Romans in 70 AD). In the latter days, however, the dispersed Jewish people will be regathered as a nation, and **that generation** will bear the fruit

that this generation did not by calling upon Jesus as Messiah (Zech12:10).

- [44] Here Jesus alludes to Isaiah 8:14-15. In Isaiah, the prophet is speaking about the two parts of the nation of Israel (cf. Rom9:6), the believing remnant that accepts Messiah when He comes versus those who reject Him. Thus, Jesus fulfills the OT prophecies that the Messiah would be "a stone of stumbling" and "a rock of offence", a point of division within the nation of Israel.
- [45] The Jewish leadership is all the more culpable because they understand exactly who Jesus claims to be (Cp., Matt21:38).
- [46] Though most of the multitude does not accept Jesus as Messiah, they revere Him as a prophet (Matt21:11) much like John. For this reason the Jewish leadership cannot move against Jesus at this time.

CHAPTER 22

PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE FEAST

- [1] Jesus gives a third parable addressed to the Jewish leadership.
- [2] The "kingdom of heaven" is Matthew's consistently-used term for the literal, messianic kingdom to come on earth (i.e., the Millennium); in this parable, this kingdom is discussed under the figure of a "marriage" (Cp., Isa25:6; Matt9:15; Rev19:9). The "king" is God the Father, and "His Son" is Jesus the Messiah (Ps2:2,7).
- [3] The wedding is prepared and it is time to call those invited to attend. This is a reference to the preaching of John (Matt3:2) and the apostles (Matt10:7) calling the nation of Israel to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". This is the first offer of the kingdom to Israel. However, the nation "would not come" (Jn1:11).
- [4] A second offer of the kingdom is made to the nation of Israel.
- [5] The second offer is also refused.
- [6] At the second offer of the kingdom, the nation begins to slay the "servants". None of the apostles were killed for preaching to the nation in the Gospels. Note that this is not a reference to the crucifixion, for in this parable Jesus is the "Son"; it is the apostles who are the "servants". The persecution and martyring of the apostles begins in the Book of Acts, which records a re-offering of the kingdom to the nation of Israel (Cp., Act3:19-21).
- [7] It is only after the second offer of the kingdom is refused that God judges the nation by bringing Titus and the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem in 70 AD.
- [8] It is clear that the nation of Israel are those "bidden" to the "wedding" (i.e., those for whom the kingdom was prepared).

However, in rejecting Jesus as Messiah, **this generation** of the nation is "not worthy".

- [9] As a result of Israel's refusal, the invitation is now extended to "as many as ye shall find", that is, all (Matt28:19-20). This does not mean Israel is no longer part of the kingdom. Rather, God in His providence uses this stumbling of Israel as the means to bring salvation to the Gentiles; but it will be the salvation of the Gentiles that will "provoke [the Jews] to jealousy", leading them to return to the Lord (Rom11:11).
- [10] This is the world-wide preaching of the gospel "to every creature" (Mk16:15). Note that the invitation to come is extended to all, "both bad and good".
- [11] But while the invitation to come is extended to all, individuals must still come in personal repentance (Matt3:2).
- [12] It is not acceptable to come to the wedding without wearing a "wedding garment". In the parable, these rabble from the "highways" who have been called to the wedding would have been offered appropriate clothing by the king. Apparently, some have refused the king's garments and have attended the wedding in their own filthy garments. When challenged as to why he was not appropriately clothed, he was "speechless (Rom3:19).
- [13] The guest who refused the king's "wedding garment" and wore his own is excluded from the wedding; he is taken away "into outer darkness" where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth", Jewish idioms for *Gehenna*.
- [14] Whereas "the many" (a Hebraism for all) are now invited to the kingdom, not all will participate. Personal repentance is necessary, and those who enter the kingdom cannot appear in their own righteousness (Philip3:9), which is as "filthy rags" (Isa64:6), but must be clothed in the righteousness of Christ (2Cor5:21), a garment which God provides to those who believe (Rom4:5-6).

JESUS IS TESTED BY THE HERODIANS REGARDING TAXES

- [15] Upset that Jesus has just taught in public three parables directed against the Jewish leadership in general, and the Pharisees in particular (the parables of the two sons, the householder who planted a vineyard, and the marriage feast), the Pharisees "took counsel how they might" tempt Jesus to misspeak in public.
- [16] The Pharisees conspire with the "Herodians" in an attempt to publicly "entangle" Jesus in controversy. As their name implies, the Herodians were in effect a political party of Jews that supported Herod's Roman government. Normally the Pharisees and Herodians despised one another, but their hatred of Jesus is great enough to press them into this conspiracy. They open with some hypocritical, feigned flattery of Jesus.

- [17] Their question for Jesus is, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" The question is malevolently devious, since it would appear to entangle Jesus in controversy whether He answers 'yes' or 'no'. Answering 'yes' would give the Pharisees and Zealots, who regarded Roman rule over the Jews as illegitimate, reason to accuse Jesus before the people. Answering 'no' might be even more dangerous, as it would allow the Herodians to accuse Jesus of sedition.
- [18] Jesus recognizes "their wickedness" behind the public test.
- [19] Then Jesus demands to see the money to be used in paying the government tax, and they bring Him a Roman denarius.
- [20] At this time, the denarius bore the image of Caesar, and the inscription read, "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the *Divine* Augustus". Thus, the deification and worship of the Caesars was apparent even from their coinage.
- [21] Jesus answers that the coin is a product of the Roman government, and they have authority to require it of the Jews; in this, Jesus confirms the legitimacy of the divine institution of human government that was initiated by the Noahic covenant (Rom9:6), which Paul will also teach includes taxation (Rom13:1-7). Notwithstanding, the authority of human government is bounded by the sovereignty of God (Cp., Act5:29).
- But the authority of human government to tax its subjects does not negate God's authority to make demands of His creatures. Just as the Jews were obligated to render taxes to Rome, they were obligated to render obedience to God (Matt5:48).
- [22] The Pharisees and Herodians "marveled" at Jesus' response, and neither finds anything which they can use to accuse Him. The Lamb of God has passed another point of inspection.

JESUS IS TESTED BY THE SADDUCEES REGARDING RESURRECTION

- [23] On "the same day" the Sadducees publicly test Jesus. The Sadducees were a Jewish religious sect which at this time controlled the priesthood. The Sadducees were theological liberals who denied most supernatural aspects of the faith (cf. Act23:8); they specifically denied a future resurrection. It is also important to note that they revered only the Torah as Scripture.
- [24] Jesus has repeatedly prophesied His own resurrection (Matt16:21; 17:23; 20:19), giving credence to the Pharisee (and Biblical) doctrine of resurrection. The Sadducees propose a hypothetical scenario thinking to mock the idea of resurrection. Their scenario begins with the provision in the Law of Moses for Levirate marriage (Deut25:5-10). That is, if a man die with no male issue, it is appropriate (though not required) for his brother to take his widow to wife; any children that result are reckoned as the seed and heir of the dead brother.

- [27] In the Sadducees' scenario, one woman is the wife of seven brothers as a result of Levirate marriages.
- [28] The Sadducees think this hypothetical scenario presents an intractable problem if they are all to be resurrected; whose wife will the woman be in the resurrection?
- [29] Jesus' response is a rebuke with three points: 1) their denial of resurrection in particular is an error; 2) their denial of the supernatural in general is an affront to the power of God; and 3) though affirming the Torah to be Scripture, they deny its revelation.
- [30] The Sadducees also have an error in their logic. They have presumed that life in the resurrection will be similar or identical to life now. This is not correct. One of the primary purposes of marriage now is for the procreation of a mortal race (Mal2:15). In the resurrection, glorified man will have an immortal body (1Cor15:51-54) and be "like" the angels, who neither die nor procreate; for this reason, marriage will not exist "in heaven".
- [31] But Jesus' rebuke centers on their denial of Scripture. Scripture teaches resurrection and an afterlife. While it would have been more straightforward to cite one of the classic OT passages on resurrection (e.g., Job19:25-26; Ps16:9-10; Isa26:19; Dan12:2), Jesus does something unexpected; He proves the Scriptures teach resurrection in the Torah, which the Sadducees affirm to be the Word of God.
- [32] Jesus quotes Exodus 3:6. Hundreds of years after the death of the patriarchs, God says, "I am the God of Abraham... Isaac... Jacob". If the existence of these men had ended with death, as the Sadducees asserted, then God would have said, "I *was* the God of Abraham..." Jesus demonstrates that the afterlife can be inferred from the verb tense used by God (Matt5:17-18).
- [33] The Sadducees have no rebuttal. The Lamb of God has passed another test.

JESUS IS TESTED BY THE PHARISEES REGARDING THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

- [34] Both the Herodians and Sadducees have failed in their attempts to publicly discredit Jesus, so now the Pharisees organize their challenge.
- [35] A "lawyer" (i.e., scribe) is put forward to "test" Jesus on a matter of the Law.
- [36] Addressing Him as "Master" (i.e., Teacher), the scribe asks Jesus, "Which is the great[est] commandment in the Law?" The question is actually going to be a two part question; what the Pharisees really want to know is what Jesus believes is the second greatest commandment, as this is the point where the Rabbinical schools of Hillel and Shammai diverge. Jesus realizes this, which is why He gives both the first and second commandments in His response.

Prioritization of the commandments was not a merely theoretical issue of theology detached from real life. The Pharisees rightly recognized that practical situations arise often in which one cannot simultaneously keep all the commandments; thus, in such cases one had to know within the Law which commandments were 'more important' than others.

- [37] Jesus quotes from the *Shema* (Deut6:5), "Love the LORD, thy God" above all else, as the greatest commandment.
- [38] Both Hillel and Shammai affirmed the *Shema* as the first commandment, so there is no controversy at this point.
- [39] Jesus anticipates the follow-up question, which is the heart of the test, so He immediately offers also the second greatest commandment; "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev19:18). In this response, Jesus is in agreement with Hillel and in conflict with Shammai. The followers of Shammai were not themselves in perfect agreement on this point, some placing the Sabbath laws, others the kosher (i.e., cleanliness) laws, as second in priority. The point is, however, that in this response Jesus has placed Himself in conflict with roughly half the Pharisees on a matter of interpreting Scripture.
- [40] Jesus asserts that all of "the Law and the prophets" can be derived from taking these two commandments as first and second in priority.

JESUS CHALLENGES THE PHARISEES REGARDING MESSIAH

- [41] After Jesus' response to their question, the Pharisees "gathered together". They now have a point on which they can attack Jesus, and presumably they are conspiring to do so.
- [42] To preempt their anticipated challenge on interpretation of Scripture, Jesus challenges the Pharisees to provide their interpretation of a passage. Jesus begins indirectly. They know that Jesus has claimed to be both the Christ (i.e., Messiah) and the Son of God (Matt16:16). Jesus asks the Pharisees whose son they understand the Messiah to be? Their answer, "the son of David", is true, but falls far short of the full answer.
- [43] Jesus now challenges them to interpret the words of David, spoken "in the Spirit", where David calls the Messiah, "Lord".
- [44] Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1.
- [45] In this verse of Scripture, David records the LORD, Jehovah, speaking to the Messiah, and David refers to Messiah as "my Lord". It would seem inappropriate for the patriarch David to refer to one of his natural descendents as "Lord". Jesus is pressing the Pharisees to see that while Messiah is "the son of David", He is also much more.

