

# MY JEWISH MESSIAH



**PAINTING: LYNDSY STANDAGE**

**WRITER: COLENE SMYER HANK**





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# **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Dear Readers,

It is with pleasure that I humbly introduce “MY JEWISH MESSIAH”; a collection that has taken over 2 years to write due to the complexity of subject matter. Given the approach of weaving Jesus’ background as a Jew into the writing, it was necessary to tap numerous opinions of Bible scholars throughout the world. Thus, without the support of the Brentwood Library in Springfield, Missouri, the journey in gathering research materials would have not been possible. They generously brought in 5 star rated books from all over the United States that allowed the writer to tap the most valuable resources possible.

“My Jewish Messiah” has been written with a very broad audience in mind; that of not only the elderly, but also using a Bible Study format in order to accommodate various groups of people desiring to expand their knowledge of Scripture. Due to the variety of topics discussed, the length of chapters varied. Thus, even though you are reading this to the more mentally alert elderly, you may need more time to cover the chapters. (Meaning you simply break them up into additional sessions) On the other hand, if you are using the material as a Bible Study, you may cover more than one chapter at a time.

\*\*\*\*Given the size of the collection, it will be necessary to use technology rather than printed materials. The length simply made the suggestion for printing hard copies not feasible.

1) Reader: Download “My Jewish Messiah” to your technical reader of choice and enjoy with the elderly. You will be able to even enlarge the pictures for greater impact. They will think they are watching TV.

2) Group Sessions: Since the chapters are not overly long, it will be possible to download them directly to your large screen TV and read the material of choice out loud as a group. Then follow with discussions. You can even download the recommended music directly from the site as part of each lesson. (If you have scholars that enjoy homework, you can assign Bible Scripture for them to read ahead of each chapter being presented.) If the technology is not available at your church, it is suggested that you conduct the study in a home setting. Many life groups already use that type of format in order to create intimacy.

Last, it is important to note that all material from devotionalembbers.com has been approached from a nondenominational point of view. Elderly people in a nursing home setting represent a variety of backgrounds and denominations.

It is the writer’s prayer that we all remember God has blessed us so that we can be a blessing to others. Even though our approaches differ, our desired destination is the same.....heaven!



# IN MEMORY OF REVEREND PAYTON SMYER



*"My Jewish Messiah" is dedicated to my earthly father, Reverend Payton Smyer; a faithful disciple of Jesus for over 60 years; who's favorite Scripture was from: 2 Timothy 4:7-8 New International Version (NIV) "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."*

*As a young evangelist, so poor he had neither a car nor a horse, my father walked from one revival to another on foot. Without the finances to replace shoes lacking soles, he would tie gunny sacks to his legs with twine and keep marching for the Lord. Many nights were spent under a tree with fallen leaves as his mattress. His nutritional sustenance often came from honey combs, berries, and wild game. If he was lucky, a kind farmer would show mercy and invite him for a meal. Rain or shine, this servant was on fire for the Savior.*

*In spite of numerous physical hardships, he walked mile after mile delivering Spirit filled sermons that saved the lost; followed by baptizing services in local streams or a place called Miller's Pond. He would baptize so many people at these Sunday afternoon events that his arms would give out!*

*Yes, folks, this was the old time religion that caused people to shout and sing praises to God without restraint; raising the rafters and shaking the ground like thunder.*

*Although he eventually had his own church, Sundays were spent delivering messages where needed; never giving a thought to denomination. Once when he did not have the money to help a neighbor in need, he borrowed \$25 from an individual intending to go hungry himself. However, God being God, laid it on the heart of a wealthy neighbor to pay my father for a family member's funeral that he had delivered free of charge. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, that check that arrived in the mail was for exactly \$25.*

*Yet, right along with his ministry, he was a dad to three little girls he showered with humorous stories and unconditional love. Through example, he taught us to love the Lord with all our hearts, minds, and souls.*



# PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY

## ***“FRONT COVER & BEYOND”***



*Lyndsey Standage*

Meet Lyndsey Standage, a young lady that feels God has blessed her with hands that love to paint and draw; thus, the artist responsible for the portrait of “My Jewish Messiah” on the front cover. As your eyes soak in the beauty of this rendering of Jesus, it is important for all of you to hear how God’s hand was at work in making the connection between this magnificent artist and the writer of “My Jewish Messiah”.

On a glorious day when the Ozark hills were alive with the melodic sounds of birds perched among blossom covered trees announcing the arrival of another glorious spring, in retrospect, the artist and writer now view that backdrop and season as the Creator’s way of drawing two kindred spirits together for his purpose of spreading the good news of the kingdom.

Having never met, as well as being generations removed, the two suddenly found themselves placed together in a “get acquainted” exercise during a women’s retreat. When hearing Lyndsey describe her



love for painting and drawing, the writer immediately responded with the words, “I would absolutely love to view your paintings.” Not wasting a moment, this young lady retrieved her phone from her cabin and quickly scrolled down through an art gallery created by herself as a high school student, now ready for her first year of college. Upon witnessing her outstanding ability to use all forms of medium and techniques, it was immediately obvious to the writer that this young lady possessed talent and wisdom beyond her years.

Then, when hearing about the writer’s need of a front cover for “My Jewish Messiah”, the rest is history; it was apparent to these two new friends that God’s hand was definitely at work. Through the indwelling of his Spirit, extraordinary events would be unfolding worldwide. At this juncture, both recognized the necessity to “Be still and know that I am God” would be their Scripture to obey.

Although Lyndsey relished painting portraits of individuals, she immediately realized that this endeavor would be a challenge because of never having seen the face of Jesus with her human eyes. Thus, facing the difficulty head on, she proceeded to turn each day when painting our Lord’s portrait into devotional time. She prayed for the Holy Spirit to work through her hands in a way that would show how the world was to view Jesus. Lyndsey spent considerable time praying over his nose, mouth, eyes, expression, and overall countenance; carefully listening to the voice of Holy Spirit as her guide before making each stroke. Using this technique, there were many times when she would blot out her work and bow in prayer for greater clarification. Above all else, she was determined that the portrait of Jesus would show **joy, peace, and passion**; all the gifts he had bestowed on her every day of her life. In the mind of this beautiful young girl, at this early age, she had already arrived at the conclusion that “TO KNOW HER JEWISH MESSIAH WAS TO LOVE HIM”.

Prior to reading Chapter One, study the portrait of Jesus and note the following:

- 1) *His brown complexion reflects the area of the world in which he lived.*
- 2) *His hair has streaks from being kissed over time by the sun.*
- 3) *Note the wrinkle at the corner of his eye; her way of showing he carried the weight of the world by endlessly delivering the news of the kingdom down every path he walked.*
- 4) *Center on the shape of his eyes and mouth that reflect pure joy as he prays to his Father.*
- 5) *View the simplicity of his simple garment that delivers a clear message of humility.*
- 6) *Did you see the facial hair that would have appeared while walking the many miles without a place to rest his exhausted body?*
- 7) *Jesus was born, crucified, and resurrected a Jew, as shown in her painting.*
- 8) *Scan the beautiful ethereal background that creates the reflection of heaven literally caressing his body with radiance and light as he communicates with the Father.*

As you read each chapter of this collection, allow the Holy Spirit to enter every space of your being so you, too, will receive the heavenly glow of the Father into your life. TO SEE OUR SAVIOR MORE CLEARLY IS TO LOVE HIM MORE DEARLY!

Visit  
[sscoop.wix.com/standagelyndseyart](https://sscoop.wix.com/standagelyndseyart)  
to see Lyndsey’s beautiful paintings.



# INTRODUCTION

## Chapter 1

# MY JEWISH MESSIAH



(THE FINGER OF GOD" courtesy of Sunset Baptist Church, Ponca City, Oklahoma)

In order to satisfy God's requirement for the removal of mankind's sin, Jesus, his only Begotten Son, came into this world. As a sacrifice for our sin, he was "born crucified!" **John 1: 14** makes this clear by stating: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Simply stated, God of very God had become a human being in order to draw us back to him; all because of unfathomable love for his creation.

Although taking on himself full humanity in the form of a man, he still remained the eternal God, the Great I Am! Can you only try and imagine that God loved you so much that he was willing to lower himself and become flesh; which means taking on the form of a human being with all the suffering and limitations? After all, he is the Creator of all that exists and needs nothing, yet, was willing to sacrifice everything in order to draw us back to him. Jesus, his Son was sent to bring the Kingdom of God to earth so that man might know God, not partially, but fully. Thus, Jesus, our Jewish Messiah, being born of God, was both human and divine.





**"THE SHIELD OF THE BLESSED TRINITY" compliments of First Presbyterian Church, Topeka, Kansas**

***The medallion contains words in Latin which depict the Trinitarian nature of God. The center circle has the word Deus, which is Latin for God. The three outer circles have the words Pater (Father), Filius (Son) and Sanctus Spiritus (Holy Spirit).***

***In the bands connecting the circles is the Latin word est, meaning "is." Reading from the center outward: God is Father, God is Son, God is Holy Spirit. The outer circles are also connected with an outer band containing non est, meaning "is not:" The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. In the words of Kenneth L. Mauldin, "The great value of this symbol and the value of our historical creeds is not the mystery (of the Trinity) is explained, but that the mystery is retained!" (Make Me a Sanctuary)\*\*The above information taken directly from the website of First Presbyterian Church, Topeka, KS. [info@topeka1stpresbyterian.org](mailto:info@topeka1stpresbyterian.org)***

### **OUR JEWISH MESSIAH**

**Excuse me! Did you just say, "Our Jewish Messiah"? Are you stating that Jesus was Jewish? Yes! Our Lord was born, raised, lived, died, and even resurrected as a Jew. **John 7: 42** made the lineage and religious practices of Jesus perfectly clear by stating, "**Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?**" **Micah 5: 2** supports this by stating, "**But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are****



small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

Furthermore, Jesus, in **John 4: 22** when speaking to the Samaritan woman, made it even clearer by stating, **“You Samaritans worship what you do not know, we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.”** While Gentiles were strangers to the means of salvation, the ancient prophets had already spoken about the promises of salvation to the children of Israel; the Messiah who was yet to come. **Isaiah 11: 1-2** that states, **“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him---the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD”**---adds credence to the fact that salvation came from the Jews.

Therefore, in God’s good and perfect time, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not in a palace but wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger. As prophesied by Micah in the Old Testament, the Father’s Only Begotten Son entered this world as the child of Joseph and Mary, both Jewish descendants of David.

Then, except for being an infant in Egypt, and a short journey into Tyre and Sidon (now Lebanon), scholars have written that Jesus spent his whole life in the narrow strip of land bordering the western shore of the Jordan River; with the northern boundary being Galilee and its sea, down to Jerusalem, located at the northernmost end of the Dead Sea. The entire distance from north to south that encompassed the territory in which Jesus traveled was only about 70 miles. (110 km). These facts alone are truly astounding, given the impact his short time on earth had, and still has, upon the world. **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich,”** found in **2 Corinthians 8:9**, best describes the gift God offered his children when coming to dwell among them. (Rich not defined as material things, but as everlasting life)





## LOCATION! LOCATION! LOCATION!

For some time, Christians have been scratching their heads in puzzlement as to why God would choose to be born in the volatile area of the world called the Near East; now more commonly referred to as the Middle East; located in what is known as the Fertile Crescent; a region extending from the Levant across the northern part of the Syrian Desert to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Clarity is shed upon God's decision because of it being labeled, "THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION". In addition, it also offers new light on the words Jesus uttered in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to his crucifixion when praying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22: 42)

The location God chose to dwell among us was literally known as the crossroads of three continents---Europe, Asia, and Africa; and had as much strategic importance in ancient times as it does today. The economies and literal daily survival of its population was dependent on the much needed supplies that made their way along the major trade routes and across the surrounding water ways. Thus, throughout Biblical times, history is filled with long and bloody successive invasions; all for the purpose of controlling the strategic trade routes which resulted in bringing new people and new cultures to the area. Thus, invasions by larger powers in addition to the ongoing civil struggles kept the entire region in a state of instability; a situation that continues even today.

Therefore, after reading from **Luke: 4: 43** the words Jesus spoke, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent," demonstrate God's almighty wisdom. Since this area was known for the spreading of humanity, it was the perfect location for delivering the news of the kingdom; a message that grew worldwide and continues to be preached today.



Map of Fertile Crescent



**In addition to the geographical location with its varying climates and topography, God came to dwell among us by being born to Mary and Joseph, devout Jews practicing their religion in a society that was filled with an array of pagan beliefs. History clearly substantiates the suffering inflicted upon the Jewish people throughout their existence on this earth as well as their great demonstration of endurance. Their strict religious practices in the Torah, (as dictated by God and recorded in the first five books of the Old Testament), give testimony as to how they have rebounded in the face of enormous adversity.**

**Therefore, by setting this complex backdrop in which Jesus resided from birth to death, perhaps we can have a greater understanding that he truly did endure temptations of life in the cruelest of times. Yet, against all odds, our Jewish Messiah, who uttered those emotional words quoted earlier, “Thy will be done,” was obedient to his Father until his time on earth was over; thus, facing death on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins.**

### **THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY**

**When the children of Israel received their first glimpse of their destiny as promised by God called the land of milk and honey, their hearts must have been beating at a very rapid rate because of the dramatic landscape appearing within their site; especially since the knowledge they possessed had been delivered by their relatives who not only had been slaves in Egypt, but had wandered for 40 years in the desert; a climate totally different from the one in which they would now reside.**

**Although many people who have not visited the Bible lands think of it as being mostly desert, it can be described as mountainous, or at least hilly. Plant and animal life differ greatly because of topography and rainfall. In addition, violent earthquakes and volcanoes have plagued the region and caused the area to appear as it does today.**

**As chapters unfold in this collection about our Jewish Messiah, you will see how our Savior’s lifestyle in this wildly beautiful land figured into his many parables, miracles and belief system.**

**Therefore, in order to add meaning to Jesus’ words and behavior found in the Gospels, it is the goal of the writer to lean heavily upon the Old Testament and the land where he lived as the very foundation on which our Lord’s ministry was built.**

**Also, as the writer conducted research for this collection, it was obvious that scholars disagree on a wide array of subjects in this arena which will be left for them to debate. It is also a fact that as ongoing discoveries are uncovered in the Bible Lands, new light will be shed on things we have understood as fact, changing them in various ways. Some will substantiate our teachings, while others will call upon us to adjust our base of information a bit. The writer makes no claim to being a scholar, but instead, desires only to shed a new light on the Gospel teachings the elderly so dearly love through the use of words and pictures formatted especially for this season of their lives. Thus, it is truly the writer’s hope that through a greater understanding of the life and times in which our Savior lived,**



the reader will arrive at the conclusion that, “to know our Jewish Messiah more clearly is to love him more dearly.”



### **GROWING IN THE WORD**



In addition, those of you desiring to use the materials as a launching pad, and then explore more deeply God’s Word, will find a section at the conclusion of each chapter with suggestions as to how you can expand your study of Scripture.