- [46] With this preemptive challenge, Jesus silences the Pharisees in the matter of interpreting Scripture, so that there will be no challenge from them over the issue of the "second commandment". The Lamb of God has passed another test.

CHAPTER 23

JESUS CRITIQUES THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

- [1] Having passed the extensive public testing led by the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus now addresses directly the "multitude" of Jewish pilgrims (along with His disciples) that have come to Jerusalem for Passover concerning the faults of the scribes and Pharisees.
- [2] Jesus affirms that they "sit in Moses' seat", meaning they are teachers of the Law.
- [3] Jesus does not condemn the scribes and Pharisees for their reverence for, and teaching of, the Law of Moses. Indeed, He agrees that the nation is obligated to "observe" their instruction, where it is faithful to the Law. However, with their own practice of the Law Jesus takes issue.
- [4] The problem of the Pharisees was hypocrisy. They were quick to put the full and heavy burden of the Law upon the Jewish people, under which they were likewise condemned.
- [5] The works of the Pharisees were for the purpose of securing the honor of men. Phylacteries were small pouches containing Scripture passages that men bound to their hands and foreheads when praying (Deut6:6-8); the "borders" of a Jewish man's outer garment was required to be blue, with tassels on the four corners, as a reminder to keep the commandments of God (Num15:38-39; Deut22:12). The Pharisees exaggerated these requirements so as to be noticed by men for their apparent (i.e., external) righteousness.
- [6] As the best examples of righteousness within the nation, the Pharisees loved to be honored as such with choice seats in both public as well as the synagogue.
- [7] They loved to be called "Rabbi", which means 'Teacher'.
- [8] Whereas the Pharisees sought to place themselves above their brothers, Christ emphasized that all Jews were equal before their one Teacher, that is "Messiah".
- [9] Similarly, God alone is "Father".
- [10] Christ alone is "Master". This is not to say that there did not exist a God-ordained hierarchy of human authority in Israel, or in the Church today—there was then and is now (e.g., 1Tim5:17; Jas3:1). The point is that we should not seek titles (Rabbi, Father, Master) for the purpose of exalting ourselves before men.

- [11] Christ reiterates His teaching that the greatest among them is he who serves, not just God, but his fellow men.
- [12] In the kingdom, God will abase those who sought to exalt themselves, and will exalt those who humbled themselves (1Pet5:5-6). The pre-eminent illustration of this is Christ Himself (Philip2:5-11).

SEVEN WOES ON THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

- [13] The harshest, most scathing rebuke in all of Scripture is given here by Jesus of the Pharisees (the most 'religious' in Israel) in the form of seven "woes". According to Walvoord, "These woes . . . denounce false religion as utterly abhorrent to God and worthy of severe condemnation".

The first woe of condemnation Jesus pronounces against the Pharisees is for "shut[ting] up of the kingdom of heaven against men". This is a reference to their leading the nation to reject Jesus as King, and in rejecting the King to postpone the Kingdom (Matt12:22-32).

- [14] While making long prayers to appear righteous, the Pharisees made merchandise of the widows whom they were obligated to help (Cp., Deut14:29).
- [15] The Pharisees were zealous in their efforts to make "proselytes", Gentile converts to Judaism. By putting them under their interpretation of the Law, with their legalistic additions, however, it actually took these Gentile converts farther away from the truth of God. The expression "child of Hell" (Greek, *Gehenna*) is a Jewish idiom for one who is deserving of eternal damnation.
- [16] In vv16-22, Jesus denounces the games the Pharisees played in their 'interpretations' of the Law. He refers to them as "blind guides"; that is, being unregenerate they are spiritually blind. It is impossible for them to find their way to the truth, or to lead anyone else to it.
- [17] It is the inherent value of the Temple that sanctifies the gold in it, so the Temple is the greater of the two.
- [19] Similarly, it is the altar that sanctifies the gift on it, so the altar is the greater of the two.
- [22] Thus, Jesus condemns the Pharisees' procedures regarding oaths, which are not only non-biblical additions to the Law, but have been devised as loopholes for releasing them from their commitments and thereby mocking the righteous demands of the Law (Lev19:11-12; Num30:2).
- [23] The hypocrisy of the Pharisees is seen in their attention to minute details of certain external aspects of the Law (i.e., tithing even of herbs), while ignoring entirely the "weightier matters of the Law" (e.g., justice, mercy, faith). Note that Jesus does not condemn their practice of tithing; He condemns

their belief that the practice of tithing can make them righteous, even while they ignore more spiritually significant requirements of the Law.

- [24] The Pharisees have not appropriately ordered their spiritual priorities.
- [25] Jesus condemns again the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Their concern is always with the external which seen by men, rather than with the internal reality. They worked hard at external appearances, but without any genuine personal holiness.
- [26] But as Jesus has previously taught, it is the internal condition that defiles men, not the external (Matt15:1-20). Thus, the priority must be on the internal above the external, exactly opposite of the Pharisees.
- [27] The reference to "whited sepulchers" refers to the Jews' practice of whitewashing entrances of caves used as burial chambers. This was important since pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for the festivals (i.e., Passover) would often use caves for shelter, but would be defiled, rendering them unclean and unable to participate in the Temple services, if they unwittingly entered a sepulcher (Num19:11-22).
- [28] Jesus says this practice was a fitting analogy to the behaviors of the Pharisees—an external whitewashing of that which is internally corrupt.
- [29] In His final woe against the Pharisees, Jesus identifies them as those who did "build" and elaborately "garnish" the "tombs of the prophets" and the "sepulchers of the righteous".
- [30] By doing so, they seek to distance themselves from the acknowledged past sins of their ancestors, who killed the prophets of the LORD sent to the nation of Israel (Cp., Matt21:34-36).
- [31] But Jesus calls to attention their own testimony, that they are "the sons of them who killed the prophets". Because the Mosaic covenant is a national covenant, this generation of Jews indeed bears a national responsibility for the acts of previous generations (cf. Jer31:29-30; Ezek18:2-3).
- [32] Furthermore, the unregenerate and rebellious heart of these Pharisees is not different than that of their ancestors; previous generations of the nation killed the prophets, and this generation will commit the greater sin of killing the Messiah/Son of God (Cp., Matt21:37-38).
- [33] This sin is motivated by the Serpent, who is Satan, whose sons they are (Jn8:44), and is worthy of eternal damnation in Hell.
- [34] This is a reference to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, whose witness to this generation of Israel will be rejected, and who the nation will persecute and martyr beginning in the Book of Acts (Cp., Matt22:6).

- [35] By doing so they prove that they are no different from their "fathers", who killed the prophets (vv30-31). In referring to "the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zechariah", Jesus is using merism to identify the sum total of the martyrdom of the righteous, since in the Hebrew canon of Scripture Abel is the first martyr recorded (Gen4:8) and Zechariah is the last (2Chr24:20-21).
- [36] Thus, "this generation" of Israel, under the Mosaic covenant, is culpable for all the sins of the nation.

LAMENTATION OF JESUS OVER REBELLION OF JERUSALEM

- [37] Here, Jesus uses "Jerusalem" as a synecdoche for the entire nation of Israel. Jesus' conclusion of this chapter is that Israel is guilty of killing the prophets that God sent to the nation (vv34-36) and will soon be guilty of killing God's Son (Matt21:37-39). God/Christ's desire to nurture, protect and bless Israel, as a "hen" naturally cares for her "chickens", has been willfully refused by the nation for ~1,500 years (i.e., since the institution of the Mosaic Covenant as the rule of life for the nation of Israel; Ex19:5-8).

The figure of a mother bird nurturing her young under the protection of her wings used in this verse is an allusion to the inspired (and prophetic) 'national anthem' of Israel given by the LORD through Moses, often referred to as the 'Song of Moses' (Deut32:11). Jesus, by substituting Himself in the place of Jehovah in this allusion, strongly asserts His personal Deity.

- [38] God's centuries of long-suffering has now come to an end. For this national sin, Jesus declares the ultimate curse (i.e., judgment) of the Mosaic Covenant will be executed on the nation (Lev26:32-39; Deut28:49-68), "your house is left unto you desolate". This judgment includes the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the dispersion of the Jews out of the Promised Land (Cp., Luk19:41-44; 21:20-24).
- [39] Again asserting His personal and Divine authority with "I say unto you", Jesus declares that this judgment against the nation of Israel will continue, which includes the absence of the King (i.e., Messiah) and His promised kingdom held in abeyance, "till" the nation of Israel becomes willing to receive and accept Jesus as King Messiah (as indicated by the singing of the 'Hallel' Psalm 118).

The implications of this should not be overlooked, minimized, or spiritualized. Far from God being forever through with the nation of Israel (Rom11:1-2), in fact the very return of Christ and His inauguration of the Davidic (i.e., Millennial) Kingdom on earth is dependent upon the continuation of the Jewish people, their eventual regathering as a nation (Isa11:11-12), and their national regeneration which will result in their repenting of the national sin of rejecting Messiah (Hos5:15-6:3; Zech12:10); Israel's petitioning of Christ's return is actually a prerequisite condition for it! This is the explanation for continuing,

Satanically-motivated anti-Semitism even during the Church Age (Rev12:13-17); even today, if Satan can exterminate the Jewish people, he can prevent the return of Christ. However, God's Word makes clear that a future generation of the nation of Israel will indeed fulfill this prerequisite condition, so Christ's return and His coming Kingdom rests assured by the promise of God (Lev26:40-46; Deut30:1-6; Rom11:26).

Dispensational Note: In contrast to the return (i.e., Second Coming) of Christ to inaugurate the Kingdom, which depends upon the regeneration and repentance of the nation of Israel (Hos5:15; Matt23:37-39), Christ's promise to return for His Church (Jn14:1-3; 1Thess4:13-18) has no prerequisite conditions! This is an important reason why the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ must be distinct and separate events, and the Rapture must precede the Second Coming.

CHAPTER 24

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

- [1] At the end of the previous chapter Christ had pronounced the judgment, "your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt23:38); from Luke's Gospel we know that with this pronouncement the Lord made clear to His disciples that Jerusalem and the Temple were going to be destroyed (Luk19:41-44; 21:20-24). Perhaps shocked by the Lord's declaration of judgment on the Temple, Christ's disciples call His attention to it, which in the days of Herod's extensive renovation was indeed magnificent.
- [2] In response, Jesus reiterates the Temple's coming destruction. His words, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down", came to pass in **70 AD**. Following an 18-month siege, Titus and his 4 Roman legions finally breached the wall of Jerusalem. During subsequent fighting inside the city, the Temple inadvertently caught fire, burning the internal wooden structure, which resulted in its collapse. Titus ordered that the fallen Temple be dismantled stone by stone in order to recover the gold, literally fulfilling this prophecy of Christ.
- [3] Leaving the Temple, Jesus traveled across the Kidron valley and "sat upon the Mount of Olives"; from this location, He would have had an impressive view of the Temple. Here four of His disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew (Mk13:3), came to the Lord "privately" with two questions: 1) When will this destruction of the Temple occur?, and 2) What will be the "sign" of your return? Though some have seen three questions here, in the Greek text, "Thy coming" and "the end of the age" are joined by a single article and conjunction; thus, from the Greek construction of the question it is clear that the disciples understood these to be a single event (not two events that might be separated in time).

Jesus' response to the first question regarding the time of the destruction of the Temple is not recorded by Matthew, but can be found in the Gospel of Luke (Luk21:20ff). Matthew 24-25 records Jesus' response to the second question regarding the signs

associated with His return at the end of the age; this long response, given by Christ while sitting upon the Mount of Olives, has come to be known as the 'Olivet Discourse'. Mark 13 and Luke 21 are parallel accounts of this prophetic discourse, which is not mentioned at all in John's Gospel; the Matthew account, however, is the longest and most detailed of the 3 Gospel accounts.

- [4] In comparing Matthew 24 with Daniel 9:27 and Revelation 6-19, it is apparent that all three deal with Daniel's 70th Week, the seven-year period immediately preceding the Second Coming of Christ, which has come to be known as 'the Tribulation'. Thus, the events described take place after the Rapture of the Church.

Matt24:3-14 records events of the first half of the Tribulation, Matt24:15-20 records events that take place at the midpoint of the Tribulation, and Matt24:21-28 records events of the second half of the Tribulation. Matthew's account of the events of the first half of the Tribulation (Matt24:3-14) correlate with the seven Seal Judgments (Rev6-7), as shown in the Table below.

Prediction	Matthew's "Birth Pangs"	Revelation's Seal Judgments
False Christs	Matt24:5	Rev6:1-2
War	Matt24:6	Rev6:3-4
Famine	Matt24:7	Rev6:5-6
Death	Matt24:6-7	Rev6:7-8
Martyrdom	Matt24:9-13	Rev6:9-11
Earthquakes	Matt24:7	Rev6:12-17
World-wide Evangelism	Matt24:14	Rev7:1-17

Prior to moving into the specific signs, Jesus warns in general to beware of deception and apostasy, which will characterize the end of the age (e.g., 2Thess2:3; 2Tim3:1-13; 2Pet3:3ff; 1Jn4:1; Jude3-4).

- [5] The first specific sign mentioned is the coming of false Messiahs, the pinnacle of which will be the Antichrist himself. The appearance of Antichrist on the world scene, and his signing of a covenant (i.e., peace treaty) with Israel, is the event that begins the 70th Week of Daniel (Dan9:27), which Isaiah refers to as Israel's "covenant with Hell" (Isa28:14-22); from this event to the return of Christ will be exactly 7 years. The ascendancy of Antichrist to global prominence is the 1st Seal Judgment of Revelation (Rev6:1-2).
- [6] The second sign is "war", which is the 2nd Seal Judgment of Revelation (Rev6:3-4).
- [7] The war that ensues from the 2nd Seal Judgment is global. World-wide "famine" and "earthquakes in diverse places" are the 3rd and 6th Seal Judgments of Revelation (Rev6:5-6; 12-17).
- [8] Christ says that these signs are "the beginning of sorrows". Here, the world translated "sorrows" is the Greek word for 'birth pangs'. His point is that the signs of "war", "famine", and "earthquakes" (as well as those to follow) are not isolated

occurrences, but multiple events that build in both frequency and intensity throughout the Tribulation period.

- [9] Yet another "sign" will be intense persecution and martyrdom of believers. This corresponds to the 4th and 5th Seal Judgments of Revelation (Rev6:7-11).
- [10] The Antichrist's program of persecuting believers will set even families and loved ones against each other (Mic7:5-6).
- [11] Antichrist's tactics will be based on deception (2Thess2:4,8-11).
- [12] Because the Holy Spirit's ministry of restraining sin will be removed during the Tribulation (Gen6:3; 2Thess2:6-7), "iniquity shall abound".
- [13] The context of the Olivet Discourse is the world-wide judgments of the Tribulation period. In context, this verse teaches that the one who physically survives to the end of the Tribulation will be "saved", in the sense of being physically delivered by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ Who destroys the Antichrist (Rev19:11-21).
- [14] The "gospel of the kingdom", which is the announcement that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt3:2; 4:17; 10:7), shall again be preached, this time "in all the world", primarily by the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (Rev7:4-8); as a result, a multitude will be saved, especially during the first half of the Tribulation (Rev7:9-17).
- [15] The "abomination of desolation" is the event that marks **the midpoint of Daniel's 70th Week** (Dan9:27). This specific event is the defilement of the LORD's Temple in Jerusalem by the ultimate form of idolatry, that of a man standing in the Holy of holies and presenting himself as 'god'. This abomination has occurred once before in history by Antiochus Epiphanes (c. 168 BC), which was prophesied by Daniel (Dan11:31)—this gives us confidence in knowing exactly what it is. This abomination will be repeated by the Antichrist exactly three-and-a-half years into the Tribulation (Dan9:27; 2Thess2:3-4; Rev13:14-15). This event requires the existence of the Temple, and for this reason the Temple must be rebuilt and in operation no later than the midpoint of the Tribulation.
- [16] While the Seal and Trumpet judgments of God which take place during the first half of the Tribulation will have brought general suffering upon the whole world (Rev6-9), Antichrist's particular persecution of the Jews begins in earnest in "Judea" at the midpoint of the Tribulation (Rev12:13). For this reason, the "abomination of desolation" is the sign to the Jews to "flee into the mountains". Scripture reveals that God will protect the believing Jewish remnant during the last half of the Tribulation at the wilderness sanctuary of "Bozrah" (Isa63:1-6; Rev12:14-17) southeast of the Dead Sea, which later came to be known as Petra.

- [18] So rapid will be the onset of persecution of the Jews by the Antichrist that there will not be time to pack for the flight. Only those who flee immediately will escape alive.
- [19] The flight into the desert wilderness will not be an easy journey; pregnant women and those with nursing babies will find the trip especially difficult.
- [20] If the "abomination of desolation" occurs during the winter or on the Sabbath, it will make the flight even more difficult. Even today, virtually all public (and many private) services in Israel are closed on the Sabbath.
- [21] The last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation will be the most intense time of suffering the world has ever known.
- [22] This verse does not teach that the last half of the Tribulation will be reduced to less than the specified three-and-a-half years duration (Dan9:27; Rev12:14); rather, the idea is that God has sovereignly limited this period of "great tribulation" to exactly three-and-a-half years, for so great will be the suffering during this time that if He allowed it to continue any longer every person would perish.
- [23] Scripture makes clear that Christ will return to earth exactly seven years after the Antichrist signs a peace treaty with Israel, or three-and-a-half years after the "abomination of desolation" (Dan9:27)—both very public events. Thus, there is no reason for anyone to be deceived into believing "Christ" has come before this. Prior to the occurrence of one of these 'signs', no one can know the precise time of Christ's return (v36); after these 'signs', however, the time of Christ's return is known exactly.
- [24] The "great signs and wonders" of both the Antichrist (2Thess2:8-11) and the False Prophet (Rev13:11-15) will be so impressive and persuasive that only by the testimony of the Word of God can "the elect" know that these are not works of God.
- [25] There is no reason to be deceived, for the Lord Himself has provided sufficient warning for what will occur.
- [26] Daily, diligent study of the Bible is vital (2Tim2:15; 3:16-17), for there is no other way to guard against deception.
- [27] The Second Coming of Christ will not be a secret or subtle event that might be legitimately missed by a casual observer. It will be sudden and public such that it cannot fail to be recognized by every person.
- [28] This is probably a reference to the divine summoning of "all the fowls" to devour the carrion associated with the war and destruction associated with the battle of Armageddon which precedes Christ's return (Rev14:14-20; 16:16-21; 19:17-18).
- [29] The return of Christ, "immediately after the tribulation of those days", will be accompanied by tremendous cosmic upheavals (Joel2:30-31).

- [30] At this time "the Son of Man" will return to earth, coming as prophesied "in the clouds of heaven" (Act1:9-11).
- [31] At the Lord's return, the "elect" from every part of the earth will be gathered to Jerusalem to be in the very presence of the Lord. Similar to the Rapture of the Church more than 7 years prior to this, this gathering of "elect" will also include a resurrection of dead believers, namely, Old Testament saints (Dan12:1-2) and Tribulation saints (Rev20:4).

PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE

- [32] Speculation regarding the "parable of the fig tree" has generated much controversy among students of prophecy. Many, most notably Hal Lindsey in *The Late Great Planet Earth*, have equated the blossoming of the "fig tree" with the rebirth of the modern nation of Israel in 1948, which subsequently led to much date-setting. However, nothing here in the context of this parable suggests that the "fig tree" is being used as a symbol for the nation of Israel. Rather, the "fig tree", and "all the trees" (Luk21:29), is used being used as a literal illustration. That is, we know that "summer" is nearing when trees first begin to "put forth leaves".
- [33] Similarly, "the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age" (i.e., the subject of the disciples' question in v4) can be known to be "near" when "ye shall see all these things"—that is, the signs enumerated by Christ in vv4-28. Since the events mentioned by the Lord in vv4-28 all occur during the 7-year Tribulation period, by recognizing them one could know that the coming of the Lord is "near" (no more than 7 years away); this is especially true of "the abomination of desolation" (v15), which is an event that will trigger a 1,260-day countdown to the Second Coming (Dan9:27; Rev12:6).
- [34] Here, Christ's reference to "this generation" must be taken in the context of the Olivet Discourse as the generation (of Israel) present during the Tribulation—that generation of Israel that will witness the signs Christ has enumerated in this chapter, all of which occur during the 7-year Tribulation period. Christ's assertion is two-fold: 1) that these signs all occur during a relatively brief period of time (i.e., 7 years), such that they will all be witnessed by a single generation, and 2) that the nation of Israel "shall not pass" away, that is perish, during the Tribulation; this is an important message of hope to Israel, recognizing that the Antichrist's pre-eminent goal during the second half of the Tribulation will be the destruction of the believing Jewish remnant (Rev12:13-17).
- [35] Christ's "words" are the Word of God, and thus eternal, more enduring than the creation itself (1Pet1:24-25).

EXHORTATION TO BE WATCHFUL

[36] Here in the Lord's Olivet Discourse, the subject changes. Whereas up to this point the focus has been on the nation of Israel in the Tribulation, the Lord now makes reference to the Rapture of the Church (which must occur before the Tribulation begins). That there is an abrupt change in subject is clearly indicated in the Greek text, which opens with *peri de* (translated "but"); according to Fruchtenbaum, "this construction in Greek is a contrastive introduction of a new subject, and, hence, is often translated as: *But concerning* (1Cor7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1; 1Thess5:1; etc.). The usage of this construction points to the introduction of a new subject." It makes sense that the Lord would now change subjects. He has finished answering His disciples' question regarding His Second Coming. However, these same disciples will become the foundation of the Church (Eph2:20), which, as additional NT revelation will subsequently clarify, will escape the wrath of God poured out upon the world during the Tribulation period by the Rapture (1Thess5:9; Rev3:10).