Above all, it is the writer’s hope that you will join her in acknowledging the importance of the Old Testament as the very foundation on which the New Testament has been built. Without one the other would not exist. Since our Jewish Messiah kept his eyes lifted toward heaven and leaned heavily upon the teachings of the Torah, dictated by God the Father through Moses, as well as honoring instruction imparted by his people, when studying the books of the New Testament, special effort will be extended to focus on the Old Testament references as well. In doing so, you will hopefully discover as the writer has, that from creation, the heart and soul of our Lord shines as brightly as the morning star; God’s way of drawing mankind back to him for all eternity.

Before concentrating on the childhood of our Savior, let us now set the stage even further by viewing the beautiful photographs of the Bible lands below. It certainly will substantiate the reason for the label, “the land of milk and honey. You will also internalize the description of the land being defined earlier as mountainous or at least hilly. Also, for those of you who have always thought in terms of only a flat desert as your visual image of the area, it will now be possible to store new pictures in your mind as you read Scriptures.







Photograph by Lanelle Sanders

Red carpet of [\*Anemone coronaria\*](#) flowers in Shokeda forest, [Israel](#) (Zachi Evenor)







"Ein Avdat Flood 1" by Gideon Pisanty (Gidip) פִּיזֶנְטִי גִדִּיפּוֹן - Own work. Licensed under CC BY 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons -

Snow in Jerusalem





## *Chapter 2*

# **FAMILY LIFE BEGINS**



**"OUT OF EGYPT" from Austin Avenue United Methodist Church, Waco, TX.**



## ROMAN PRESENCE IN PALESTINE

Since the life of Christ would be profoundly affected by the control of the Roman Empire in Palestine, it is important to set the stage with their demands, as well as the struggles of the Jewish people to comply; especially regarding taxes. One fact that appears repeatedly in the documents regarding this time period is the depth of the corruption existing under their reign. The rich became richer and the poor became poorer. No matter the situation, the Jews had to pay taxes that weighed heavily upon their shoulders; so extreme they had to borrow from the enemy just to survive; a situation that engulfed them even deeper into the dark valley of no return.

Thus, it was during this time that we read in Scripture that Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world demanding that everyone report to his own town to register. Apparently, this was the method used for making certain the tax collectors were not skimming off monies for their own personal accounts. It was through an accurate count of the people that Caesar could apply a mathematical formulation of expected funds to arrive into his coffers. Also, since Rome believed strongly in the principle: "Divide, and it was easier to rule", even a closer tabulation would be possible. Any tax collector not passing on proper funds, or anyone taking issue with the rulers, as well as those causing a disturbance was simply "eliminated".

Therefore, according to **Luke 2: 4-5**, "So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child," they had immediately set out on the long and tiring journey together.



*(Map of journey of Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem is about 70 miles as the crow flies but walking it through winding mountain trails is more like 90 miles and probably took about a week. Map to left.)*

Recalling the beautiful but treacherous terrain as described in the previous introduction, one can only marvel at the fact that a young woman with child actually was able to endure this type of a journey. Certainly it would be reasonable to conclude that divine providence was at work in this situation.



Josephus in “Antiquities Jiuves” stated that since Herod spent far beyond his means, heavy taxes were constantly being imposed on his subjects; making this a common occurrence.

Given the prophecies that the Messiah would be born in David’s royal line, God’s timing for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem was perfect as usual. **Jeremiah 33: 15** substantiates this by stating, **“In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land.”**

Consequently, our Jewish Messiah’s fate was to be born in the harshest of conditions away from family, and under Roman jurisdiction; all before he uttered one earthly cry.



*The Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ “-- by James Tissot*

At this point, the writer would like to pause and add some personal thoughts as to the birth of Christ. First, it is necessary for an individual to make a decision to believe that God



came into this world to draw man back to him in the form of a male child that was born to a virgin girl named Mary. One either believes or not! Since the birth of a child is truly a spectacular miracle in itself, the writer feels literally ANYTHING is possible for God.

Also, the writer is thrilled that not only was Jesus born into the family with a poor background materialistically, but also that lowly shepherds, thought of by society at the time as being unclean and outcasts, were the first to receive the birth announcement. It automatically was a sign to all of us ordinary individuals that we matter and are loved by God.

Additionally, the writer also feels the conditions surrounding the miraculous birth of our Savior sent a message to mankind that God was getting ready to let everyone know that the Second Covenant meant enormous changes in our thinking process. Not only were our sins going to be forgiven, but in bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth, we were going to be asked, through actions, to truly love our neighbors as ourselves. We were actually going to be directed to humbly follow in the footsteps of Jesus and minister to **all** people; especially the downtrodden in society. An individual believing the Messiah was to be a King on a throne, riding a white horse with special privileges far above society, must have been understandably disappointed in every aspect of Christ's arrival. As for me and my family, without slight hesitation, believe Jesus is our Messiah and Savior! How about you?

### **JEWISH LIFE AND CIRCUMCISION**

In spite of all the regulations imposed by the Roman government, scholars agree that what kept the Jewish people as a cohesive group was their religious practices; weekly worship in the synagogues, dietary restrictions, and the pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Therefore, from the beginning of Jesus' childhood, being born to devout Jewish parents, he was taught to live life in strict adherence to the Law. Thus, according to the Jewish Law, eight days after a male child was born, he was to be circumcised. **Genesis 17: 12 "For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner---those who are not your offspring,"** states this clearly. Scripture indicates the consequence for non compliance in detail from **Genesis 17: 14** by stating, **"Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."**

Since circumcision was the physical sign of the covenant, an order that Abraham received at age 99, at eight days old, our Lord was under the same Law. Later tradition placed the circumcision of Abraham on the Day of Yon Kippur.

Rabbis in the time of Jesus had been taught that the "desert" generation had neglected this commandment, prompting Joshua to have all the Hebrews circumcised before they entered the Promise Land. (Jos. 5: 2) If this was not fulfilled, the Passover lamb could not be consumed. Since Prophet Elijah intervened to re-establish it, at the ceremonies of circumcision, it was believed that God was present.





At the ceremony, Joseph would have recited the prayer handed down to him through tradition by saying, "Blessed by the One who sanctified Abraham, as friend, from his mother's womb. He established a law within his flesh. He created this sign to be the mark of His Holy Covenant for all his descendants. This is why the Living God, our Rock, has ordained in turn to save those He loves of our nation. Blessed be He Who made this covenant." (by Fr. Frederick Manns, O.F.M. Professor at Franciscan Biblicum Studium-Jerusalem. Translations by Fr. A Parent O.F.M., and Fr. James Heinsch, O.F.M.)

*Luca Signorelli's Circumcision of Christ, c. 1491, commissioned by the Confraternity of the Holy Name of Jesus in Volterra, with Simeon at the rear*

Traditionally, the ceremony created an occasion for a family feast at which they

drank and danced, clapping hands. This ceremony was completed in the presence of the father, Joseph in this case, as the head of the family. Even on the Sabbath, if a child was eight days old, the Law allowed the circumcision to take place.

Another ceremony Joseph and Mary completed was the "Redemption of the First Born"; a time when the male first born was redeemed back from God through an offering. **Luke 2: 22-24** states, "When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every first born male is to be consecrated to the Lord', and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons.'" The foundation regarding this particular ceremony was first described in Leviticus 12: 1-8. The words in Scripture describing a pair of doves or two young pigeons as the payment presented by Mary and Joseph for their son's redemption signified they were not wealthy enough to afford the usual number of shekels. It was at this ceremony Scripture states that Simeon, a devout and righteous man who was waiting for the consolation of Israel, proclaimed that Jesus was the Lord's Christ. His proclamation in **Luke 2: 34** when speaking to Mary, causes your heart to skip a beat as he says, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be



**spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”** In addition to this prophecy, Anna, the widow who never left the temple gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. How did Jesus’ parents feel at this moment in time? Scripture states they marveled at what was said. Do you suppose they grasp the meaning? How is it possible for two mere human beings to understand what the future held for their son? After all, they had been through so many challenges already in their short marriage.



[Presentation in the Temple](#), the biblical account upon which the churching of women is based. ([Hans Memling](#), c. 1470, [Museo del Prado](#). [Madrid](#))

Let us now pause for a moment and recognize the fact that after only 40 days of taking on the form of a human being, how deeply our Lord had already been immersed into the religious traditions as taught in the Torah; the first 5 books of the Hebrew Scriptures.



## MORE ON KING HEROD



Although many people think of King Herod as a Jew, he was of Arab descent, and ashamed of his origins. Thus, he attempted to invent a Jewish genealogy for himself.

It has been reported that after having his wife put to death, he wandered around his palace calling for her and ordering his servants to bring her to him.

Then, unfortunately, as he grew older his paranoia only worsened, causing him to be an absolute monster; this period occurring at the time of the birth of Christ.

Thus, it was at this time, having seen the star in the east, the Magi journeyed to Jerusalem from the East asking to **see the one who had been born king of the Jews**. Upon hearing this news, according to Scripture, Herod became extremely disturbed and tried to convince them to report back to him after finding the new born child. Matthew also wrote that, due to Herod's deteriorating mental state, the news came as an enormous threat to his throne.



*tissot-the-magi-in-the-house-of-herod-*



**\*\*\*It is important to note that Matthew is the only one who included in his writing information about the wise men and Jesus' family fleeing to Egypt. In fact, literature is filled with many writings stating the wise men did not appear, nor did Mary and Joseph make the journey into Egypt. Actually, Luke has the family going to Nazareth, instead. Apparently these conclusions were drawn because of discrepancies in dates of the death of Herod and other facts. (Many times there is a debate among scholars over happenings due to dates not matching events.) The writer will, once again, let the scholars deal with these issues, but will include the happening in this chapter because it appears in the Bible. Another part of the debate is the identity of the wise men, how many arrived, when they arrived, and the light (star) they followed.**

**In addition, it has been concluded by some scholars the Scripture in the Old Testament from **Numbers 24: 17, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel,"** as the motivation for following the bright moving light in the sky. This would indicate the wise men's knowledge of the Scripture.**



Also, another point of discussion among scholars was regarding the number of wise men as being identified as three. The reason for stating three wise men traveled from the east in search of the birth of a king came from the mention of the number of gifts they presented, which were gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Thus, as stated in Scripture, after being warned in a dream, the wise men made the decision to travel another route, rather than inform Herod of their findings.

*Adoration of the Magi* by [Bartolomé Esteban Murillo](#), 17th century



## FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

Mengs 18th century

After the wise men had departed, the Lord then appeared to Joseph in a dream warning him that Herod would be searching for his child to kill him.

Once again, in spite of the wise men obeying God and going home by another route, Herod, suffering from chronic paranoia and realizing he had been outwitted, gave orders to kill all boys in Bethlehem and vicinity who were two years old and under.

Thus, this horrific event caused Matthew to write that the prophecy proclaimed from old by the prophet Jeremiah was being fulfilled that read, **"A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachael weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because her children are no more."** (Jeremiah 31: 15) This scripture is using Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, as the symbolic mother of northern tribes, when exiles

were taken into captivity by the Assyrians. It is used at this time in the book of Matthew to describe the feelings of loss by the mothers in the Bethlehem area. This quote in Matthew from the Old Testament teachings demonstrates, once again, how closely the Old and New Testaments are linked.

Consequently, the act of complete obedience to God by Joseph, who was not the biological father of the infant Jesus, shows vividly his character and great reverence for the Almighty. He did not question or hesitate but instead took the mother and child during the night and left for Egypt.





## Jesus' flight into Egypt



It is important to note by using the map to the left a possible route the Holy family might have taken on their flight to Egypt. Another point is to focus on the extent of Herod the Great's rule in the region. Without the divine intervention of God, it would have been impossible to know what was happening and how to escape from the imminent danger.

Once again, it is critical to keep in mind the varying climates of the Near East and Egypt as it related to the safety of Joseph's family. The Sinai area of Egypt has a very arid desert climate with two main seasons, both of which are dry. The winter months are between November to March and still have very warm daytime temperatures. However, the night time temperature can drop to about 12 degrees Celsius.

Therefore, given this climate, proper clothing, food and fluid intake must have been at the forefront of Joseph's mind. This trip was not like a vacation that is planned in advance. After being warned by an angel, Joseph had to leave in haste during the dark of night. Although we don't know for sure the age of Jesus at the time, he must have been an infant, which made the concern of his parents for his welfare even that of greater worry. View the painting below with this in mind.

The flight of Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph and Infant Jesus Into Egypt by Tissot





Scripture then states that after Herod died in 4 B.C., Joseph had his third dream where an angel told him that it was now safe to bring Jesus back to the land of Israel.

### **TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION**

Let us now take a moment to contemplate the happenings in the lives of Christ's parents and how it relates to human emotions. First think of the myriad of feelings that flowed in the hearts and minds of his newly married parents; Mary and Joseph. Not only a wide range of feelings occurred, but at an extremely rapid rate, as well. Upon arrival to Bethlehem, they both must have felt some relief in having reached their destination; although suffering from a good bit of fatigue and physical discomfort. This would especially apply to Mary, given the fact she was due to deliver at any point in time. One must also wonder about the conversation the two carried on as they made their journey toward Bethlehem. Were they well enough acquainted that conversing was easy? Could they anticipate the needs of one another easily? Certainly, due to Mary's condition, it was necessary to quickly depart in an effort to protect her from accusations and judgment from the people in the village.

Next, let us center on Joseph's desperation to find lodgings for his young wife about to deliver. Who would be there to assist her? What would she have to endure by giving birth surrounded by the smells and sounds of animals? As he trudged around on bruised and blistered feet from door to door, what the dictionary defines as agony must have broken all records.

Then, bring the young girl Mary into sharp focus. How afraid was she of having her first child without her mother nearby? Would her new husband have to be the one to help her since no family member was around? Remember how modest she must have been? Did she cry out in pain as she endured the contractions of child birth? So..... many questions?

Finally, after the birth of Jesus, both parents must have been feeling elated that their son, **THE SON OF GOD**, had been safely delivered and was healthy. Thus, as the shepherds arrived because of being first to receive the good tidings of joy straight from heaven, Mary and Joseph must truly have been pondering all this in their hearts! They surely experienced an all time high as they looked into the face of God, in the form of their new born child!

Furthermore, being devout Jews, these feelings of joy must have continued as the circumcision and redemption of the first born ceremonies occurred. After all, this was a religious practice that called for celebration and clapping.

Their feelings of exaltation would have continued as the wise men followed the star to their home and identified Jesus as the King of the Jews that had been born. How honored they must have felt when accepting the gold, frankincense and myrrh on behalf of the Son of God. Scripture states they pondered all this in their hearts.



Although they both realized the excitement they felt would level off at some point, one can assume they did not expect it to abruptly end as it did with the warning about Herod's intentions in the middle of the night. Recalling how human beings respond to a shocking announcement or happening in life, the dream that Joseph had that revealed this imminent danger must have arrived like a ton of bricks into his heart and mind. He must have been in a defensive mode as he launched himself up off his pallet. Can you picture in your mind how he quietly scurried around getting everything and everyone ready to travel the long dangerous journey to Egypt? Shhh!---Don't wake the sleeping baby! Are you able to visualize all this in your mind? Does that say anything to you about Joseph and Mary as the earthly parents God chose for himself? One basic truism we can state clearly is that surely our Lord knows us better than we know ourselves. He knew in advance the courage and wisdom Mary and Joseph possessed! Aren't you thrilled that your Lord knows you better than you know yourself?