In contrast to the Second Coming, which is preceded by a multitude of signs over a period of 7 years (some of which have been enumerated in this chapter) and thus can be precisely dated once the signs have begun, the Rapture of the Church is a signless, and therefore **imminent**, event; there is nothing that must occur prior to the Rapture, so it might occur at any moment. The time of the Rapture is known by the "Father only" and can never be dated at any point in time.

[37] The time preceding the Rapture is likened to the "days of Noah", which were days leading up to a world-wide Divine judgment.

[38] Just as the days before the flood of Noah were marked by nondescript, 'normal' life (albeit wicked; cf. Gen6:5), so the days just before the Rapture will be those of normal or routine life. Other than great apostasy on the earth (2Thess2:3; 2Tim3:1-5), which is an ambiguous 'sign', there will be nothing to indicate that the world-wide judgment of God is about to begin. That is, "until", just as the believing remnant (i.e., Noah and his family) was taken out of the world and placed by God into the divine protection of the "ark", the Church likewise is removed from the world; the Rapture of the Church is the first indication to the unbelieving world that the judgment of God is approaching.

Pre-trib Note: If the Rapture of the Church were to take place at any point during the Tribulation, it is impossible to see how this verse could be true. Life in the Tribulation, during which God is pouring out His wrath upon the entire world with literally multiple billions killed, will be anything but 'normal'. This verse is a strong point in the multi-faceted case for a pre-trib Rapture.

[39] The event of the Rapture of the Church, and the world-wide judgments that follow it, will take the unbelieving world by surprise, just as did the Flood. Just as when the judgment of the Flood was complete, only believers remained alive to repopulate the new world, so at then end of the Tribulation (and the judgment

at the Lord's return; Matt25:31-46) only believers will remain to enter and populate the Messianic Kingdom on earth.

- [40] Here is the Rapture, which is an instantaneous event (1Cor15:52). The one removed is "taken" to be with the Lord (1Thess4:17) for the purpose of escaping the coming wrath of God poured out on the entire world (1Thess5:9; Rev3:10); this point is emphasized in the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel (Cp., Luk21:34-36).

Greek Note: In the Greek text, the word translated "taken" here in v40 is the same Greek word translated "receive" in John 14:3, another Rapture passage. It is an entirely different Greek word that is translated "took" in v39, where those being judged are the ones taken.

- [41] In v40, the Rapture happens at a time when "two be in the field", typically mid-day. Here, the Rapture happens when "two women shall be grinding at the mill", typically early morning. In Luke 17:34, a third case is included, "in that night there shall be two in one bed", obviously night time. Thus, the Rapture is an event that occurs simultaneously, world-wide (1Cor15:52).
- [42] In light of the imminent (and therefore unpredictable) return of the Lord to Rapture His Church, Christ exhorts His disciples to "watch" at all times. To reiterate this important point, the Lord gives four parables which emphasize the fact that **watchfulness** includes readiness (Matt24:43-44), expectancy (Matt24:45-51), preparedness (Matt25:1-13), and faithfulness (Matt25:14-30) during the Lord's absence; Christ's exhortations in these parables are directed to the disciples as representatives of the nascent Church. In each parable, the attitudes and actions of believers versus unbelievers are contrasted.

PARABLE OF THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE

- [43] The first parable calls attention to a householder who was robbed during the night. Had he known a thief was coming, he would have "watched" (i.e., remained alert, ready).
- [44] The point is that we have been warned that the Lord will come suddenly "in such an hour as ye think not"; thus, the exhortation is to "be ye also **ready**".

Pre-trib Note: The repeated emphasis throughout the NT that the Rapture is an imminent event, that there are no signs that precede it, that it will come when no one expects, that its time cannot be predicted, etc., is a powerful point in the case for the pre-trib Rapture.

PARABLE OF THE FAITHFUL AND WISE SERVANT

- [45] The second parable uses the illustration of a "faithful and wise servant", whom "his lord" has entrusted with the stewardship over the house while he is away for an unspecified period of time.

[46] The "blessed servant" will be the one who, upon the lord's sudden and unannounced return, will be found faithfully executing his lord's directions (1Cor4:2). Thus, this parable makes clear that to wait and watch at all times for His return (vv43-44) is not a time of inactivity, but of diligent labor in those things He commanded His servants to do.

[47] The faithful servant will be rewarded with even greater responsibility over his lord's business; in like manner, those found faithful in this present life, during which the Lord is away, will be rewarded with even more responsibility in the Kingdom which will come when He returns.

[48] However, the "evil servant" doubts the nearness, or even the certainty, of his lord's return (2Pet3:3-4).

Pre-trib Note: Only a pre-trib Rapture preserves imminency, the idea that the Lord's return for His Church could take place suddenly, at any moment. All other eschatological positions, which deny an imminent Rapture, are in effect guilty of saying, "My Lord delayeth His coming".

[49] Doubting the return of his lord, the evil servant departs from the commands of his lord and turns to selfish and sinful pleasures. The doctrine of an imminent Rapture, fervently believed, is powerful motivation for a believer to moment-by-moment live a holy life (2Pet3:10,14; 1Jn3:2-3).

[50] The point of this parable is that the believer should live in **expectancy** of the Lord's imminent return; this characteristic distinguishes believers from unbelievers (1Thess5:1-11).

[51] That the "evil servant" is an unbeliever is clear, in that when he is judged he is sent to the place where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth", which is a Hebrew idiom for Hell (Matt22:13); this is made explicit in the parallel account in Luke's Gospel (Luk12:46).

CHAPTER 25

PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

[1] In this parable, the Lord likens the coming of the "kingdom of heaven" (i.e., the literal Messianic kingdom to come on earth) to ten virgins awaiting the coming of the bridegroom. The duty of these virgins in the ancient Jewish wedding ritual was to have oil-filled lamps prepared and ready in advance of the imminent arrival of the bridegroom.

Ancient Jewish Wedding Ritual. In the ancient Jewish wedding ritual, the bridegroom's father arranged for a bride for his son, including the price the son was to pay for his bride. Upon payment of this price by the son the espousal period began, which was legally binding and could not be broken without a divorce, but the marriage was not consummated at this time. Rather, the

bridegroom went away and was not seen by the bride for an extended period of time (approximately one year). The extended espousal period served two purposes: 1) it tested the bride's commitment to remain faithful while awaiting the coming of the bridegroom, and 2) it provided time needed for the bridegroom to return to his father's house and prepare a place for him and his bride to consummate their marriage—this was generally accomplished by the son building an additional room onto his father's house. When the room was completed *to the father's satisfaction*, the son was released to go and claim his bride.

The coming of the bridegroom for his bride was an unannounced event, generally occurring at night. This scenario (i.e., the imminent return of the bridegroom) served to keep the bride and her maids always watchful, expectant, and prepared for the sudden arrival of the bridegroom. As the bridegroom approached the home of the bride a shout would be given announcing his arrival (and alerting the bride), and he would be met by a procession of virgins (i.e., bride's maids) who would conduct the bride and bridegroom back to the place prepared at the father's house; because the bridegroom's coming generally occurred at night, the bride's maids were expected to have oil-filled lamps prepared in advance. At the father's house the marriage would be consummated, followed by a wedding feast (or marriage supper) with invited guests that could last up to a week.

- [2] The contrast highlighted in this parable is between "wise" virgins and "foolish" virgins; that is, those who were prepared and those who were not prepared for the coming of the bridegroom.
- [3] The foolish virgins, although knowing of the promise of the bridegroom to return suddenly to claim his bride, never filled their lamps with "oil". These lamps were kept especially for this event and were not burned on other occasions, so it is not that they had used all their oil; rather, they had never been filled in preparation. As "oil" is so often used as a type of the Holy Spirit in the OT (Ex29:7; 1Sam16:12-13), the foolish virgins without oil in their lamps should be understood to be unbelievers (Rom8:9; 2Cor1:22; Eph1:13; 4:30). Thus, the distinction being made in this parable is not between different types of believers, but between believers and unbelievers.
- [4] The "wise" virgins, believing the promise of the bridegroom to return, prepared their lamps in advance by filling them with oil; their preparation testifies to their faith (Jas2:18).
- [5] Note that in the parable the bridegroom is absent for such a long time that "they all slumbered and slept", believers as well as unbelievers (Cp., 2Pet3:3-4).
- [6] The bridegroom comes suddenly "at midnight". This is the event for which the virgins (should) have been waiting and watching, and for which they ought to be prepared by having their lamps filled with oil.

- [7] The test of preparedness has come, and it is now time for the virgins to light their lamps.
- [8] The "foolish" virgins are not prepared, having no oil in their lamps, whereas the "wise" virgins are ready with oil-filled lamps.
- [9] There will be no store open at midnight at which the foolish virgins can "buy" oil. It is too late to prepare once the bridegroom has arrived.
- [10] The point of this parable is **preparedness**. Only "they that were ready went in . . . to the marriage", where the "marriage" or wedding feast represents the kingdom (see comments on Matt22:2). This was the point of John's message of "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt3:2)—that when Messiah comes bringing His kingdom, only those ready (i.e., believers) will enter.
- [11] As in Matthew 7:21-23, the foolish virgins are seen to be mere professors.
- [12] As unbelievers, regardless of whatever works they may or may not have, the foolish virgins do not know the bridegroom, and they are not known by him.
- [13] So, just as the virgins (i.e., the bride's maids) know to expect the coming of the bridegroom, but cannot predict "the day nor the hour" of his coming (so that they must be prepared at all times), so this parable emphasizes that one must be prepared for the imminent return of Christ. It is the believer that is prepared and will not be taken by surprise at the Lord's coming (1Thess5:1-11).

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

- [14] The final parable emphasizes faithfulness in diligently laboring for the Lord in His absence. In this parable, the "man" who charges his servants to manage his "goods" while away in a far country is obviously Christ.
- [15] All of the servants are given stewardships over portions of the man's resources, although not all stewardships are equal; they are apportioned according to the "ability" of the servant. A "talent" is 6,000 denarii, which is the equivalent of roughly 20 year's worth of pay for a servant; thus, even the servant who receives only one talent is entrusted with a very large sum of money.
- [16] The one entrusted with five talents "traded with the same", making an additional five talents for his lord; this represents a 100% rate of return.
- [17] Likewise, the one entrusted with two talents also invested his lord's money and received a 100% rate of return.
- [18] However, the one entrusted with one talent fails to invest his lord's money.