**SOURCES:**

"IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS," Jean-Pierre Isbouts

"LIFE APPLICATION STUDY BIBLE," New International Version (Tyndale)

"WORLD RELIGIONS," Michael D. Coogan (General Editor)

"BIBLICA," The Bible Atlas, Chief consultant Professor Barry J. Beitzel



**GROWING IN THE WORD**



- 1) Go to [www.devotionalembbers.com](http://www.devotionalembbers.com) and open the hymnal and play "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" as a way of centering the group.
- 2) It is the writer's hope that all that read or listen to this chapter will be fully cognizant that God has also chosen you to be here on earth at this time and in this place. Your mission, like Joseph's, is critically important to spreading the good news of the Kingdom of God. Have you chosen to accept this responsibility? My prayer is that you, like Mary and Joseph, choose to allow our Father to lead you through the Holy Spirit in this effort by listening and following with complete obedience. Have you discerned the manner in which God is calling you to spread the good news of the kingdom? Share if you are willing.
- 3) Discerning your mission is sometimes very difficult. Talk together as a group on ways in which this can be accomplished.
- 4) Compare the dangers you face in today's world to those navigated by Jesus' family members. Certainly, we can't sit back and think there are none in our lives. Make a list of life threatening issues people today face.



5) How can Believers support one another in dealing with these issues? How can you as an individual assist others? Your church?

Prayer

*We praise you that your mighty hand was present in every aspect of our Savior's life. Scripture shares with us as far back as the Old Testament the course our Lord's life would take; all according to your plan designed from the beginning of time. Then, as danger reared its ugly head, nothing outsmarted your wisdom and changed the course of history. Your choice of Mary and Joseph as the parents for your Son was truly magnificent; perfect in every way.*

*Then, as we observed the manner in which they listened and obeyed your commands, it served as a model for us to follow in our lives today. No matter the short time we reside as your creation on earth, we are not here without purpose. Help each person realize that life is not about self, but about the plan you have for our lives. We pray for eyes that stay focused on you, ears that listen for your still small voice, and feet that follow with complete obedience.*

*All these things we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen!*



## *Chapter 3*

# AT HOME IN NAZARETH



Jesus helps St. Joseph in the Carpenter's Shop from [marysrosaries.com/](http://marysrosaries.com/)



## AT HOME IN NAZARETH

**Matthew 2: 19-21:** “After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead. So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

Once again, we must establish the extent the Roman rule in the area impacted the decisions made regarding the town which Joseph chose to call home. Although Herod had died, Rome did not trust Herod’s sons, thus, divided the kingdom into three parts, one for each son. Since Archelaus had received Judea, Samaria, and Idumea, Bethlehem was not even a possibility for Joseph because of the son’s reputation toward violence. Given the fact his evil personality surfaced at the very beginning of his reign by slaughtering 3,000 influential people, it is certainly clear why God did not want Joseph’s family in the region of this evil ruler.



[David Roberts](#) - The Holy Land Book Nazareth, 1842





Nazareth, postcard by Fadil Saba

Although the two above pictures of Nazareth were from a later time, it will still offer an understanding of the type of terrain found in the area. Certainly, once again, it is far from the misconception that people have of Jesus living in a flat desert area.

## Influence of Roman Empire Upon Nazareth

### *1) Religion*

Nazareth was influenced greatly by the rule of the Romans in a myriad of ways. Not only were the people constantly paying unfair taxes imposed upon them, but were eking out a living on a daily basis that was being impacted greatly by famines, floods and thieves. Survival was the thought that remained at the forefront of most peoples' minds.

In addition, because of the Roman structure for governing, even the Jewish people had a hierarchy, or social rank, that added to the misery of the majority of the population of Palestine.

At the top stood a ruler, who when Jesus lived, served at the pleasure of Rome. **Mark 10: 42** explicitly expressed what Jesus thought of him by stating: **"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them."** This scripture was in response to James and John wanting the highest position in Jesus' kingdom and his message to them that serving others was a quality of true greatness.



Under the ruler came a thin layer of aristocracy; an example would be the chief priests (Sadducees) attached to the Temple.

Then, beneath this group came a level of men from the professional class, namely Pharisees, that served in the local administration; all literate and educated. Since the prevailing religious law was the one followed in Palestine, it stands to reason why Jesus was always in a debate with them over issues as an advocate for the downtrodden.

At the bottom, beneath all these layers came the majority of the population which was thought to be as much as 90 percent. This also included the poor, unemployed, and disabled.

In addition, the Jewish people found themselves at odds with the Roman Empire due to their differences in religious practices. Romans were labeled as pagans, defined as anyone subscribing to the polytheistic religions found throughout the area. This practice was also defined as a “cult,” an abbreviated form of the Latin word *cultus deorum*, meaning “care of the gods.” They believed one must care for the gods and they in kind would care for the people. They simply had a god associated with literally everything. (Cities, crops, water, etc.) There was a class system for their gods; meaning some was more important than others. To the ancients of that time, they cared not what you believed and were unconcerned about how you lived on a daily basis. On the other hand, they did care how you worshipped the gods through cultic acts. Since they did not believe in an afterlife, they felt the gods would help them in all aspects of their daily lives. So, one would never want to offend a god for fear of being in disfavor.

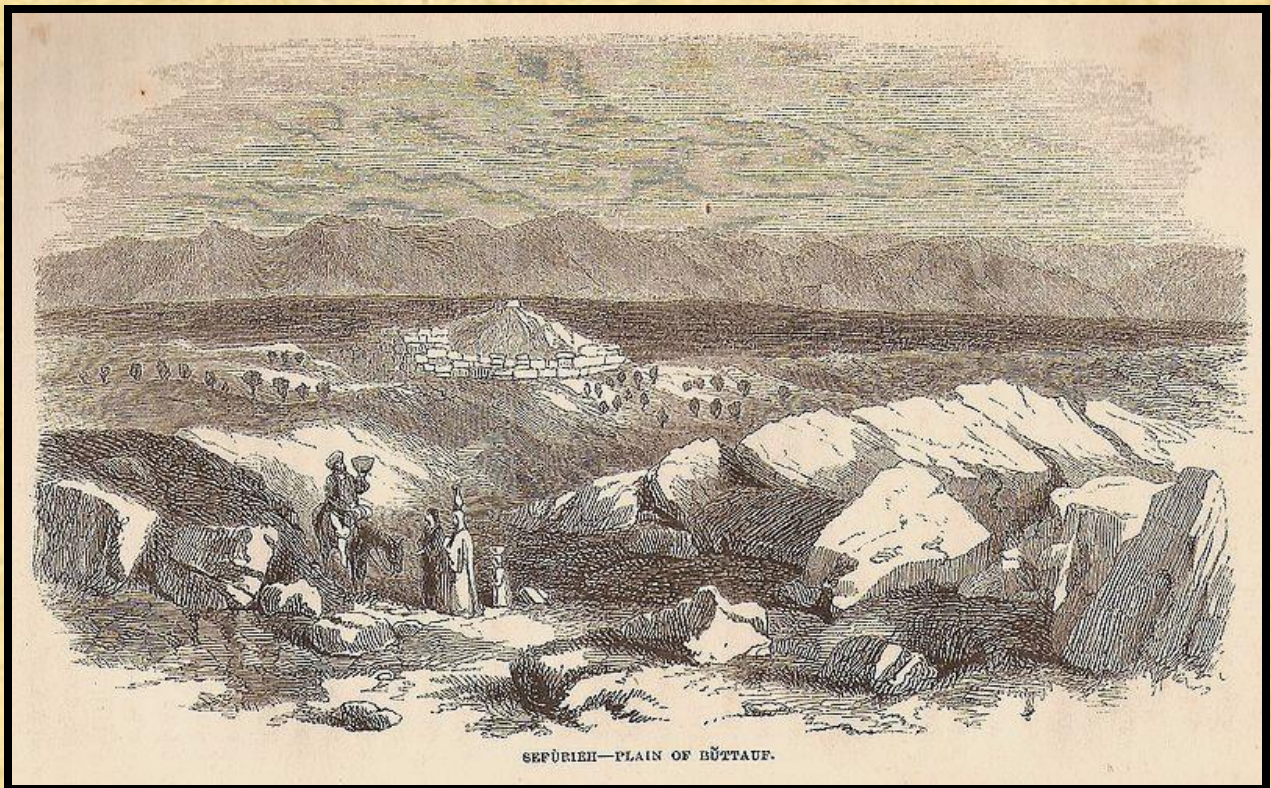
Of course, this philosophy did not set well with the monotheistic, (belief in one God) of the Jewish people who were fervent about their religious practices. They believed one God, the creator of all, had made a covenant with his people. Within the Jewish religion, there were different viewpoints regarding afterlife. Some subscribed to the idea, while others did not.

## **2) *Economy***

The Roman Empire chose to allow the Greek language to remain even though they, personally, spoke Latin. This decision, along with the roads they built, allowed trade and also Christianity to grow rapidly after the death of Jesus.

In addition, recent archaeological findings at Sepphoris, a city that was renovated by Herod's son Antipas, offers more information on how it might have impacted the living made by Jesus' family; especially given the fact that it was within walking distance of Nazareth. Over time, it was labeled as the jewel of the Galilee because of its position and wealth.





Sefurieh - Plain of Buttauf, Palestine, picture p. 133 in W. M. Thomson: *The Land and the Book; or Biblical Illustrations Drawn from the Manners and Customs, the Scenes and Scenery of the Holy Land. Vol. II.* New York, 1859

*Often referred to as the*

*"Mona Lisa of the Galilee".*

*Part of a mosaic floor in Sepphoris.*



*Partially reconstructed Roman theater in Sepphoris*



Since it was the center of trade for the area, it would have not only impacted those living around it, but also brought in people possessing numerous cultural backgrounds. Over time, archaeology has uncovered ample findings to conclude that, without doubt, it was a Jewish city, and although beautified during the reign of Antipas, it would not have become a magnificent Roman village until after the death of Christ. Since it had a source of spring water, this would have been an additional draw to the people.

### *3) Agrarian Society under Roman Control*

During the time Jesus lived in Nazareth, it was considered an agrarian society; one whose economy was based on producing and maintaining crops using farmland. Through marriage, Jewish families sometimes farmed one or more small plots of land that had been a part of the contract. The main crops grown on these plots to feed the family were wheat or barley, legumes, and fruit. The challenge faced was to produce not only enough to feed the immediate family, but to also grow enough to meet the allotted amount that was to go to the Roman government. Given all the added challenges presented by weather conditions and natural disasters, it became impossible for many of the farmers to comply; thus causing the tax collectors to enter the scene, either as a lender or individual foreclosing on property. Thus, the 90 per cent designated to the bottom of the class system were certainly a vivid image of the downtrodden in society at that time. It is no wonder they were desperate for a messiah to rescue them from their unfair lot in life.

### Carpenter

Thus, after establishing Nazareth as home, Scripture then states that the child Jesus grew and became strong and was filled with wisdom. It also strongly indicates that the grace of God was upon him.

A quote from a book written by Paul E. Kretzmann called, EDUCATION AMONG THE JEWS, stating, "It was thought that if a father did not teach his son a trade, it was like teaching him to steal," best describes the immediate task set before Joseph regarding the life of his son, Jesus.

Although little is recorded in the Bible regarding the boyhood of Jesus in Nazareth, it is believed that he would have naturally followed in Joseph's footsteps as a carpenter. It is important to expand the definition of carpenter as defined in Palestine at that point in time.

Given the fact that wood was not plentiful in Nazareth, it has been speculated that perhaps Joseph trained his son in not only making objects of wood, but stone and metal, as well. This conclusion is also drawn from the Gospels description of Joseph as a "[\*tekton\*](#)" (τέκτων). *Tekton* has been traditionally translated into English as "carpenter", but is a rather general word (from the same root that gives us "technical" and "technology") that could cover makers of objects in various materials. (Dickson, 47: *Wikipedia*)

However, others still stand behind the theory that Joseph and Jesus probably made such items as ploughs and yokes from wood for farmers in the agrarian area where they lived.





John Everett Millais - Christ in the House of His Parents ('The Carpenter's Shop')

Certainly, **Mark 6: 3** does verify that Jesus followed in the footsteps of his father Joseph and became a carpenter by trade in stating, **“Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.”**

### At Home In Nazareth

Although it is not a possibility to locate photographs of homes people lived in during the time of Christ, re-creations have been completed of dwellings that would be similar to his through information supplied from archeological excavations.

The home in which Jesus lived with his family would have been built of rocks and stones, being mortared with mud and coated with clay; for the purpose of warding off the hot summer sun, rain, and chill of winter. If more space was needed to accommodate a growing family, evidence shows that enlargement of quarters was accomplished by adding rooms on top of the crude structure.

Excavations also show that families probably built their homes close to one another in clusters; which would mean sharing common courtyards. This was done as a way of offering support to one another; protecting and sharing of daily needs for everyday living. They might have shared food stuffs such as milled grain, milk from goats, and eggs from chickens. Above all, the fellowship families enjoyed from preparing their food and eating together would have been invaluable in facing the challenges they most certainly endured on a daily basis. Also, as the son of a laborer, Jesus would need to be physically fit,



sporting various calluses on his hands and feet, along with dirt beneath his nails. No prince here!



*19th century photograph of a Middle Eastern village; note the stone, some rough and some dressed; small windows; doors below street level; flat roofs; haphazard positioning of houses*



*Reconstruction of interior of house like Jesus would have lived in.*



## JESUS LEARNED TO PRAY

As the early morning light danced playfully with the lingering shadows over the hills of Nazareth, Mary (Miryam) the mother of Jesus (Yeshua), would have already begun her day by grinding grain into flour for making bread; a process she went through at dawn, without fail. The difficult task of gleaning stalks of wheat from the field would have been completed at another time, followed by the arduous process of removing the grain from the stalk and storing it in a covered clay jar. Mary would have probably been about this work with other women that lived in her closely knit community; thus turning it into a time of friendship and support, which made the burden lighter for all. Not only would they have gleaned in the fields together, but also baked the bread in the courtyard over an open fire.



*The Gleaners* Jean-François Millet (II) 1857

It is estimated the grueling process of milling the grain would require at least 3 hours of work daily for an average family of five. (The upper hand stone was used to grind grain on the lower quern stone.)

Picture from Wikipedia





Without fail, due to his mother's hard work and diligence, Jesus would have been awakened every morning by the tantalizing aroma of freshly baked bread that wafted its way throughout the courtyard and rose quickly to the roof of the house where he slept with his other siblings. This morning ritual would have reiterated the importance of bread to the very core of his being. Without doubt, he would have realized from a very early age that bread was the most important food for his people. According to scholars, it was understood to be the biggest part of the diet for people during Biblical times; meaning that many lived almost entirely on it for sustenance.