- [19] The lord of these servants returns "after a long time". Upon his return, the lord evaluates the faithfulness of the servants in their labors for him in his absence (Cp., 2Cor5:9-10).
- [21] The servant who took his lord's five talents and used them to gain five more was commended by his lord for "good and faithful" service. Having proved faithful in this stewardship, his lord promises to give him even more responsibilities.
- [23] The servant who took his lord's two talents and used them to gain two more receives the same commendation from his lord as the one entrusted with five talents. Thus, in evaluating the results of their labors, the lord takes into consideration the differing opportunities available to each servant.
- [24] Now the servant entrusted with one talent is evaluated. He attempts to justify his lack of labor for his master by appealing to the "hard" and demanding character of the lord. Whether or not his characterization of the lord in the parable is true cannot be known, but it is irrelevant; if the lord were as demanding as the servant portrays, fear of "hard" judgment upon his return ought to have motivated diligent labor on the part of the servant.
- [25] The inference is that this servant lacks faith; he doubts the promised return of the lord. By hiding his lord's money "in the earth", he can return it to him should he return; but if he fails to return, he can keep it for himself.
- [26] This servant is judged to be both "wicked" and "slothful". Note that it is not mere laziness that is condemned; the motive behind the servant's inaction is "wicked".
- [27] Apparently, the lord in the parable would have been satisfied with mere interest on his money that could be obtained by depositing it with "the exchangers" (i.e., a bank). Some have speculated that this servant did not deposit the money as that would have put it on record as belonging to the lord; by "hiding" it rather than depositing it, he could keep it for himself if the lord failed to return. Again, the conclusion is that this servant doubts the return of the lord.
- [28] In judgment, that which had been entrusted to him is taken from him; it is given to that servant that has proved himself to be faithful.
- [29] The references here to those that "hath" and "hath not" are references to *faith*. Those who have faith are motivated to serve the Lord in his absence, and their faithfulness will be rewarded; those who lack faith as a result produce no fruit and will be judged (Matt7:16-20). Walvoord comments: "Here, as elsewhere in Scripture, while works may be an evidence of salvation, they are never the ground of salvation. The one-talent man, while deficient in works, was condemned because of his lack of faith."
- [30] The Hebrew idioms used here indicate that the "unprofitable servant" is to be cast into Hell, confirming that it is unbelief that is being judged, not mere slothfulness. The point of this

parable is that the servant who truly believes the promise of his Lord to return and judge him (cf. Rev22:12) will manifest **faithfulness** in laboring diligently according to the stewardship entrusted to him; failure to do so is taken as evidence that the Lord's promise to return was never believed (2Pet3:3-4).

THE SHEEP AND GOAT JUDGMENT

- [31] When Christ returns "in His glory" (i.e., at the Second Coming, not the Rapture), He will be accompanied by "all the holy angels" (Cp., Rev19:14). His literal return to earth will be for the purpose of His "sit[ting] upon the throne of His glory".

Premillennial Note: The Lord Jesus Christ is not sitting on His throne in heaven today; during this inter-advent age, Christ is sitting on His Father's throne (Rev3:21). Christ's throne is the "throne of . . . David", which is an earthly throne over the "house of Jacob" (Luk1:32-33). Christ must return to earth and sit upon this earthly throne in order to fulfill the promise God made to David (2Sam7:12-16; 1Chron17:11-14; Luk1:32-33). The Davidic covenant demands an Premillennial view of the coming Kingdom.

- [32] At the time of Christ's coming in glory (i.e., at the end of the 7-year Tribulation), all Gentiles who survive the Tribulation will be gathered before Him for judgment. Although most English translations render the Greek *ethnos* in this verse as "nations", it is better translated Gentiles, as the subjects of this judgment are individuals rather than nations. This judgment will take place in "the valley of Jehoshaphat" (Joel3:12), which lies between the city of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. This judgment results in the separation of all living Gentiles into two groups, "sheep" and "goats".

- [33] The judgment results in the "sheep" being set on Christ's right hand, a position of honor, and the "goats" on the left (i.e., dishonor).

Pre-trib Note: Note that at the time of Christ's Second Coming, after His physical return to earth, the sheep and goats (i.e., the righteous and the unrighteous, or believers and unbelievers) are still inter-mingled. This would not be true if the Rapture had occurred at the same time as the Second Coming, as the post-tribulation Rapture position advocates. The Rapture must occur a significant time before the Second Coming to allow for new believers to be produced.

- [34] Note that Christ at this time is referred to as "the King" (Zech14:9; Rev19:16). Those "on His right hand" (i.e., the sheep) "inherit the Kingdom"; thus, the purpose of this judgment is for determining who among the Gentiles that survive the Tribulation period alive will be allowed to enter the Kingdom which Christ will establish on earth at His return.

- [36] Christ's standard of judgment will be whether or not individual Gentiles cared for and ministered to Christ.

- [39] The "righteous" sheep are confused, not understanding when they ever ministered to the person of Christ in the ways He described.
- [40] Christ explains that He reckons their ministering to "my brethren" as ministering to Him personally (Cp., Act9:4). In so doing, Christ introduces a third group of people, "my brethren", in addition to the "sheep" and "goats". Note that Christ's "brethren" are not subjects of this judgment, but the standard of it.

Who are these Christ refers to as "my brethren"? They are the Jews of the Tribulation period, who are Christ's "kinsmen according to the flesh" (cf. Rom9:3-5). These Jews, who are being converted to Christ by the ministry of the 144,000, will be the subjects of intense persecution by the Antichrist in Satan's attempt to exterminate the Jewish race, especially during the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation (Rev12:13-17). In light of Antichrist's persecution of these Jews, Christ judges the Gentiles of the Tribulation according to their actions toward them, as stipulated in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen12:3). This is not salvation by works, but an evaluation of works that evidence salvation (Cp., Jas2:14-20; Heb11:31).

- [41] Then, those "on the left hand" (i.e., the goats) are "cursed" and sentenced to "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" , which is the Lake of Fire (Rev20:10). These Gentiles will not participate in the Kingdom.
- [45] Again, the standard of their judgment is how these Gentiles of the Tribulation ministered to the suffering Jews among them, according to the requirement of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen12:3).
- [46] Thus, all the Gentiles who survive the Tribulation are personally judged by Christ at His return. The "goats" are unbelievers who will not enter the Kingdom, but immediately "go away into everlasting judgment"; the "sheep" are "righteous" believers who possess "life eternal" and "inherit the kingdom" (v34).

CHAPTER 26

JEWISH LEADERS PLOT TO KILL CHRIST

- [1] Christ's extended discourse (Matt24-25) given in response to the disciples' question, "what shall be the sign of they coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt24:3), is concluded.
- [2] Jesus reiterates His teaching that He will be betrayed and crucified (Matt20:19), revealing here that it will be on "the Passover", which is two days away.
- [3] The entirety of the Jewish leadership "assembled together", including the "priests", "scribes", and "elders" at the palace of the "high priest . . . Caiaphas".

- [4] The Jewish leadership, representing the nation of Israel, conspires to "kill" Jesus (Cp., Matt21:38-39).
- [5] However, "they" do not want Him to die on "the feast day", while Jerusalem is filled to overflowing with pilgrims; however, in fulfillment of the ancient type, the Lamb of God must be sacrificed on the Passover, the 14th of Nisan (Ex12:6; Lev23:5).

JESUS ANOINTED FOR HIS BURIAL BY MARY

- [6] During the week before Passover, Jesus taught publicly in Jerusalem during the day, but He and his disciples returned to Bethany each evening (Matt21:17). This evening Jesus and His disciples are in the home of one known as "Simon, the leper", although he had undoubtedly been cleansed by Christ (Matt8:2).
- [7] The "woman" is identified as Mary, the sister of Lazarus, in John's Gospel (Jn12:3). During the dinner, Mary anoints the Lord's head with "very precious ointment", elsewhere identified as "spikenard" (Mk14:3).
- [8] The disciples "had indignation" at the waste of the costly perfume; John's Gospel indicates that this objection was led by "Judas Iscariot".
- [9] The value of the perfume was "three hundred denarii" (Mk14:5), or a full year's wage.
- [10] Jesus asserts that Mary's action was not "waste", but rather "a good work".
- [11] Jesus is not suggesting that giving to the poor is not a worthy ideal. However, the disciples will have many opportunities to do so after the Lord's death, whereas their remaining time with Him is almost ended.
- [12] Jesus indicates the motivation behind Mary's act, "she did it for my burial". This reveals that Mary, perhaps alone among the disciples, took seriously the Lord's teaching of His upcoming death.
- [13] Jesus declares that Mary's "good work" will forever "be told for a memorial of her".

JUDAS AGREES TO BETRAY JESUS

- [14] The time has arrived for Judas to arrange to betray Christ, so he "went unto the chief priests".
- [15] Having already conspired to seek to kill Jesus (v4), the priests recognize this as the opportunity for which they have been waiting. They "covenanted" with Judas to pay "thirty pieces of silver" for him to "deliver" Jesus to them; this sum of money was the value of a common slave (Ex21:32) and four centuries before was prophesied to be the price of Messiah's betrayal (Zech11:12).

Judas' promise to "deliver" Jesus to the chief priests involves more than merely pointing Him out to them, which would be of little value; implied in the "covenant" is the testimony of Judas against Jesus in the subsequent trial(s) that will condemn Him.

- [16] With the agreement in place, Judas now looks for the right time to betray his Master.

PREPARATIONS MADE FOR THE PASSOVER

- [17] There is some difficulty caused by this verse and the chronology that follows. This day is Wednesday of Passion week, and Jesus and His disciples will eat the Passover supper in the evening (i.e., Wednesday evening, which is Thursday the 14th of Nisan by Jewish reckoning). However, they apparently keep the Passover a day before the rest of Jerusalem, since on the next morning, when Jesus appears before Pilate, the Jewish leadership has not eaten the Passover and are expecting to do so the following evening (cf. Jn18:28). Without fully reconciling all the details, it is clear the Jesus and His disciples keep the Passover on the evening of Nisan 14, a day before the rest of Jerusalem (but still consistent with the requirements of the Law; cf. Ex12:6), such that Jesus is also crucified on Nisan 14, the day of the Passover on which the lambs are sacrificed.
- [18] None of the gospels identify the man at whose house the Lord and His disciples kept this last Passover, but he lived "in the city" (i.e., Jerusalem) and was presumably a believer in Jesus as Messiah.
- [19] The disciples spend this day, Wednesday, making preparations for the Passover supper they will observe with Jesus in the evening.

JESUS' LAST PASSOVER

- [20] Thus, on Wednesday evening Jesus eats the Passover supper with His twelve disciples.
- [21] David had long ago prophesied that Messiah would be betrayed by a "familiar friend" (Ps41:9); here, Jesus reveals that it will be one of the twelve.
- [22] It is interesting that each disciple fears himself capable of betraying the Lord, recognizing his own depravity (Jer17:9).
- [23] In response to the disciples' questions, Jesus indicates His betrayer "dippeth his hand with me in the dish". As recorded by Matthew this does not narrow the betrayer among the twelve, as the Passover ritual required all to share the same sop dish. In John's Gospel, however, he indicates that Jesus passed the sop dish to Judas after these words (Jn13:25-26).
- [24] There is no conflict between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Though fore-ordained that Messiah would be

betrayed and crucified (Act2:23; Rev13:8), nevertheless His betrayer will be held responsible for his wicked act.