Therefore, given all this emphasis on the Jewish teaching regarding the symbolism of bread, upon awakening, no matter how much his stomach rumbled, Jesus did not jump out of bed and race his siblings to the table with the goal of satisfying his hunger. Not Jesus (Yeshua), a child being raised by Mary and Joseph; two extremely devout Jewish parents. Thus, it is at this point we will begin to understand how the importance of prayer became so engrained in the fiber of our Lord's being at such an early age. Upon arising, he would have recited, "I offer thanks to You, living and eternal King, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great."

Then, after washing his hands, he would have said, "Blessed are You, Lord our G\_d,( YHWH) King of the universe who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us concerning the washing of the hands," followed by, "Blessed be Adonai, our G\_d, King of the universe who brings forth bread from the earth." *(Since, out of respect, the Jewish people did not believe in saying God, they replaced it with Adonai, (Lord.)*

Then, among many other prayers, the Shema, (An important prayer in Judaism that served as a centerpiece for morning and evening), from Deuteronomy 6: 4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our G\_d, (Adonai) the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your G\_d with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates," was faithfully recited, and usually at bedtime with children.

Are you getting the picture of the importance the Jewish people placed on praying to God? They believed prayer built a relationship with Adonai; establishing such a strong bond that they would desire to serve him with all their heart, mind and soul. Their attitude toward prayer was established through the Torah; the first five books of the Old Testament as presented to them through God's servant Moses. The directions were clearly written and to be followed to the letter. Thus, it was not a chore to spend time praying to the Lord, but instead, an honor and pleasure. *(Wikipedia)*



## INFLUENCE OF AGRICULTURE

Since agriculture was the way the majority of people made their living in the Bible Lands, Jesus would have not only worked the land in order to provide food for his family's table, but would also have become intimately acquainted with every aspect of growing crops and raising animals. Thus, in order to stress greater understanding of his concepts when teaching, it was only natural that he would use examples in his lessons that were based around plants and methods of cultivation. Let us now take a look at some of these using Scripture.



## OLIVE TREE

*(Picture from Wikipedia)*





## OLIVE PRESS

Olive oil was used in the Temple worship service, cooking, for lamps, as a cleaning agent and for

medicinal purposes. Olive tree branches were often grafted into wild trees to insure no interruption of fruit production; the major

source of making a living for people. Olives were put into the vat and then either trodden or pounded with a stone or pestle. An additional way to extract oil was through the use of a press. Even the left over pulp was squeezed again to extract all remaining oil.

Throughout history, the olive tree has been a symbol for faithfulness and steadfastness. Our Lord, being extremely familiar with the book of Psalm, would have memorized the Scriptures below relating to the olive trees.



**Psalms 52: 8**

**"But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercies of God forever and ever."**

**Psalm 128:3**



**"Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house; Your children like olive plants all around your table."**

The olive tree was so significant that even Paul used it in his teachings describing the grafting in of the Gentiles.



**Romans 11: 17-21**

**"If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.' Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by**





**faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.”**

**\*\*\*\*Be aware that our Lord extended such mercy that we were not grafted into a wild tree, but the original, (His chosen people; the Hebrews); a sure sign of no favorites, but a genuine love for each of his children equally.**

**The Garden of Gethsemane (Gat Shemen in Hebrew, literally, the place of the “olive press”) was such an integral part of Jesus’ own prayer life that he repeatedly went there; and especially to spend time instructing his disciples.**

**Luke 22: 39**



**“Coming out, he went to the Mount of Olives, as he was accustomed, and his disciples also followed him.”**



Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane by Arkhip Kuindzhi by Wikipaintings





*Photograph of Garden of Gethsemane (Wikipedia)*

## ***GRAPES***





## Grape Presses

When the grapes were ripe, they were gathered and dumped, one or two baskets at a time, into a small vat whose floor sloped down towards a small basin.

The grapes were trampled by foot to extract juice.



## The Words Of Jesus

### *John 15:1-8 King James Version (KJV)*

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abides not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herin is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”

## **YOKES**





*A yoke is a wooden [beam](#) normally used between a pair of [oxen](#) or other animals to enable them to pull together on a load when working in pairs, as oxen usually do; some yokes are fitted to individual animals. There are several types of yokes, used in different cultures, and for different types of oxen. A pair of oxen may be called a yoke of oxen, and yoke is also a verb, as in "to yoke a pair of oxen". Other animals that may be yoked include [horses](#), [mules](#), [donkeys](#), and [water buffalo](#). Wikipedia*

### Words of Jesus

#### Matthew 11:29 New International Version (NIV)

**“<sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”**

Paul also used the yoke to describe properly choosing a marriage partner by stating:

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 6: 14

**“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership has righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?” (New American Standard)**

This usage of animals to plow the fields may have prompted Paul to use the example in Scripture of being unequally yoked. It was well known that the unevenness of the yoke due to a miss match of animal size was unworkable and stressful to the animals.

*(Photograph from Wikipedia)*





# BARLEY (GLEANING)



Gleaning (formerly 'leasing') is the act of collecting leftover crops from farmers' fields after they have been commercially harvested or on fields where it is not economically profitable to harvest. Some ancient cultures considered this as their welfare system for the poor.



"Ruth in Boaz's Field", 1828 by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld



## **TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION**

As you have read through this chapter, hopefully, it will have become obvious how Jesus, as a Jew, living under the Roman rule, had to navigate very treacherous and stormy waters on a daily basis in order to simply survive. In recognizing this fact, it should come as no surprise how aware he was of the plant and animal world. Certainly, he would have allowed the beauty of nature to fill his very heart and soul with peace during the many times of turmoil. He must have sought private places for talking to his Heavenly Father throughout his thirty three years of life in order to keep his mind focused and clear on his mission. Beyond doubt, he would have imprinted permanently on every fiber of his being that as the Son of God, he had come to be a sacrifice for the sin of mankind so that they would be drawn back to the Great Creator. Please take some time to contemplate on that mission. Even though our world and daily lives are filled with more questions than answers due to chaos and inner struggles, can you imagine how difficult it was for our Lord who faced such an enormously grave mission to keep his footing in this land of turmoil under Roman control? Is it, then, no surprise that he chose such a beautiful place called the Garden of Gethsemane as his sanctuary to receive a peace that passes all understanding that can only come from God? It was even the location where, just prior to being crucified for our sins, that his sweat poured out as drops of blood because of being in such turmoil. Consequently, it was at that time that his Father's angels tended to him; bestowing on him the courage and tenacity to move resolutely toward the cross. Gloria Hallelujah! Praise his holy name!

In closing, the question we all must ask ourselves is, "Where is the location of your Garden of Gethsemane?" Do you have a place of solace where you spend time with God? If not, the writer encourages you to locate one immediately. Let it be first on your "to do" list! It is the only way you can remain centered and in touch with your Lord! Amen!

### **SOURCES:**

"IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS," Jean-Pierre Isbouts

"LIFE APPLICATION STUDY BIBLE," New International Version (Tyndale)

"WORLD RELIGIONS," Michael D. Coogan (General Editor)

"BIBLICA," The Bible Atlas, Chief consultant Professor Barry J. Beitzel

"EDUCATION AMONG THE JEWS, Paul E. Kretzmann





## GROWING IN THE WORD



1) Before beginning your study individually or as a group, please go to the home page of [www.devotionalembbers.com](http://www.devotionalembbers.com), open the hymnal and listen to the recording of “IN THE GARDEN” by Organist/Pianist Brad Jent in preparation for learning.

2) Since this chapter spoke of certain important agricultural crops, let us now apply them directly to Scripture. Read the Scripture beneath each crop and discuss meaning as a group.

**Wheat** (Recognized as a symbol of the church on earth. The head of the wheat bound together symbolizes the individual members that make up one body; the church.)

**John 12: 24** (ESV) “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

**Luke 22: 31-32** (NIV) “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” (Can you think of other examples?)

**Olive Oil** (“Oil was used in all sorts of ceremonies where Israel desired to recognize the need and the presence of the Spirit in some given calling or task.”)(Christian Believer Knowing God with Heart and Mind by J. Ellsworth Kalas) **Read the Scriptures below and discuss)**

**I Samuel 10: 1** (NIV) “Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul’s head and kissed him, saying, “Has not the Lord anointed you leader over his inheritance?”

**James 5: 14** (NIV) “Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil.”

(Go deeper by reading **Luke 4: 17-21** where Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah. Who anointed him?)

## CLOSING PRAYER

*Dear Lord,*

*We praise you for the Scriptures that teach us what it was like to live in the Bible lands. Although it was long ago in a location hard for us to imagine and internalize, we ask that you open our minds to new concepts so that we will better understand your Word. Teach us what you want us to know and understand so that we get to know you intimately as our Savior.*

*Amen!*



# *Chapter 4*

## **EDUCATION OF JESUS**



*("Jesus In The Temple At Age Twelve" from Salemsborg Lutheran Parish, Lindsborg, KS.)*



## EDUCATION OF THE JEWS

Before facing the challenge of exploring the educational background of Jesus, it is crucial to view the attitude of the Jewish people throughout history concerning the development of the mind. Certainly, Abraham provides evidence of the importance for education and its very early germination among the Hebrews. Since he was thought to have been a member of the nobility in his country of Chaldea, and the father of the Jewish people, it is central to the exploration to view his educational foundation.



Thus, given his geographical location and upper class family status, he most certainly would have been in close contact with the Chaldean, Egyptian and Hitite methods of learning. History indicates the civilization of Babylonia (Mesopotamia and Chaldea) was extremely far advanced; with reading and writing considered a general attainment for the population throughout the country. Surprisingly, according to Professor Sayce, in "Education Among The Jews" by Paul E. Kretzmann, Ph. D., schools and libraries were flourishing long before Abraham was born, with special attention focused on both the arts and sciences. Also, Egyptian schools and libraries were numerous and well known for a proliferation of teachers, pupils, poets, and prose writers; making the literary culture very familiar to citizens and visitors.



Josephus even stated, "He (Abraham) communicated to them (Egyptians) arithmetic and delivered to them the science of astronomy; far before Abram came into Egypt, they were unacquainted with those parts of learning." (Antiq. Of the Jews, Book I, Chapter VIII, 2). Then moving forward in time, such patriarchs as Isaac and Jacob, held extremely prominent positions that required the ability to read and write fluently.

Thus, during the centuries when the Jews were without a stable government, or were being suppressed by a foreign power, the seeds planted by their ancestors for the need of educating their people had grown so deeply into the soil of their mindset, that although appearing scarce at times, proliferated into a strong argument for knowledge that still remains solid even today. They had internalized the concept that to survive as a Jewish people, they must pass down from generation to generation the religious laws God had bestowed on them through Moses. Otherwise, when displaced to far corners of the world, their proud heritage would fade into non existence.

One reason this deeply rooted philosophy existed was because the Jews regarded their children as gifts from God. Old Testament Scripture is replete with verses proclaiming this attitude. **Psalm 127: 3-5** can be used as an example: **"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate."**

Furthermore, Chapter 6 of Deuteronomy states the greatest reason for the Jews to stress the necessity for reading and writing was so the people would always love their God with all their heart, soul, and strength. This reminder was to occur through the act of writing the decrees and commandments on the doorframes of their houses, on their gates, and to be worn on their clothing and person.



*Tefillin* (*Askhenazic*: [/ˈtfilin/](#); *Israeli Hebrew*: [\[tʃiˈlin\]](#), תפילין) also called *phylacteries* ([/fiˈlæktəriːz/](#) from Ancient Greek φυλακτήριον *phylacterion*, form of *phylássein*, φυλάσσειν meaning "to guard, protect") are a set of small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the [Torah](#), which are worn by observant Jews during weekday



*morning prayer. The Hebrew noun tzitzit* [\[tsiˈtsit\]](#) (*Hebrew*: ציצית, *Modern* *tzitzit*, *Tiberian* *sʿisʿit*) is the name for specially knotted ritual fringes, or tassels, worn in antiquity by [Israelites](#) and today by observant [Jews](#) and Samaritans. They are attached to the four corners of the tallit (prayer shawl) and tallit katan (everyday undergarment.)  
Wikipedia

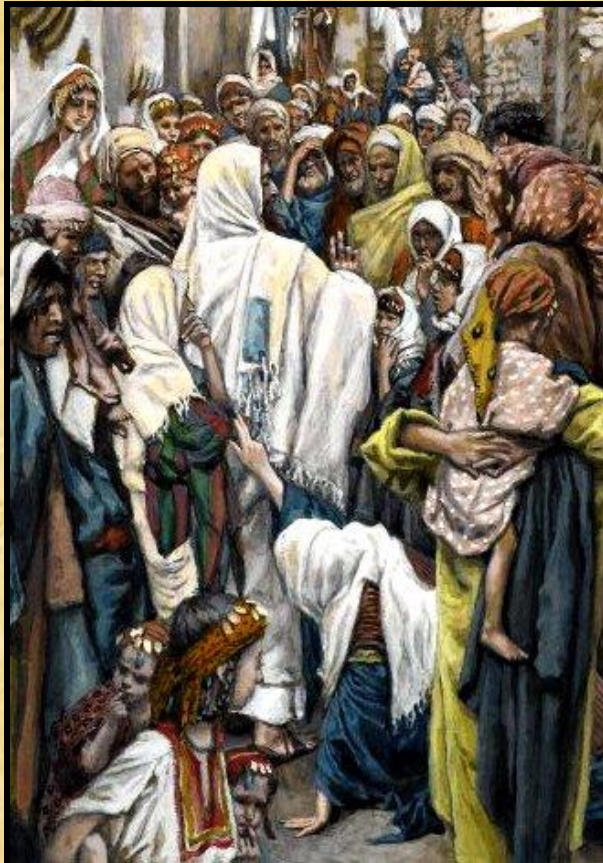




A mezuzah (*Hebrew*: מְזוּזָה "doorpost"; plural: מְזוּזוֹת mezuzot) is a piece of parchment (often contained in a decorative case) inscribed with specified Hebrew verses from the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21). These verses comprise the Jewish prayer "Shema Yisrael", beginning with the phrase: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One". A mezuzah is affixed to the doorframe in Jewish homes to fulfill the mitzvah (Biblical commandment) to inscribe the words of the Shema "on the doorposts of your house" (Deuteronomy 6:9). Wikipedia

It is thought that Jesus, as a devout Jew, would have worn the religious items described above, but not in an ostentatious manner. Matthew 6: 5 lets us know that he would never have been dressed for showing off in public by stating, **“When you pray, you are not to be**

**like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men.”**



Another Scripture that lets us know that Jesus wore the religious attire of the Jews and was also recognized by the people as a Rabbi who had healing power can be found in **Matthew 9: 20** as follows:

**“And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment”.**

*(Painting of Woman Touching Hem of Jesus' Garment by Tissot)*

In Chapter 6 from Deuteronomy, they were also precisely told to impress the laws on their children; another clue as to what God



thought about the value of being educated. In addition, throughout the Bible, Jesus is identified as a teacher 45 times; and with the similar Aramaic term another 14.