- [25] Then Judas asks, "Master, is it I?" Note that he addresses Jesus as "Master" (i.e., teacher), rather than "Lord" as the other disciples (v22). In response, Jesus straightforwardly affirms that it is Judas. John's Gospel indicates that the other disciples did not hear or understand this exchange between Jesus and Judas, and that at this point Judas leaves the room so that he is not present when the Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper (cf. Jn13:27-30).

THE FIRST LORD'S SUPPER

- [26] Now, "as they were eating" the Passover meal, Jesus institutes what comes to be known as the "Lord's supper" (1Cor11:20). Thus, the Lord's Supper that we observe today is merely a small part of what was the Passover seder. It is for this reason that the early Christians continued to observe the Lord's Supper as part of a meal (cf. 1Cor11:20-34), which came to be known as a "Love Feast" (Jud12).

Jesus reveals that in the ritual of the Lord's Supper, the unleavened "bread" which is "broke" represents His body, offered on our behalf (1Cor11:24; 15:3).

- [27] Paul indicates that the cup of wine used at the Lord's Supper was the "cup of blessing" (1Cor10:16), also known as the cup of *redemption*, which was the third of four cups drank during a Passover seder.

- [28] In the ritual of the Lord's Supper, the cup represents the Lord's "blood . . . shed for [the] many for the remission of sins". In the Greek text, "many" is articulated, such that it would literally be "*the many*" (a Hebraism for 'more than the sum', a hyperbolic way of expressing 'all'); thus, Christ reveals that His blood will be shed for all (1Jn2:2).

Jesus indicates that with the offering of His "body" and "blood" (i.e., His death), "*the New Testament*" (or Covenant) will be inaugurated. It is via the New Covenant, in contrast with the Old Covenant (i.e., Mosaic Covenant) that God provides for the forgiveness of sin (Jer31:31-34; Ezek36:25-28; Heb8:6-13).

- [29] This Passover is known as an 'unfinished' Passover, since after drinking the 3rd cup Jesus vows not to drink of the "fruit of the vine" again until He drinks it with His disciples "in my Father's kingdom". Thus, the 4th cup of the Passover seder, the cup of *praise*, was not drank. Since Jesus has not yet drank this cup with His disciples, the "kingdom" has not yet been inaugurated. This event will literally take place at "the marriage supper of the Lamb" when Christ returns (Rev19:9).

- [30] The traditional Passover seder ended with the singing of a "hymn", as our Lord's Supper does today. With the Passover seder/Lord's

Supper concluded, Jesus and His disciples (minus Judas) depart for the "Mount of Olives".

JESUS PROPHECIES PETER'S DENIAL

- [31] Whereas Peter's denial is best remembered, it must be recognized that all of the disciples were "offended because of [Christ] this night"; all will be ashamed, and none will stand up for Christ. This fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7.
- [32] Jesus reminds the disciples of His promised resurrection, and indicates He will meet them in "Galilee".
- [33] Peter foolishly vows that even if all others forsake the Lord, yet he "never" will.
- [34] Jesus prophesies that this very night, Peter will deny Him not once, or twice, but "thrice".
- [35] Peter and all the disciples vow to "die" rather than "deny" their Lord. Jesus will soon remind them that "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (v41). The Apostle Paul would later agonize over his own inability to do for the Lord that which he most desired (Rom7:15-25).

IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

- [36] Jesus and His disciples come to a garden "called Gethsemane". The name of the place is quite significant; "Gethsemane" means 'oil press', the devise used to crush olives so that the oil will come out (Cp., Jn16:7). Jesus commands most of the disciples to "sit" while He goes to pray alone.
- [37] Jesus advances further into the garden with only Peter, James and John. These three disciples are apparently Jesus' most intimate earthly companions; it was they who saw the Lord in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt17:1ff). As Jesus begins to contemplate what He knows is immediately before Him, He becomes "sorrowful and very heavy".
- [38] A bit farther into the garden, Jesus commands Peter, James and John to "tarry here, and watch" as He prays alone.
- [39] Now Jesus advances even further into the garden alone and "fell on His face, and prayed". Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is His time of greatest trial on earth, and was accompanied by "strong crying and tears" (Heb5:7). In His prayer, Jesus expresses His unconditional submission to the will of God His Father, which becomes an example for every believer (Philip2:5-8). Jesus petitions that the Father's will be accomplished in another way (i.e., a way other than His death and separation from the Father). Christ's petition, "if it be possible", would certainly have been granted; that it was not indicates that the death of Christ, the Son of God, was the only way God could redeem man. There are not many possible ways for fallen man to be reconciled to God; there is **one**

and only one way, and that is through Christ and His work of propitiation (Jn10:7-9; 14:6; 1Jn2:2; 2:22-23).

- [40] After His first prayer, Jesus is discouraged to find His closest disciples fallen asleep.
- [41] Jesus commands His disciples to "watch and pray", knowing their greatest "temptation" (i.e., to forsake Him) is imminent. How vitally important it is that the believer be spiritually prepared in advance of temptation, "praying always" and "watching . . . with all perseverance and supplication" (Eph6:11-18).
- [42] Jesus prays the same prayer a "second time".
- [43] Again, He finds His disciples fallen asleep.
- [44] Jesus prays "the same words" a "third time".
- [45] Again, the disciples are asleep when He returns from praying the third time; Jesus passed His period of greatest personal trial alone—no one with Him, and no one praying for Him. Knowing that in a short time they will be awakened for a sleepless night, He does not wake them this time. Possibly, the Lord spends a brief period of time praying for His disciples (cf. Luk22:32).

BETRAYAL AND ARREST OF JESUS

- [46] Presumably a short period of time passes between v45 and v46. Sensing the coming of Judas and his band, Jesus awakes the disciples.
- [47] Judas arrives with an armed "multitude" sent from the "chief priests and elders".
- [48] A "kiss" had been prearranged between Judas and the mob as the sign that Jesus was to be taken.
- [49] Again, Judas addresses Jesus as "Master" (i.e., Teacher) rather than Lord, "and he kissed Him". The fact that a "kiss" was the sign of betrayal highlights the fulfillment of the prophecy that it would be a "familiar friend, in whom I trusted" that betrayed Messiah (Ps41:9).
- [50] Jesus has never before addressed any of His disciples as "friend" (cf. Jn15:14-15). But here, by addressing Judas as "friend", Jesus calls attention to the prophecy of His betrayal (Ps41:9).
- [51] As the mob attempts to take the Lord, Peter (cf. Jn18:10) drew his sword and "struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear". At this point, Peter is indeed standing with the Lord, even risking his own life in His defense.
- [52] Jesus immediately put a stop to the violence by reprimanding Peter—now is not the time to fight.

- [53] And if it were time to fight, Jesus reveals that He could petition His Father and receive aid from "more than twelve legions of angels" (i.e., >72,000).
- [54] However, to fight now was not the will of God the Father, as already revealed in "the scriptures", which prophesy that "the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him" (Matt20:18-19; cf. Isa53).
- [55] Jesus calls attention to the wicked motives of the Jewish leadership. He has "daily" taught "in the temple" before large crowds of Jewish pilgrims. If His crime was so great, why was He not taken then? The obvious reason is that the people considered Him to be a prophet (Matt21:11), certainly not guilty of any crime. That this mob has come in the dead of night to steal Him away confirms their action is evil and unjust.
- [56] Jesus reiterates that "all this was done . . . that the scriptures . . . might be fulfilled". With this, "all the disciples forsook Him", just as He had prophesied earlier (v31; Zech13:7).

SECOND TRIAL: JESUS BEFORE CAIAPHAS

Jesus' Six Trials. **1)** Before Annas, the legitimate but deposed high priest (Jn18:12-13), **2)** before Caiaphas, the official high priest (Matt26:57-68; Mk14:53-65; Jn18:19-24), **3)** before the Sanhedrin (Matt27:1-2; Mk15:1; Luk22:66-71), **4)** before Pilate, Governor of Judea, the first time (Matt27:11-14; Mk15:2-5; Luk23:1-5; Jn18:28-38), **5)** before Herod, Governor of Galilee (Luk23:6-12), and **6)** before Pilate a second time (Matt27:15-26; Mk15:6-15; Luk23:13-25; Jn18:39-19:16).

- [57] Matthew records that Jesus is brought to "Caiaphas, the high priest". Jesus actually undergoes six distinct trials on the night before His crucifixion, only four of which are recorded in Matthew's Gospel.
- [58] Peter follows from "afar off" the mob that takes Jesus to the "palace" of Caiaphas.
- [59] Jesus is interrogated first by the high priest Caiaphas, and later by "all the council" (i.e., the Sanhedrin); these two trials are somewhat blended together in Matthew's account. Note that this is not a 'fair' trial, as the Jewish leadership is prepared to accept, and even involved in soliciting, testimony they know to be false in an attempt to find a legal basis to sentence Jesus to death.
- [60] The problem was not that they could not find an abundance of false witnesses, but that by Law the testimony of two of the witnesses had to agree in order to sustain a death sentence (Deut17:6).

Presumably the "chief priests" who had "covenanted" with Judas to deliver Jesus to them were counting on testimony from him (v15), but he is no where to be found.

- [61] Finally they find one point of agreement between two of the false witnesses, Jesus' claim to be able to rebuild the temple in three days. But even this charge is perverted and false. First, they twist Jesus' teaching to sound as if He would destroy the Temple, when in fact His assertion was that they would (Jn2:19); second, in this teaching Jesus was using "temple" figuratively to refer to "His body", not the literal Temple at all (Jn2:21).
- [62] During this trial Jesus makes no defense for Himself, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 53:7. Jesus offers no defense for two reasons. First, on a mundane level, the trial is a mockery, He has not been officially charged, so it is not even appropriate for Him to offer a defense. Second, and much more importantly, the events which will culminate in His crucifixion have been initiated; as a part of this work, the sins of all the world will be imputed to Him (2Cor5:21), such that His death can be reckoned as payment for them (Rom3:25; 1Cor15:3; 1Jn2:2). As sinners (Rom3:23), fallen man justly deserves death (Rom6:23); as a substitute for sinners, and being made "sin for us", no legitimate defense can be offered.
- [63] Finally, Caiaphas "the high priest" places Jesus under a sacred oath, which by Law requires Him to answer truthfully (Lev5:1). Caiaphas wants to know if Jesus claims to be "the Christ, the Son of God". All Jews know that Scripture teaches that Messiah will be the Son of God (Ps2:2,7), and they further understand that the title "the Son of God" asserts Deity (Jn5:17-18; 10:30-33). Here is the heart of the issue: the unbelieving Jewish leadership will not accept Jesus' claim to be God!
- [64] Jesus affirms that He is Messiah and the Son of God with, "Thou hast said", indicating that the high priest has spoken correctly. He goes on to allude to Daniel 7:13-14, a passage that makes use of the messianic title "Son of man". Thus, Jesus links two Old Testament messianic titles, the Son of God and the Son of man, and applies them to Himself.
- [65] The "high priest" declares Jesus' response to be "blasphemy"; by charging Jesus with "blasphemy", Caiaphas denies Jesus' claim to be "the Son of God" (i.e., Deity). Of note, for the high priest to rend his clothes was a violation of the Law (Lev21:10).
- [66] With the council now in agreement that Jesus has committed "blasphemy" against the LORD, they have a legal basis for sentencing Him to death (Lev24:16).
- [67] It is before the Jewish Sanhedrin that the physical abuse of Jesus begins.
- [68] They mock His claim to be "Christ" (i.e., the Divine Messiah).

PETER DENIES CHRIST

- [69] While in the outer "court" of Caiaphas' palace awaiting the result of Jesus' trial before the high priest, Peter is recognized by a "maid" as a disciple of Jesus.
- [70] Peter denies the maid's assertion (first denial).
- [71] Having been recognized, Peter leaves the courtyard and goes out onto the "porch". Here he is recognized by "another" (Greek, *allos*) as one who was "with Jesus of Nazareth".
- [72] This time Peter denies "with an oath" even knowing Jesus (second denial).
- [73] After "a while", others among the crowd also waiting on the porch challenge Peter as "surely" being one who was with Jesus. They recognize his accent is Galilean and can't imagine any other reason a Galilean would be at Caiaphas' palace awaiting news about "the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee" (Matt21:11). "Surely" Peter must be "one of them" (i.e., the disciples of Jesus).
- [74] This time Peter curses and swears that, "I know not the man", denying the Lord this third time in strongest of terms.
- [75] Upon hearing the "cock crow", Peter immediately "remembered the word of Jesus" which prophesied his three denials (v34). Knowing he had failed his Lord, despite his word to the contrary (v33), he "wept bitterly".

CHAPTER 27

THIRD TRIAL: JESUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

- [1] The trial during the night before Caiaphas and (apparently) only a portion of the "council" (v59) had to await "morning" to be confirmed by "all the chief priests and elders of the people" (i.e., the full Sanhedrin). When they had heard the testimony "against Jesus", the charge of "blasphemy" (i.e., His personal claim to be God!) was sustained and the Sanhedrin sentenced Him "to death".
- [2] However, the Sanhedrin's authority to carry out a death sentence had been previously curtailed by Rome. Thus, they "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate, the [Roman] governor" of Judea to petition him to carry out their death sentence.

JUDAS OVERCOME WITH REMORSE

- [3] The consequences of Judas' betrayal (i.e., a death sentence on Jesus) apparently went beyond his expectations. Judas "repented" (i.e., showed remorse for his actions because of the unexpected consequences, but this does not mean he exercised saving faith; Cp., Heb12:16-17) and attempts to return the "thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders" (Matt26:14-16).

- [4] At this point Satan has already indwelt Judas (Luk22:3; Jn13:27), so this declaration of Christ's innocence is in effect from the Satan himself. The Lamb of God has been declared to be "without blemish" (Ex12:5) by Judas/Satan. Judas' remorse has no effect on the Jewish leadership.
- [5] Not wanting to keep the money he received for his betrayal of Christ, Judas takes it and throws it into the "temple" (Greek, naos, which is specifically the Holy Place). Then Judas commits suicide by hanging himself (apparently over a cliff, such that when the rope breaks and he falls his bowels rupture; Cp., Act1:18).
- [6] Ever mindful of keeping the external requirements of the Law, the "chief priests" realize they cannot put the money back into the treasury since it is blood money (i.e., money paid to bring about a man's death).
- [7] Instead, they use the money to purchase a potter's field (i.e., a place where potters dug for clay) in Judas' name (Act1:18). The Temple was obligated to provide for the burial of "strangers" who died in and around Jerusalem, so the purchase of this field for that purpose the chief priests considered a wise use of the blood money.
- [8] For this reason, this burial plot became known as "the field of blood" (Act1:19).
- [9] Matthew asserts that this complicated transaction was a fulfillment of "that which was **spoken** by Jeremiah, the prophet".
- [10] Difficulty with this assertion comes from the fact that the subsequent quotation appears to be an allusion to, though not an exact quotation of, Zechariah 11:13. Zechariah 11:12-13 indeed prophesies that Messiah will be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, and that the blood money will be "cast . . . unto the potter . . . in the house of the LORD", an amazingly specific prophecy of what would come to pass. Resolution of the difficulty likely comes from the fact that Matthew says that these words were "spoken" by Jeremiah, not written by him. Since Jeremiah did record some words very similar to these (e.g., Jer19:1-11), it must be that Jeremiah also uttered the prophecy Matthew cites, although it was not committed to written form until the time of Zechariah.

FOURTH TRIAL: JESUS BEFORE PILATE (FIRST TIME)

- [11] The Sanhedrin delivered Jesus to Pilate, the Roman "governor" of Judea, to seek his endorsement of their death sentence. However, whereas Jesus' conviction before the Jews was for blasphemy (i.e., His assertion to be "the Son of God"), before Pilate the Jews accuse Him of claiming to be "King of the Jews", in effect charging Him with sedition against Roman rule. When asked, "Art Thou the King of the Jews?", Jesus clearly acknowledges that He is (1Tim6:13).

- [12] However, before the accusations of the "chief priests and elders", Jesus "answered nothing" (Isa53:7).
- [14] Pilate "marveled greatly" that one charged with a capital offence would offer no defense. Though not recorded by Matthew, it is at this point that Pilate learns Jesus is a Galilean; knowing that Herod, the Governor of Galilee, is in Jerusalem for the feast, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod. However, Herod, after mocking Jesus, returned Him to Pilate (Luk23:6-12).

SIXTH TRIAL: JESUS BEFORE PILATE (SECOND TIME)

- [15] Herod, refusing to take any action against Jesus, returns Him to Pilate (likely deferring to Pilate's jurisdiction in Jerusalem). Pilate does not believe Jesus to deserve a death sentence; he wants to release Jesus, but is sensitive to the need as leader of a foreign occupation to pacify the Jewish leadership when possible. One last avenue available to him is a direct appeal to the people. It was customary for the governor to release a prisoner of the people's choosing as a token gift on Passover.
- [16] To give the people an option, Pilate selected also "Barabbas" (whose name means 'son of the father'), one well-known to the Jewish public as a robber (Jn18:40) and murderer (Mk15:7).
- [17] Pilate presents Jesus and Barabbas to the people, assuming they will surely choose Jesus for release, alleviating his need to pass judgment. Note that in his presentation of Jesus, Pilate refers to Him as one who is "called Christ" (i.e., Messiah). Pilate is attempting to frame this entire affair as simply a matter of Jewish religion, in which he need not be involved.
- [18] Pilate recognized that the Jewish religious leadership felt threatened by Jesus, and for this reason sought his death; however, Pilate sees no threat to Roman rule from Jesus.
- [19] Also contributing to Pilate's dilemma, his wife had shared with him a disturbing dream regarding Jesus, instructing her to "have thou nothing to do with that righteous man".
- [21] Unfortunately, Pilate underestimated the ability of the "chief priests and elders" to manipulate the crowd into choosing Barabbas over Jesus.
- [22] Indeed, the Jewish leadership persuade the people to call for Jesus' crucifixion (Matt23:13).
- [23] Pilate's personal assessment of Jesus is that He is innocent (Matt27:24; Luk23:14,20,22; Jn19:4), thus adding his certification that the Lamb of God is "without blemish" (Ex12:5). When Pilate appeals to the crowd to explain for what "evil" in "Christ" they are calling for His crucifixion, no explanation is given.
- [24] Pilate realizes the mob will not be denied without an ugly scene. However, he seeks to absolve himself from personal responsibility

in Christ's death, "and washed his hands" as testimony to that fact according to Jewish Law (Deut21:6-9). Nonetheless, Scripture holds both Pilate and Herod, Roman rulers with the authority to prevent Christ's death, responsible for it along with the people of Israel (Act4:27); both Jew and Gentile are guilty of the death of Christ.

- [25] The mob accepting responsibility for the blood of Christ "on us, and on our children" does not mean that all Jews are cursed forever as 'Christ-killers', as some have taught throughout Church history. However, this generation of Jews will be judged for this specific sin in the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (see Luk19:41-44).
- [26] Pilate consents to the people's demand and orders Christ crucified.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

- [27] The Roman "soldiers" begin the lengthy process of mocking and scourging.
- [29] They dress Him in a "scarlet robe" and a "crown of thorns", mocking His claim to be "King of the Jews". No doubt unbeknownst to these soldiers, "thorns" are a sign of the curse of God (Gen3:18; Gal3:13). That Messiah would be shamed and mocked is prophesied in many places (e.g., Ps69:19).
- [30] The beating and scourging suffered by Jesus from the Romans left him virtually unrecognizable (Isa50:6; 52:14).
- [32] The severe beating left Jesus physically unable to carry His cross (i.e., the cross-beam) to the place of His crucifixion. For this reason, the Roman soldiers compelled "Simon", "of Cyrene" (i.e., modern day Libya), no doubt a Jewish pilgrim come to Jerusalem for the feast, to "bear His cross".
- [33] The hill on which Jesus was crucified was known in Aramaic as "Golgotha", meaning "place of the skull". It is the rendering of Golgotha into Latin that results in 'Calvary'. Golgotha was a hill outside the city of Jerusalem; thus, Jesus was sacrificed "outside the camp" as was required of the "sin offering" (Cp., Lev4:12,21)
- [34] Prior to nailing Jesus to the cross, the Romans offered Him "vinegar", "mingled with gall" to drink, a mild anesthetic, as prophesied (Ps69:21). However, unwilling to have His mind clouded by the sedative, Jesus refused it.
- [35] Jesus, as all subjects of crucifixion, was hung naked. The Roman soldiers divided His "garments" among them. But His "vesture" (i.e., a seamless robe; Jn19:23) was of great value, and for this the soldiers cast lots. In all this was fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 22:18.

Jesus' Seamless Robe. No mention whatever is made of Jesus' seamless robe until the crucifixion. For one who possessed little or nothing (Matt8:20), such a robe was unusual and of tremendous value. How Jesus came to possess it is not indicated. However, it appears to be a typological fulfillment of Joseph's "coat of many colors" (where the Hebrew translation of Gen37:3 is uncertain), which he received as a special gift from his father who loved him above all his brothers (Cp., Matt3:17).