In the book by Paul E. Kretzmann, Ph. D. called "Education Among The Jews", a complete outline of the Jewish educational system was presented. Even though scholars have indicated that instruction for the children was done via oral tradition, there are also those who feel, based on the history as far back as Abraham that children were instructed to read and write. It is certainly well known that the Jewish people carried on the teachings of their religion by having the Scriptures committed to memory and debated the application with great enthusiasm. In fact, they had memorized them so well that, during a debate, only a portion of a Scripture could be used, knowing the listener/s would interpret the idea by recalling the remainder of the verse in his own mind. Sometimes, this type of behavior would cause a hot debate to ensue. As Christians, if we don't have an understanding of the methods used in debate at that time or know the Scripture being used by memory, the main point will be lost. We will revisit this in the next chapter when Jesus has chosen his disciples.

Of course, only boys were taught, while girls received simply instruction on how to do chores around the house. Who they married was determined by the father as a business deal. The fact that a wife was expected to reproduce many children was paramount to the survival of the Jewish people. Although the suppressive environment created by the invaders iron fist caused dire circumstances that were almost unbearable, somehow, the Jewish people still found a way to teach their religious beliefs to their children. The question we must debate in our own minds is, if the Jews, at the time of Jesus, had Scriptures committed to memory only, then how was it possible for Jesus to write in the sand? Kretzmann may offer historical information to us by tracing the education of the Jews back to the time even prior to Abraham. Even though the outline presented of the Jewish schools may not have been formalized during the time of Jesus, it is very interesting to note when becoming a Rabbi himself and choosing his disciples, the model he used follows the structure Kretzmann listed as described below:

1) Birth to age 5---Boys were taught at home by their father just as soon as they could talk. Usually by the time a male entered the school setting, he had memorized the book of Leviticus; the most important and difficult one in the Torah. Of course, since prayers were said twice daily, the children knew the Shema; ("Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one", found in Deuteronomy 6:4.)

2) Infant School--- Age 5 Boys were taught the Hebrew alphabet by rote. The Hebrew alphabet consisted of letters that also served as their numbers. Additional instruction was completed on the book of Leviticus.

3) Elementary---(Called The House Of The Book) Age 6-9. Although it was found that a fee was required at this point, other writings indicated that the teachers were commanded to instruct the children of the poor without compensation and were not to favor the children of the rich. The Jewish people wanted their entire community to stay bound as one no matter the situation. Pupils squatted on the floor or ground and sat quietly,



listening with fear and trembling. Not more than 25 students were to be present. The curriculum consisted of learning trades, Leviticus, followed by all books of the Torah.

4) Secondary School—(House of Learning) Boys age 10-14 sat in chairs before masters and were taught the Mishna (The first section of the Talmud, being a collection of early oral interpretations of the Scriptures as compiled about AD 200) Even though this dating places the Mishna well after the birth of Christ, it was thought that some form of this type of instruction was already in action, but made formal around AD 200. Since a boy of 13 was considered a man and was expected to perform commandments, it makes sense that something had already been developed as a curriculum, but not yet written as a standardized document.

\*\*\*\*When only age 12, Jesus visited the high school of special renown in Jerusalem in the Temple hall; a place where advanced pupils were admitted and discussions of the Holy Law and Mishna were held. (Luke 2: 46) “After three days, they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking questions.” It would have been almost impossible for Jesus to have been given the ear of these “important individuals” unless his entrance was permitted by them. They would have prior knowledge that he possessed some form of education that qualified in their minds reason for admittance. Obviously, they would not have attributed it to divinity; since they thought him to simply be the son of Mary and Joseph, and nothing more.



*Liebermann Jesus 1879 "Debating in the Temple at Age 12"*



### **SCHOOL BUILDINGS**

If a building was not available for instruction, a dwelling became the school house. The teacher sat on an elevated platform and the children squatted before him on the ground. It was an absolute disgrace if a child's attention wavered from the instructor. If a synagogue was close by, it served as a place for religious readings, prayer, lectures, expositions of the scriptures, and had an adjoining room called "house of learning."

Kretzmann's quote from Tract Aboth (IX, 79), provides the reason for thorough drill in religious instruction by stating, "Without the knowledge of religion, there can be no true culture, and without true culture there is no knowledge of religion. Where there is no wisdom, there is no fear of God, and without fear of God, there is no wisdom."

### **EDUCATION OF JESUS**

After reviewing the history above, some things are obvious, while others remain a mystery. Certainly, education for males was considered paramount, but not for females. Thus, Joseph would have, without doubt, been the responsible party for his son's learning. However, one only needs to read Mary's words from the Magnificat glorifying God after she realized what He was going to do for the world through her to be cognizant of the fact that no matter her age or gender, she also had been blessed with intellect. Our God Almighty, in his infinite wisdom had placed His Son in the capable hands of an outstanding mother and father; namely Joseph and Mary.

Also, it stands to reason that even through the direst circumstances endured by the Jews under enemy rule; some semblance of an educational system for their children would have survived; although almost in shambles at times. Their incredible ability to rebound as a religious group throughout the ages would substantiate this statement.

Therefore, at the risk of going out on a limb alone, the writer will now weigh in with a view of her own regarding the education of Jesus. Based on her training in education and 13 years of experience teaching children to read, it should be recognized there are simply some foundational principles a child must possess before others can take place; namely between the act of reading, followed by the ability to write. Unless a child has a storehouse of memorized words, a system of phonics for sounding out others, and the ability to comprehend sentences, the act of writing cannot occur. Since writing equals all these skills being used in combination and bringing them through the finger tips, a sequential order is necessary.

Some scholars have stated that Jesus was uneducated because of being poor, while others attribute his intellect purely to his divinity. Certainly, one thing we know from Scripture is that Jesus was both God and man. (Divine and human) One Scripture that stands out is the fact that our Lord grew in stature and wisdom; referring to the childhood spent in his earthly home with Mary and Joseph as his parents. It is also true that he experienced all aspects of life as a human being. Otherwise, Scripture would not have stated that he had



born our sorrows and walked in our shoes experiencing life from the perspective of a human being.

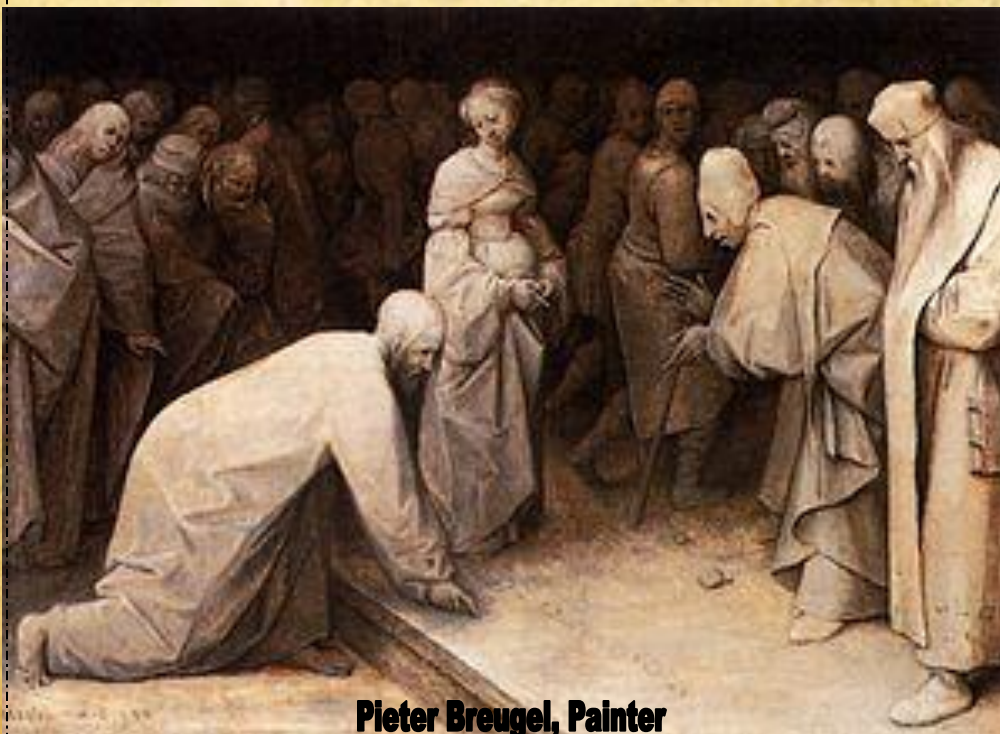
Let us now read verses from the book of John that verify that Jesus understood how to read and bring the words through his fingertips in the form of writing; all while using his knowledge of the Law under trying circumstances created by the teachers of the law and Pharisees as a form of trickery. Please note not only his skills of reading and writing, but that of comprehending the Law in a way that takes it beyond the lines to the application level. He literally used the teachings of the Law as a weapon in defense of God as well as the poor accused woman who was only a pawn. Obviously, they cared nothing for her; given her gender and profession.

### **John 8: 2-10**

<sup>2</sup> At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. <sup>3</sup> The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group <sup>4</sup> and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" <sup>6</sup> They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. <sup>7</sup> When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." <sup>8</sup> Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

<sup>9</sup> At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. <sup>10</sup> Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"



**Pieter Breugel, Painter**

Jeremiah 17: 13 offers crucial background on understanding this passage. The priest hearing the charge against another was required to stoop down and write the law that had been broken, along with the names of the accused, in the dust of the floor of the Temple. Obviously, in this incident, Jesus was letting the accusers clearly know that,



although they were not keeping the law, he most certainly would regardless of their deceitful behavior. Although research does not show what words Jesus wrote in the sand on the Temple floor, it can be discerned that he was following the religious instruction of the Jewish people.

At this point, ladies and gentlemen, everything in the writer's being proclaims that **Jesus could read and write**; no matter that he was poor and living under the suppression of Roman Rule. After researching the education of the Jews, it is my opinion that from Abraham forward, generation after generation realized the very survival of their people was dependent upon the education of their children.

Finally, one last example in Scripture that shows Jesus not only had the ability to read, but also possessed tremendous understanding of synagogue protocol, was when he read to the people of Nazareth from the Scroll of Isaiah.

(Brooklyn Museum - Jesus Unrolls the Book in the Synagogue (Jésus dans la synagogue déroule le livre) - James Tissot)





*Luke 4: 16-21*

**“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up front to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave [it] again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”**

**Additionally, I agree that his divinity and humanity were working together at this point in time. As mere humans, we simply don't know when, where, and how they both were interacting. Through God, all things are possible! Even the members of the Sanhedrin who spoke seventy different languages were no match for the Almighty. As you journey through the remaining chapters, you will note how God used such unique approaches and strategies that the most learned individual could never outsmart him. Even the wise could be made foolish by the Great I Am! When it appears to the reader that the enemy is winning, we can rest in total assurance that God is still in control and will bring things about according to his plan. Just as his One and Only Son, the Jewish Messiah, walked in complete obedience the path set before him that led to the cross, we also must listen to the calling of the still small voice during the remaining time we have on earth.**

**In conclusion, the writer believes there is also a lesson from this chapter on the divinity of God for each person to learn, that clamors daily for attention. If a mere human being allows God to be at work in his life, our Lord will use his divinity to turn ordinary acts into extraordinary happenings for his glory, pleasure and purpose; all because we humbly believe it is the only possible way to follow the path our Heavenly Father has set before us on this journey called life. Although, like Jesus, we can never be both God and man, by receiving our daily bread from our Creator, each day can be greeted with confidence and joy. Amen!**

**SOURCES:**

- 1) “Education Among The Jews” by Paul E. Kretzmann, Ph. D.**
- 2) *Antiq. Of the Jews, Book I, Chapter VIII, 2***
- 3) *NIV Application Study Bible***





## **GROWING IN THE WORD**



- 1) Suggested Hymn: Go to [devotionalembbers.com](http://devotionalembbers.com) and play Trust and Obey found inside the hymnal collection as played by organist Brad Jent.
- 2) Open your Application Study Bibles to Genesis 11: 26-32 and read about the genealogy of Abraham. Using the footnotes below, read about the sophistication of the Chaldeans educational system. Did their advanced system for learning surprise you? Then, if you search even before the time of Abraham, you will find that it was already in existence; thus, believed to be the area the wise men called home.
- 3) Now, go to Daniel Chapter 1: 1-5 and read about his training in Babylon after having been taken into captivity. Using an application study Bible, read the description of their language and academic program. Why do you think captives like Daniel were educated?
- 4) Given the fact the Jewish people were constantly being taking captives and eventually scattered all over the world, can you see why they felt the need to record the Law, rather than memorizing it from generation to generation?
- 5) After reading about the Jewish system for educating their children, what lessons can we still learn from them today?

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord,

What a pleasure it was to learn about the importance your people placed on the value of children and their education. May it serve as a model for our thinking process in today's world. Help parents dedicate time each day in praying with their children so they will realize always your place of importance in daily life. There is no greater model than to pray at each meal as a family.

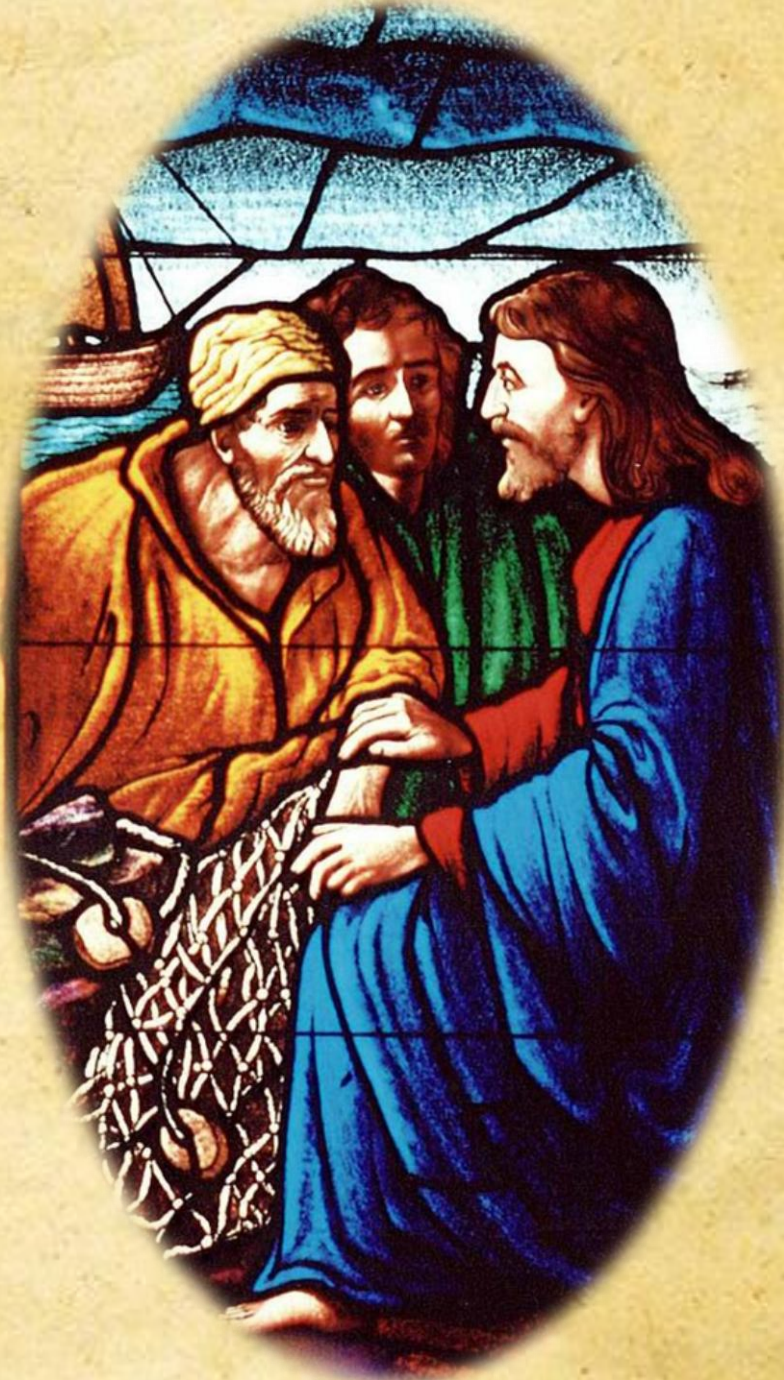
Then, when our eyes grow heavy due to the need for sleep, please cause us each to send a sweet fragrance of gratitude toward heaven for your mercy, grace, and love. Remind us to bow the knee as a family before climbing into bed and speak words of adoration to you as our Lord and Savior.

Even though our days are busy beyond imagination, write upon our minds the necessity of teaching our children to read a variety of books, but most of all your Word. May we all place the Bible in a prominent location in the home, and use it as the most important resource for wisdom; allowing the words to act as a light for our path. Amen!



## *Chapter 5*

# **JESUS GATHERS DISCIPLES**



"FISHERS OF MEN", compliments of Austin Avenue United Methodist Church, Waco, TX



## SETTING THE STAGE

Whether it was while our Lord walked among the dew covered lilies of the field, strolled along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, or prayed on the hillside above Nazareth that a crucial conversation occurred between himself and God concerning the time his ministry was to begin, man does not know. We are told of his visits and debates among the priests in the temple and synagogues, but nothing about the intimate circumstances leading up to the time he took his first step into the final three years of his life. However, given the window of time for launching his ministry and his fast approaching crucifixion, it is no wonder that he moved with such resolute actions. If the message, after his ascension into heaven that the kingdom of God had arrived on earth was to survive and be delivered to all generations, time was of the essence.



Certainly, the Bible made clear that his cousin, John the Baptist, had identified his own mission as to prepare the way of the Lord; a directive from God that was made clear even to his parents prior to his birth. From the beginning of John's ministry, his teaching methods and manner of dress set him apart from the crowd. However, he not only stayed focused on his mission, but also attracted disciples who followed his beliefs. Even though totally centered on the work at hand, it is important to note that he looked outside himself and was able and willing to identify Jesus as the Lamb of God when he saw him pass by; an act that cost him some disciples. He not only kicked off the ministry of Jesus by baptizing him in the Jordan River, but had the wisdom and courage to know when to step aside. Then, to unselfishly relinquish his ministry so that one greater than himself could move

onto center stage, displayed wisdom, courage, and great humility. Although he needed later to be sent a message from Jesus that he had identified him correctly as the Messiah, he moved on from that moment of doubt. Take a second and walk in his footsteps! Could you have done this magnificent selfless deed?

**"And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' Matthew 3: 17 (NIV);** the words Jesus heard from his Father after being baptized by John that must have filled him with joy and courage for the journey ahead. For us, it also displayed actions of humility and obedience in the Son's relationship with God the Father. In addition,



it is important to note how directly tied baptism was to our Messiah's life as a Jew; a religious ceremony that occurred from birth forward that carried great significance to his people.



(Ary Scheffer 1795-1858)

Yet, from that period of elation, Jesus was led directly out into the desert by the Holy Spirit where he would stay 40 days and nights to confront the real enemy of Israel; Satan. This time can be directly related to the Old Testament's account of the children of Israel being led out of bondage from Egypt where they failed to trust God for their daily bread, provision of water, and obedience of worshiping only one God.

In facing the temptations set forth by Satan, Jesus relied directly on the teachings of the Torah with the following Scriptures in reply:

**Deuteronomy 8: 3** "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

**Deuteronomy 6:16, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God."**

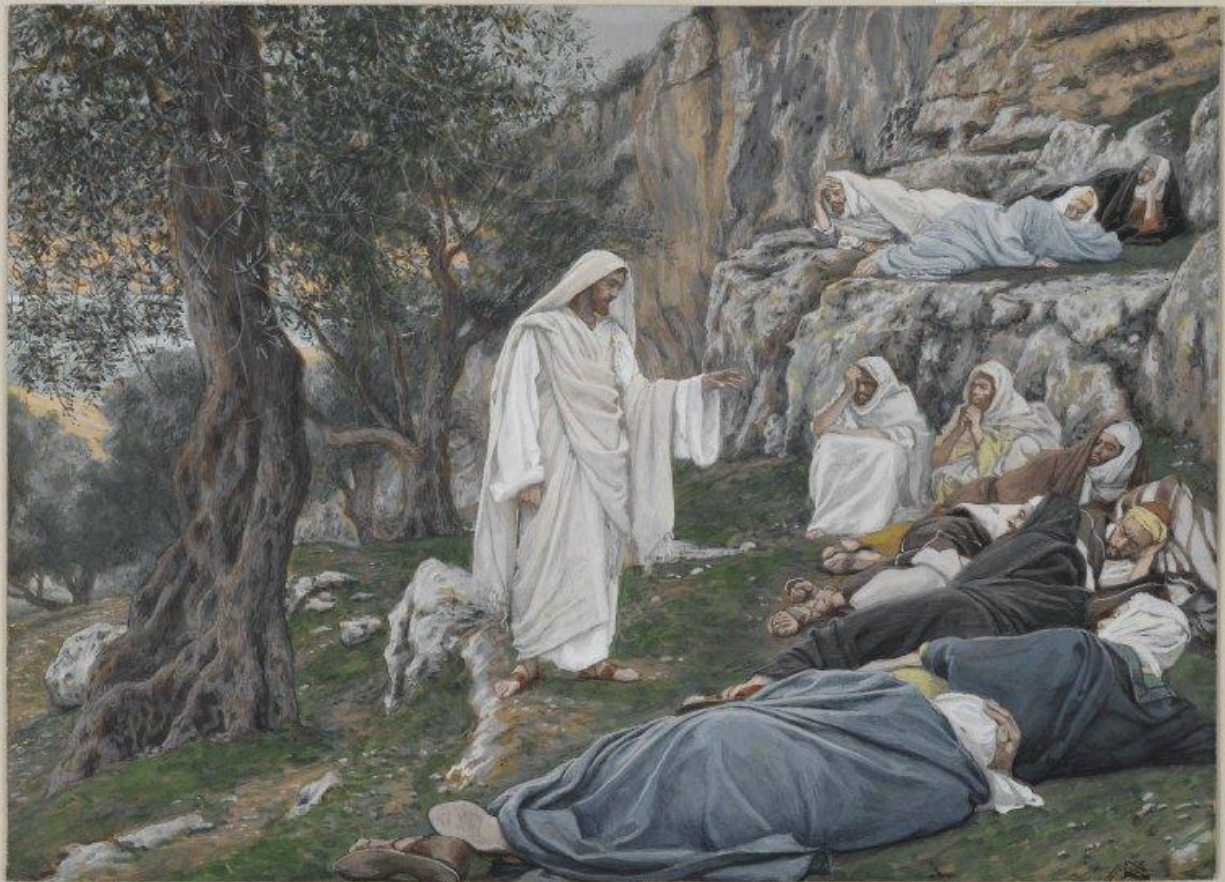
**Deuteronomy 6:13-14:** "It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

Thus, after enduring hardships and temptations for 40 days and nights, and having been comforted and restored by God's angels at the end, the three years of Jesus' ministry on earth began.

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL PLAN:**

Let us now revisit the educational structure as found in the book, Education Among The Jews by Paul E. Kretzmann, Ph. D, when he described the advanced learning stage of students. It was at this time that the more astute young men would approach a rabbi and request to be his students. In his description Kretzmann reported that only those deemed by the rabbi as the cream of the crop would be selected as being worthy of sitting in his presence; a time so rigorous that it lasted only 3 years for the students. (The following painting by Tissot of Jesus commanding his disciples to rest shows how aware the Lord was of the importance of restoration for enduring the difficult journey ahead.





In the book, The Jew Named Jesus by Rebekah Simon-Peter, she describes rabbis and their disciples traveling around the byways of the Holy Land as a common occurrence. Then, as these itinerate groups moved from one location to another, the teachers frequently would sit and debate one another on different religious topics. In addition, the fact that they had literally memorized the Scriptures word for word, added to the drama of a discussion that might confuse Christians when reading the New Testament. An example of this technique can be found in Matthew 21: 16 when Jesus replied to the chief priests and teachers of the law's objections to children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David." Our Lord, in all his wisdom, simply quoted a portion of the Scripture from **Psalm 8: 2, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise,"** causing those objecting to make a quick departure. Given the fact the opposition had committed the Scripture to memory, they added, **"because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger"** in their own minds; thus ending the debate."

Therefore, having been trained in this method, Jesus the Jewish Rabbi, chose to organize the gathering of his disciples in a similar manner; but not identical. Jesus possessing the wisdom from his Father would shock mankind both then and now, as to the way his selection process was carried out.





The  
Pharisees  
come out  
and begin  
to debate  
with him.  
(Painting by  
Tissot)

### **GATHERING HIS DISCIPLES**

When Jesus first began his ministry, he labored single handedly in a limited area using a teaching technique that was elementary. It would be thought of in education as the first step to comprehension called the literal level. He kept his instruction simple so those listening would be able to grasp his meaning. Then, after narrowing his selection down to 12, his teachings would deepen and become more elaborate. His goal would then be the training of the twelve disciples; a mission that had to be accomplished in record time before he ascended back to the Father. It was imperative they have the knowledge and faith to carry on so that all would not be lost for humanity.

Therefore, Jesus reversed the process followed by the rabbis of the time. Instead of selecting the recognized “cream of the crop” that had approached him, he chose 12 ordinary men with high morals and character knowing they were teachable. Also, since the learned men objected to his methods and beliefs, the so called, “cream of the crop” would not have considered Jesus worthy to follow. “Twelve Ordinary Men” by John MacArthur best summed up the approach of Jesus by stating, “The strategy of Jesus from the time he began his public ministry was bold and enormously controversial; so much that after preaching in the synagogues in his home town of Nazareth, his own community members tried to kill him. The



choosing of the 12 apostles was a judgment against institutionalized Judaism; a renunciation of those men and organizations which had become totally corrupt.” **John 1:11 “They hated him. He came to his own, and his own did not receive him,”** substantiates this fact. That the Jewish religion was focused on the physical descent of Abraham rather than faith in God caused Jesus to strongly object with enormous passion.

However, having stated this, it is important to point out that it was against corruption and those associated with it that he objected. Jesus loved his people and desperately wanted them to follow him. (The first people of The Way were Jews that believed Jesus was the Messiah.) Before pointing our fingers at the Jews and the persecution of Jesus, it is important to balance our thoughts and recall that Tyndale who pioneered the translation of Scripture into English so that the masses might have access to the Bible, was strangled and burned at the stake by church leaders. (Christians, not Jews)

## **THE TWELVE**

As the writer researched information about the 12 disciples, not only was there controversy about their lives, but little known facts available concerning many of them. Most authors simply used Scripture and determined on their own the personality of some. Literally little to no information was available about many of the twelve. There was even disagreement among the scholars as to the method and place of death of each apostle. Since the titles disciple and apostle are used interchangeably, it is important to define the words. (Disciple-refers to student learners) (Apostle-“*Shaliah*”—sent out. “*Shaliah*” was the name given to agents sent out into the community by the Sanhedrin with full rights sanctioned by this council of Israel) First the disciples were students as they journeyed around with Jesus observing his behavior and listening to his messages as he taught, restored sight to the blind, healed the sick, and raised the dead. Then, after he deemed them ready, he turned them into apostles and sent them out. Using this method of training, Jesus was sending a clear message to the people that the disciples were his delegates. This would enable them to carry on his work after he had returned to the Father.

As you view the chart below of the apostles, it is the writer’s intent to not try and focus on the physical appearance or deeds of any particular disciple. As chapters unfold in this collection describing happenings in the ministry of Jesus, it will be important to recall that, even though other people were present, the training of his disciples was always his goal. Although many people would believe and come to Christ, the kingdom message must be propelled from generation to generation through the unified group of twelve apostles.

Above all, it is imperative for the reader or listener of this collection to center on the fact that the disciples were simply ordinary men that God used in an extraordinary manner. In viewing



the group of 12, you will recognize that Jesus used a broad stroke as he selected people from all walks of life; fishermen, a tax collector who worked for the Roman Empire and was thought of as cruel and dishonest, a zealot that wanted to do away with the Roman government, quiet men who stayed in the background not desirous of recognition, and a noisy, exuberant, excitable, enthusiastic individual like Peter the rock; people just like us. He covered all bases in dealing with the various personalities of mankind who would hear his message.

In addition, as the writer researched and prayed to God for direction, it became crystal clear that he would want the focus to be on the training, not the individual disciples. Had he wanted us to learn about each one, the writers of the Gospels would have supplied ample information.