- [36] At this point, the Jews sat down to watch the lengthy suffering of Jesus on the cross (Cp., Gen37:24-25; Ps22:13).
- [37] Comparison of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John give the full inscription as, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews", written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin (Jn19:20).
- [38] Crucified with Jesus were two common criminals, "thieves", such that in His death "He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isa53:12).
- [39] Golgotha was chosen as a place of crucifixion because of its prominent place on the highway leading into Jerusalem.
- [40] The Jews still seek a sign from the one who claims to be Messiah (Matt12:38). Surely, one who claimed to be "the Son of God" (i.e., God Himself) would never submit to be crucified; they assume His crucifixion proves He is not who He claimed to be. However, if they knew and understood the Scriptures, they ought to realize it actually proves that He is "the Christ, the Son of God" (e.g., Ps22; Isa53; Luk24:25-27).
- [42] The Jewish leaders' claim to be prepared to believe the claims of Christ if He were to show one more miracle are not true (Cp., Luk16:30-31).
- [43] The very words the Jewish leaders use in mocking Christ on the cross were prophesied (Ps22:8). Seen again is the motivation of their hearts; their issue with Jesus is that, "he said, I am the Son of God".
- [45] Jesus hung on the cross from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm on Thursday, the 14th of Nisan (Mk15:25). The final 3 hours (noon to 3pm), darkness covered "all the land". Those who have suggested that this was a "natural" solar eclipse are ignorant of the Jewish calendar. The Jewish calendar was based on the lunar cycle, which each month beginning at the new moon; thus, the 14th of the month (Lev23:5) is a full moon, at which time a solar eclipse is astronomically impossible. The darkness that covered the final three hours of Jesus' crucifixion was supernatural, consistent with the requirement that the high priest "make atonement" for the nation alone (Lev16:17).
- [46] As the crucifixion nears its end, "about the ninth hour", Jesus "cried with a loud voice", so that all would hear, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" This is the only time it is recorded that Jesus addressed the LORD as "God", rather than "My Father". These words are the first verse of Psalm 22, that psalm

written by David one thousand years before which prophetically describes the events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ in minute detail. The answer to Christ's question is given in Psalm 22:3, "For Thou art holy". As Christ was "made . . . sin for us" (2Cor5:21) on the cross, a separation took place between God the Father and the Man Jesus Christ.

- [47] Some mistakenly believe Jesus is calling for "Elijah", which in Greek sounds very similar to "Eli".
- [48] Whereas Christ refused a drink at the beginning of the crucifixion (v34), He apparently accepts one now that His work is finished.
- [49] Still looking for a sign, some look for "Elijah" to appear.
- [50] Jesus' final words from the cross, which He "cried . . . with a loud voice", were "It is finished" (Jn19:30), which is the last verse of Psalm 22 (Ps22:31). With all the work that the Father had given the Son to do finished (Jn17:4), Christ "yielded up the Spirit". Christ's death was like that of no other man. Christ Himself had said that no man had the power to take His life, but that He would voluntarily "lay it down of Myself" (Jn10:18).
- [51] Coincident with the death of Christ were two signs. The first is that the "veil of the temple" (which Josephus records was a heavy tapestry ~4-in. thick), that which prevented man's access into the Holy of Holies where God dwelt (1Chron13:6), was "rent from the top to the bottom"; that the rending began at the top signifies it is a work of God, by which He is indicating that entrance into His presence is now open for every believer (Heb4:14-16; 10:19-22). The second sign was a tremendous earthquake.
- [52] A third sign was the opening of many graves which had held "saints" (i.e., Jewish believers).
- [53] The raising of these saints did not occur at the time of Christ's death, but 3 days later "after His resurrection", which is consistent with Paul's teaching that the resurrection of Christ occurred first (1Cor15:20). The raising of these "saints", seen by many in Jerusalem, was a visible sign that with the death and resurrection of Christ those held captive by death (i.e., OT saints) were freed (Ps68:18; Matt16:18; Eph4:8).
- [54] Witnessing the signs that accompanied the death of Christ, a Roman centurion (i.e., a Gentile) declared, "Truly, this was the Son of God", an affirmation the Jews were unwilling to make.
- [55] Most of the disciples forsook Jesus at the cross, as He prophesied (Matt26:31,56), but the women who had ministered to the physical needs of Christ during His ministry were faithful to the end.
- [56] These faithful women included Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons (Mk16:9), Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John (i.e., "Zebedee's children"). John records that Jesus' mother, Mary, and her sister were also present at the cross (Jn19:25), along with "Mary, the wife of Clopas", which may be the same as the mother of James and

Joseph; thus, there were at least three Mary's (perhaps four) present at the crucifixion of Christ.

JESUS BURIED

- [57] Jesus' body was removed from the cross as "evening" approached. Joseph of Arimathaea, a "rich man", a disciple of Jesus, and a member of the Sanhedrin (but one who had not consented to Jesus' death; Luk23:51), petitioned Pilate for the body of Jesus.
- [58] As a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph would have had access and influence with the governor, and Pilate granted Joseph's request.
- [59] Thus, Joseph prepared Jesus' body for a proper burial, aided by Nicodemus (Jn19:39).
- [60] Joseph buries Jesus "in his own tomb", in which no one had ever been buried (Jn19:41), fulfilling yet additional prophecy (Isa53:9).
- [61] Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, remained at the sealed sepulcher.

THE TOMB IS SEALED

- [62] On the day following "the day of the preparation" (i.e., Nisan 14, the day the Passover lambs are slain), the "chief priests and Pharisees" confront Pilate.
- [63] Although forgotten or not believed by His own disciples, the Jewish leadership remembers clearly Jesus' repeated prophecy that, "after three days I will rise again".
- [64] Fearing Jesus' disciples will attempt to steal His body in order to claim fulfillment of His prophecy of resurrection, the Jews petition Pilate to seal the sepulcher until the time of the prophecy has passed.
- [65] Pilate grants their request to seal the tomb, saying "make it as sure as ye can". Is there a note of skepticism in Pilate's comment?
- [66] Thus, by order of the governor, the sepulcher was sealed and a Roman "watch" set to guard against any who would attempt to steal the body.

CHAPTER 28

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

- [1] The resurrection of Christ occurs on "the first day of the week", which by Jewish reckoning is Sunday. Early on Sunday, just after "dawn", the two Mary's (Matt27:61) come to the sepulcher with the

intent of finishing the preparations of Jesus body for burial (Luk24:1) that had been hastily performed by Joseph and Nicodemus before the approaching Sabbath day (Jn19:38-40).

The Day (of the week) of the Crucifixion. This verse gives an important clue as to the day of Christ's crucifixion. Without dispute, this verse teaches that the resurrection occurred on Sunday. Jesus had previously prophesied He would be buried for "three days and three nights" (Matt12:40), which would seem to point to a Thursday crucifixion. The traditional difficulty with a Thursday crucifixion is the fact that the Gospels also indicate that the day after the crucifixion was a Sabbath (cf. Mk15:42; Jn19:31), which has been assumed to mean Saturday, thus apparently fixing the day of the crucifixion as Friday. However, there's no way to get even a portion of three nights between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning. This has led interpreters to take Jesus' prophecy of "three days and three nights" figuratively rather than literally.

However, in John's Gospel, he notes that the Sabbath following the day of the crucifixion was not a normal Sabbath (i.e., Saturday), but a "high day" (Jn19:31). What most fail to realize is that the day after Passover on Nisan 14 (Lev23:5) is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread on Nisan 15 (Lev23:6), which is a "high" Sabbath day in which "no servile work" can be performed (Lev23:7); this means the day after Passover is **always** a Sabbath day, regardless of the actual day of the week on which it falls. Thus, the best understanding in light of all the relevant Scripture is that Christ was crucified on Thursday afternoon, followed by the high Sabbath due to the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread on Friday, followed by the normal weekly Sabbath on Saturday. The women come to the tomb on Sunday morning, the first day since Thursday in which "servile work" can be performed. Matthew 28:1 is consistent with this interpretation, as in the Greek text the word for "sabbath" is plural (though not so translated in most English translations), indicating more than one Sabbath has transpired.

- [2] At their arrival at the sepulcher, the women experience a "great earthquake" and witness an "angel" descend from heaven and "roll back the stone" which had sealed the tomb.
- [3] This is a description of the angel's appearance.
- [4] The Roman soldiers keeping watch also witnessed the appearance and action of the angel; so frightened were the soldiers that they fainted.
- [5] The first word of the angel to the women is, "Fear not", common when men encounter angels (Cp., Gen21:17; Dan10:19; Luk1:13; 1:30).
- [6] The angel indicates that the Lord "is risen", with the reminder "as He said" (cf. Matt16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18; 26:32); the Lord

expected His disciples to remember and anticipate His teaching regarding His resurrection. The angel encourages the women to see for themselves that the tomb is empty.

- [7] The angel reminds them that the Lord has previously said that He would meet them in Galilee (their home) after His resurrection (Matt26:32).
- [9] As the women are leaving the garden, Jesus appears to them. The women fall to their feet in an act of worship; they cling to the Lord "feet", indicating that His resurrection body is real and tangible (Cp., Luk24:39).
- [10] Jesus reiterates the message of the angel that they are to go to the disciples and instruct them to meet Him in Galilee.

THE SOLDIER'S BRIBED

- [11] When the Roman soldiers regain consciousness, they report back to the "chief priests" regarding what has happened.
- [12] The Jewish leaders do not want the true account of the resurrection of Jesus to get out, so they bribe the soldiers.
- [13] The cover story the soldiers are to tell is that Jesus' disciples stole His body, "while we slept".
- [14] Knowing such a story will never be accepted by their commander, since for Roman soldiers to fall asleep while on watch was a capital offense, the Jews promise to intercede for them with the governor to ensure their safety.
- [15] So the account commonly believed "among the Jews" of Jerusalem, and still advocated by liberal theologians today, is that the disciples of Jesus stole His body; not disputed, however, is that the tomb was empty!

JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS DISCIPLES

- [16] The "eleven disciples", Judas now being dead, make their way to Galilee as instructed.
- [17] Like the women (v9), upon seeing the risen Lord the disciples "worshiped Him". That "some doubted" is obviously a reference to Thomas (Jn20:24-29).
- [18] As a glorified Man, Jesus has been set at the right hand of God the Father (Eph1:20; Heb1:3; Rev3:21), a position of authority over everything, both on earth and in heaven, including the angelic host and Satan himself (Eph1:21; Heb1:4). Note that it is not in His Divine nature that Christ is put in this position of authority, as that is the authority that the Son of God always had and never set aside (Philip2:6), but it is as a glorified Man that Christ is exalted (Philip2:9-8).

[19] From His position of absolute authority, Christ commissions His disciples to "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk16:16). Whereas Christ's previous commission to these same apostles was for them to preach the "gospel of the kingdom", "not . . . to the Gentiles, . . . but . . . to Israel" alone (Matt10:5-7), His new commission is for them to take the gospel of grace (1Cor15:1-4) to Jew and Gentile alike in "all nations". This is the **great commission** which is the duty of the Church; not the conversion of the world, but the evangelization of the world.

Christ also institutes a new ordinance for the Church, that of "baptizing" those who believe "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". This baptismal formula contains an important Trinitarian structure, as the Three Persons are said to have a singular "name".

[20] But the duty of the Church is more than evangelism only (i.e., preaching the gospel), but also "teaching [those that believe] . . . all things . . . I have commanded"; thus, preaching the gospel to unbelievers, and teaching the Scriptures to believers. In this task, Christ promises those who will become the foundation of the Church (Eph2:20) that He will be with them, and us (Heb13:5), to the "end of the age", at which time the Church will be complete (Rom11:25).

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