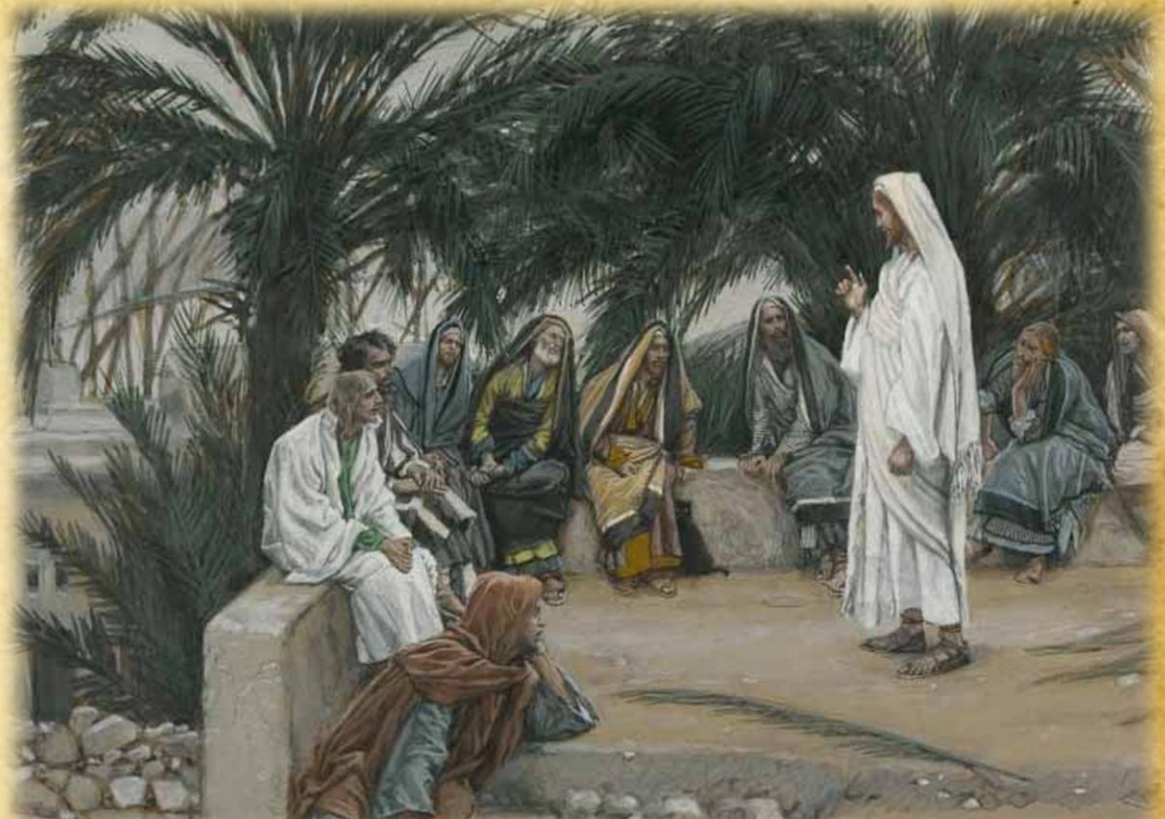
Ordination of the 12 disciples painting by Tissot



Those “whom he also named apostles” were:

<u>Gospel of Matthew</u> <sup>[Mt 10:1–4]</sup>	<u>Gospel of Mark</u> <sup>[Mk 3:13–19]</sup>	<u>Gospel of Luke</u> <sup>[Lk 6:12–16]</sup>	<u>Gospel of John</u>
<u>Simon</u> (“who is called Peter”)	Simon (“to whom he gave the name Peter”)	Simon (“whom he named Peter”)	Simon Peter / <u>Cephas</u>
<u>Andrew</u> (“his [Peter’s] brother”)	Andrew	Andrew (“his brother”)	Andrew (“brother of Simon Peter”)
<u>James</u> (“son of <u>Zebedee</u> ”)	James (“son of Zebedee”) / one of the “ <u>Boanerges</u> ”	James	one of the “sons of Zebedee”
<u>John</u> (“his [James’s] brother”)	John (“brother of James”) / one of the “Boanerges”	John	one of the “sons of Zebedee” / thought to be the “disciple whom Jesus loved” <sup>[13:23][20:2]</sup>
<u>Philip</u>	Philip	Philip	Philip
<u>Bartholomew</u>	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	<u>Nathanael</u>
<u>Thomas</u>	Thomas	Thomas	Thomas (“also called Didymus”) <sup>[11:16][20:24][21:2]</sup>
<u>Matthew</u> (“the tax collector”)	Matthew	Matthew	not mentioned
<u>James</u> (“son of <u>Alphaeus</u> ”)	James (“son of Alphaeus”)	James (“son of Alphaeus”)	not mentioned
<u>Thaddaeus</u>	Thaddaeus	<u>Jude</u> (“son of James”)	Jude (“not Iscariot”) <sup>[14:22]</sup>
<u>Simon</u> (“the <u>Cananean</u> ”)	Simon (“the Cananean”)	Simon (“who was called the <u>Zealot</u> ”)	not mentioned
<u>Judas Iscariot</u>	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas (“son of Simon Iscar

Jesus teaches his disciples painting by Tissot







The disciples are now sent out as apostles of Christ by Tissot



## **TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION**

Throughout the time the writer focused on this chapter, the words, “GO YE”, kept entering her mind. Thus, as a result of this occurring repeatedly, it is the writer’s belief that Jesus wanted all of us to conclude that we recognize the importance of our work as disciples in today’s world. After you have read the Scripture from the chart above, you will quickly recognize your reflection in the eyes of a particular disciple’s personality. If you are quiet and work in the background, you may identify with Andrew. If you are gregarious and quick to react, Peter’s eyes may hold your reflection. In the event you are mathematically inclined, Matthew may be your guy. Above all else, please always remember how important your work in the kingdom is to our Lord. Just like the disciples, you will sin and fall short, make enormous mistakes, feel afraid, act in a cowardly manner or hide, but still when all is said and done, compassion, courage, grace, and forgiveness from God will propel you forward.

In conclusion, if we witness a disciple struggling and in need of a helping hand, let us not become judgmental as messengers of Jesus, but encouraging, lacking hesitation, and filled with love. “GO YE!”

### **Sources:**

“Twelve Ordinary Men by John MacArthur

“The Training Of The Disciples by A. B. Bruce

The Jew Named Jesus by Rebekah Simon-Peter

Education Among The Jews by Paul E. Kretzmann, Ph.D.



## **GROWING IN THE WORD**



- 1) Suggested Hymn: Using [devotionalembbers.com](http://devotionalembbers.com), open the hymnal and begin your time together by playing, “Only Trust Him,” by organist Brad Jent.
- 2) Using the chart above listing information about the disciples, spend some time locating the Scripture that tells about each disciple. Discuss the wide array of personalities Jesus chose. Relate it to today. Why is it important for disciples to have unique personalities and gifts when serving Christ?
- 3) When you read the section about the manner in which Jesus chose his disciples in relationship to the structure used by the religious community, why do you feel he took that approach? When



employers hire their staff, do you feel they are looking for the same values in people that Jesus recognized?

4) Why is it important to keep in mind that Jesus loved even the leaders that persecuted him relentlessly?

5) Which disciple can you relate to the most? Why?

6) Why do you think Jesus chose such a diverse group of individuals as his disciples?

7) What challenges might their individuality have presented with the bonding process?

8) Can you relate to being on a committee and having to learn to cope with the variety of personalities involved?

### PRAYER

Dear Father,

Thank you for allowing us to see the uniqueness of each disciple you chose. The ordinariness of this group of men gives each of us great faith in our own abilities. If you chose to select 12 rag-tag individuals that did not hold prominent positions in society, then there is hope for all of us, too. It speaks loudly to the fact that each one of us is important in the work of the kingdom.

As we travel with you and your disciples in the remaining chapters, we ask for the wisdom to understand not only your teachings, but how difficult it was for the group of 12 to grasp the concepts; even though they were seeing you up close and personal. Please remind us that the information we possess is from a historical point of view. At this point on our journey in this collection we are witnessing the creation of the lessons in the Bible from which we obtain our knowledge.

Finally, help us internalize the importance of appreciating the uniqueness of each child you created. As we work as disciples in your kingdom, instill in our hearts attitudes of forgiveness, kindness, patience, and grace so that we may serve as one united body; your church. All these things we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen!



## *Chapter 6*

# **PARABLES OF JESUS**



The Sower, c.1907, The Presbyterian Church of Pittsburg, Kansas



## PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY WITH JESUS

Now that Jesus has gathered his disciples, you will soon note that his messages and behavior reflect a tenacious determination on his part to make every second an instructional moment with the twelve. If the kingdom on earth was to continue after his departure, he was fully cognizant that the group of men selected must be prepared to carry his message forward. Thus, from now on, we all will quickly realize that he has stepped his teaching up a notch as to the quantity and depth of subject matter.

In addition, it is critical for all of us to be reminded that his audience was almost entirely made up of Jews. Therefore, since Jesus was raised by two devout Jewish parents, it was crucial for the writer to locate sources that would shed light on the impact of his religious background as it related to his teachings.

Thus, as a way of establishing a foundation for offering greater meaning of Jesus' words, the writer will lean heavily upon the books, "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist," and "Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story," written by Brant Pitre to provide deeper understanding of the teachings of the Jewish people regarding their expectations of the messiah yet to come. The first source Pitre relied on was the Old Testament, followed by:

*"The Dead Sea Scrolls: an ancient collection of Jewish manuscripts copied sometime between the second century B.C. and A.D. 70. This collection contains numerous writings from the Second Temple period, during which Jesus lived."*

*"The Works of Josephus: a Jewish historian and Pharisee who lived in the first century A.D. Josephus" works are extremely important witnesses to Jewish history and culture at the time of Jesus and the early Church."*

*The Mishnah: an extensive collection of the oral traditions of Jewish rabbis who lived from about 50 B.C. to A.C. 200. Most of these traditions are focused on legal and liturgical matters. For rabbinic Judaism, the Mishnah remains the most authoritative witness to Jewish tradition outside of the Bible itself."*

*The Targums: ancient Jewish translations and paraphrases of the Bible from Hebrew into Aramaic. These emerged sometime after the Babylonian exile (587 B.C.), when many Jews began speaking Aramaic rather than Hebrew. Scholars disagree about their exact dates."*

*The Babylonian Talmud: a vast compilation---more than thirty volumes---of the traditions of Jewish rabbis who lived from around A.C. 220 to 500. The Talmud consists of both legal opinions and biblical interpretations, in the form of a massive commentary on the Mishnah."*

*The Midrashim: ancient Jewish commentaries on various books of the Bible. Although parts of these are later than the Talmud, they contain many interpretations of Scripture attributed to rabbis who lived during the times of the Mishnah and the Talmud."*

*In addition to the sources above, several Jewish professors were on the faculty of the educational institution Pitre attended. All these factors caused the writer to view this scholar's work, (already assigned 5 star ratings), as a major resource for providing accurate background information regarding Jesus' Jewish roots and their impact on his teachings.*

Since the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt had ended when the twelve tribes had entered the land of milk and honey God had promised them, the Old Testament prophets had foretold a new exodus would unfold; a fact taught to all Jews as religious instruction. Of course, the messiah yet to come was the central theme of this promised new exodus; a position Jesus claimed for himself. In the



book, "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist" by Brant Pitre, the four component parts of the new exodus are summarized as follows:

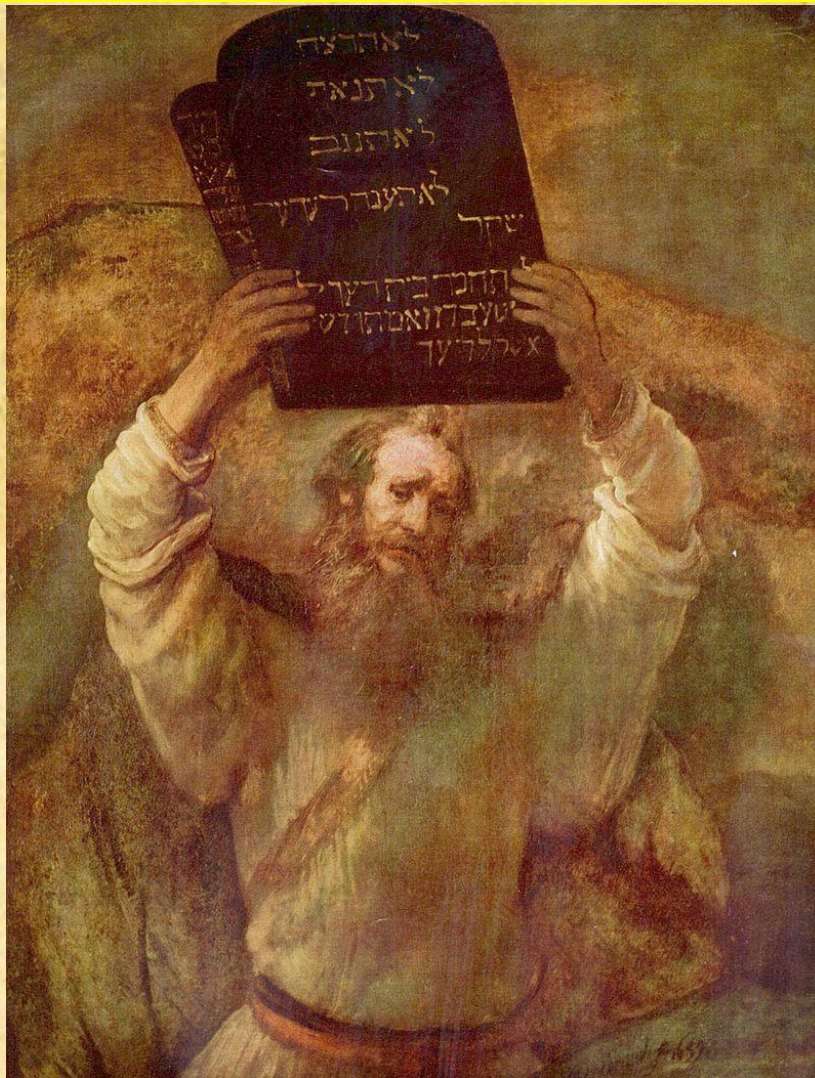
*"1) The coming of a new Moses: (God would one day save his people by means of a new deliverer; the Messiah.)*

*2) The making of a new covenant: (To be fulfilled in "the World to Come"; one entirely different from the Old Testament covenant)*

*3) The building of a new Temple: (One that would be built at the time of the coming of the Messiah.)*

*4) The journey to a new promised land: (A world prepared by God where all things would be made new.)"*

***\*\*As you read the questions Jesus was asked by the Jewish leaders and his replies, being aware of the four points above will hopefully provide insight and greater depth of understanding. The back and forth conversations, that seem by some of us as out of sequence, will perhaps take on new meaning. You will probably want to refer to these 4 points as we move forward. Also, for greater understanding, the writer recommends highly the purchase of these two books for your library.***



***"Moses with the ten Commandments" by Rembrandt (1659)***



## ARE YOU READY?

In a previous chapter, you read about the twelve disciples chosen by Jesus that were ordinary people just like all of us. In the mind of our Lord, he knew they were rough around the edges and in desperate need of training; a task to be completed before his crucifixion. In addition, he recognized that the concepts of God's kingdom would be of a heavenly nature; far beyond the realm of human understanding. However, since nothing is impossible for God, he would use his great wisdom in delivering state of the art parables that would contain the necessary information in a beautiful story form they could grasp. In addition, he made it clear that understanding required ears that were set on listening. If an unwillingness to put forth the energy in doing this existed, the parables would not be understood.

Also, before ascending into heaven, our Savior directed his followers, meaning us, to strap on our sandals and become disciples as well. Therefore, it is the writers hope that as the remaining chapters unfold in this collection that you are ready to walk right along beside your favorite disciple until your cup is full to overflowing with faith and knowledge. Go ye!

## TIMELESS STORIES CALLED PARABLES

According to Arland J. Hultgren, the definition of a parable is as follows: "A parable is a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between God's kingdom, or expectations, and something in this world, real or imagined." He also lets us know clearly in his book, "The Parables of Jesus", throughout history people from a vast array of backgrounds used this form of teaching as a way of expressing ideas and concepts.

Thus, the Jewish audience that Jesus addressed would have been very familiar with the technique. However, the big difference would have been the manner in which the Hebrew mind worked in anticipating the outcome. The Jewish mind was intensely practical, thus, expecting concrete lessons, not abstract ideas, whereas, in comparison, the Greek mind would be anticipating a good debate just for the sake of argument. In the Jewish mind, the conditioning process followed was to be told by the parable specifically what to do.

Although using parables as a form of communicating an idea can be traced back to the Old Testament, scholars have agreed the stories Jesus told using this method were truly timeless; literal masterpieces designed to awaken the mind of the listeners and enlighten them out of their state of blindness or dullness of spirit. One well known example from the Old Testament is when Nathan used a parable as a way of delivering a message from God to David after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and hid it. As you compare the style of this one to those Jesus used, you will easily note how masterful our Lord was in creating parables for the ages; meaning they are still fresh and applicable to everyone.



## **2 Samuel 12:1-7 New International Version 12**

*The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup> The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, <sup>3</sup> but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him." <sup>4</sup> "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." <sup>5</sup> David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! <sup>6</sup> He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." <sup>7</sup> Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.'"*

### **JESUS THE GREAT TEACHER**

Although Jesus did not invent parables, he could tell a story using that form of communication with such expertise and drama that the deep things of God were revealed to the common eye. Literally, he was able to use earthly things to unveil heavenly wisdom not only for people then, but also for today. His beautiful cameo-like pictures were exercised under very harsh conditions on the spur of the moment. Since he was an itinerant teacher, he did not have the privilege of advanced preparation. Also, people at that time were known to follow or gather around itinerant rabbis with the goal of gleaning information about the anticipated messiah that would offer hope for a better life. Due to Roman control, many found themselves as displaced outcasts; wandering around the area in a state of physical discomfort that left them in a bottomless pit of desperation. Thus, since the promised messiah was a part of their religious instruction, they longed for a savior that would rescue them and establish a kingdom of peace and prosperity like the one during the reign of King David. This is one of the reasons Jesus labeled them as "Sheep without a shepherd," and took pity on them. It is thought by many scholars that even the disciples made the decision to join the rank of Jesus because of believing him to be the promised earthly king or messiah that would deliver the Jewish people out of the hands of their oppressors, thus ushering in the new exodus. Unfortunately, over time, if the peoples' expectations were not met in an expeditious manner, they would soon become disenchanted and disillusioned, dropping out. Certainly, the twelve disciples noted this and brought it to the attention of Jesus, prompting him to deliver a parable just for their ears as a way of encouragement that small steps would eventually turn into something big.

### **INTERPRETATIONS OF PARABLES**

Throughout time, an array of interpretations of the parables by religious scholars have caused ordinary people like us to become a bit confused as to the proper meaning. One thing that was pointed out as a potential problem was trying to apply meaning to every word in each



parable. Since Jesus was under pressure to create these beautiful stories in parable form right on the spot, it is recommended by many scholars that trying to apply Christian beliefs, going far beyond what Jesus intended, is over doing it, to say the least. There is even disagreement as to the number of parables and their meanings, as well.



Jesus Teaching by the Seashore by James Tissot

As you make your way through this chapter on parables, it is the writer's hope that you will become so interested in the teaching of Jesus that a desire to go deeper will occur. Thus, the following chart has been provided to offer ease in locating the parables throughout the Gospels:



Parables of Jesus in Chronological Order				
	Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1	New cloth on an old coat	9:16	2:21	5:36
2	New wine in old wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37-38
3	Lamp on a stand (also see #6)	5:14-15		
4	Wise and foolish builders	7:24-27		6:47-49
5	Moneylender forgives unequal debts			7:41-43
6	Lamp on a stand (2 <sup>nd</sup> time, see #3)		4:21-22	8:16, 11:33
7	Rich man foolishly builds bigger barns			12:16-21
8	Servants must remain watchful (also see #44)			12:35-40
9	Wise and foolish servants (also see #42)			12:42-48
10	Unfruitful fig tree			13:6-9
11	Sower and four types of soil	13:3-8, 18-23	4:3-8, 14-20	8:5-8, 11-15
12	Weeds among good plants (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:24-30, 36-43		
13	Growing seed (Kingdom of Heaven)		4:26-29	
14	Mustard seed (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
15	Yeast (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:33		13:20-21
16	Hidden treasure (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:44		
17	Valuable pearl (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:45-46		
18	Fishing net (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:47-50		
19	Owner of a house (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:52		
20	Lost sheep (sheep as children, also see #29)	18:12-14		
21	The sheep, gate, and shepherd	( John 10:1-5, 7-18 )		
22	Master and his servant			17:7-10
23	Unmerciful servant (Kingdom of Heaven)	18:23-34		
24	Good Samaritan			10:30-37
25	Friend in need			11:5-8
26	Lowest seat at the feast			14:7-14
27	Invitation to a great banquet			14:16-24
28	Cost of discipleship			14:28-33
29	Lost sheep (sheep as sinners, also see #20)			15:4-7
30	Lost coin			15:8-10
31	Lost (prodigal) son			15:11-32
32	Shrewd manager			16:1-8
33	Rich man and Lazarus			16:19-31
34	Workers in the vineyard, early and late	20:1-16		
35	Persistent widow and crooked judge			18:2-8
36	Pharisee and tax collector			18:10-14
37	King's ten servants given minas (also see #45)			19:12-27
38	Two sons, one obeys one does not	21:28-32		
39	Wicked tenants	21:33-44	12:1-11	20:9-18
40	Invitation to a wedding banquet	22:2-14		
41	Signs of the future from a fig tree	24:32-35	13:28-29	21:29-31
42	Wise and foolish servants (2 <sup>nd</sup> time, see #9)	24:45-51		
43	Wise and foolish virgins	25:1-13		
44	Servants must remain watchful (2 <sup>nd</sup> time, see #8)		13:35-37	
45	Three servants given talents (also see #37)	25:14-30		
46	Sheep and goats will be separated	25:31-46		

NIV Narrated Bible in Chronological Order (hardcover) and Daily Bible in Chronological Order (paperback) by Dr. F. LaGard  
Smith of Pepperdine University, published by Harvest House.



## THE PARABLES OF JESUS

As you view the Parables of Jesus, you will note they have been grouped into categories as follows: **PARABLES OF THE REVELATION OF GOD, PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM, PARABLES OF WISDOM AND FOLLY, PARABLES OF SALVATION, CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP AND JUDGEMENT** so that some semblance of order might occur. In addition, you will note a narrative form of a parable contains the phrase, “once upon a time” when describing stories set in the past, while those labeled as a similitude will include the words, “is like.” Also, you will note the beauty in the design of Jesus’ parables allowed him to directly address his audience with words like, which one of you, what woman, what king, and are known to leave room for interpretation. The sense of freedom in our Lord’s parables went against the grain and allowed his listener, no matter how rudimentary his knowledge of the Jewish religion or culture, promoted ease in understanding the message intended.

### I. PARABLES OF THE REVELATION OF GOD (*Forgiveness, grace, and love*)

#### *A. Unmerciful Servant*

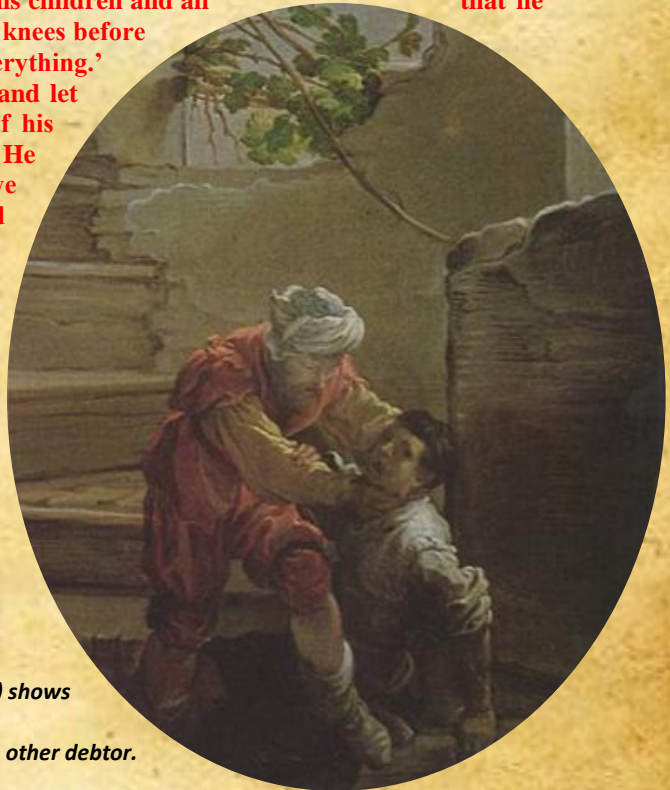
Matthew 18:23-34 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>23</sup> “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold<sup>[a]</sup> was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. <sup>26</sup> “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ <sup>27</sup> The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. <sup>28</sup> “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.<sup>[b]</sup> He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. <sup>29</sup> “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ <sup>30</sup> “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. <sup>32</sup> “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ <sup>34</sup> In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

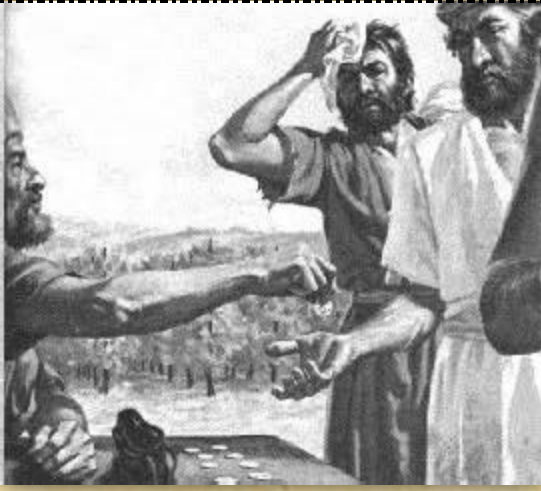
**Lesson: By his grace learn to forgive as God forgives.**

This depiction by [Domenico Fetti](#) (c. 1620) shows

*the unforgiving servant choking the other debtor.*







## B. Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16 New American Standard Bible

20 “For the kingdom of heaven is like <sup>[a]</sup>a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup>When he had agreed with the laborers for a <sup>[b]</sup>denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup>And he went out about the <sup>[c]</sup>third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; <sup>4</sup>and to those he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ And so they went. <sup>5</sup>Again he went out about the <sup>[d]</sup>sixth and the ninth hour, and did <sup>[e]</sup>the same thing. <sup>6</sup>And about the

<sup>[f]</sup>eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he <sup>\*</sup>said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day long?’ <sup>7</sup>They <sup>\*</sup>said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He <sup>\*</sup>said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ <sup>8</sup>“When evening came, the <sup>[g]</sup>owner of the vineyard <sup>\*</sup>said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.’ <sup>9</sup>When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a <sup>[h]</sup>denarius. <sup>10</sup>When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; <sup>[i]</sup>but each of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup>When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, <sup>12</sup>saying, ‘These last men have worked *only* one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’ <sup>13</sup>But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? <sup>14</sup>Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. <sup>15</sup>Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye <sup>[j]</sup>envious because I am <sup>[k]</sup>generous?’ <sup>16</sup>So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

**Lesson: (Difficult to interpret) could be a message to the Jewish audience addressing their difficulty of accepting the Gentiles as receiving God’s blessing, or, we never deserve God’s blessing and are in danger of losing it if we have a feeling of entitlement.**

## C. Lost Sheep

Matthew 18:12-14 New Living Translation (NLT)

<sup>12</sup> “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn’t wander away! <sup>14</sup> In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father’s will that even one of these little ones should perish.

**Lesson: Just as God is concerned with one lost sheep, so he is concerned for his entire creation; meaning you, too.**



Painting of the Lost Sheep by James Tissot



### D. Lost Coin

Luke 15:8-10 English Standard Version (ESV)

<sup>8</sup>“Or what woman, having ten silver coins,<sup>[a]</sup> if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

**Lesson: Each individual is precious to God and to lose one would be very distressing to him. Thus, when a single sinner repents, rejoicing in heaven occurs. He was lost but now he is found.**



### E. Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>11</sup>Then Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> said, “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup>A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup>When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup>He would gladly have filled himself with<sup>[b]</sup> the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ <sup>20</sup>So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And get the fatted calf and kill



Prodigal son by James Tissot



it, and let us eat and celebrate;<sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.<sup>25</sup> “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.<sup>26</sup> He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.<sup>27</sup> He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’<sup>28</sup> Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him.<sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.<sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’<sup>31</sup> Then the father<sup>[d]</sup> said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.’<sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

**Lesson:** How easy it is to resent God’s gracious forgiveness of others; allowing our self righteousness to get in the way. Don’t think your sins are less, but rejoice instead.

## II. PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM (Growth and joy of finding the kingdom)

### F. *The Seed And The Soil*

Matthew 13:1-23



The Sower by James Tissot

<sup>13</sup>That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup>Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup>And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup>Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup>Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup>Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup>Let anyone with ears listen!” <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” <sup>11</sup>He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. <sup>12</sup>For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. <sup>13</sup>The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’ <sup>14</sup>With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: ‘You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. <sup>15</sup>For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.’ <sup>16</sup>But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. <sup>17</sup>Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see,

but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.”<sup>18</sup> “Hear then the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup>When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. <sup>20</sup>As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup>yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a



while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. <sup>22</sup>As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. <sup>23</sup>But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

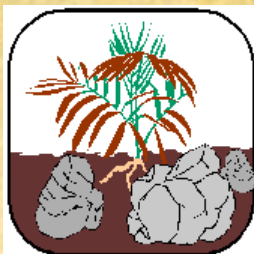
**Background:** The Sower and the Seed was thought to be the first parable Jesus told. Before the lesson to the parable is highlighted, it is important to first take into consideration the geographical location in ancient Palestine. The example Jesus used describing the four soil types would have been recognized immediately by his Jewish audience because they all existed in any field in Palestine.



**Packed Soil**

In Palestine the common ground (*wayside ground*) was divided into long narrow strips which each man could cultivate as he desired. In between these strips of cultivated land was a narrow three foot path in width that was considered as right of way. Over time, peoples' footsteps would pack the soil, making it as hard as concrete. When seed fell on the surface, it would simply be eaten by birds or become hard and dry.

**Lesson: A heart hardened by sin does not receive the Word of God.**



**Rocky Soil**

In Palestine, a field could also have a thin, shallow layer of soil with rock beneath that was usually located over a shelf of limestone. Although the seed would quickly sprout, the roots could not go deep enough to provide the nourishment necessary for the plant to withstand the hot sun; thus shortly wilting and dying.

**Lesson: A heart for Christ that is not deeply rooted will turn away.**



**Thorny Soil**

By simply turning over the soil, it would take on the appearance of being ready to receive the seed. Unfortunately, if during the last planting season, thorny weeds had been allowed to go to seed they would become problematic for the newly planted seeds by sprouting right along beside them; thus choking out the farmers crop.

**Lesson: Things of this world choke out a heart for Christ.**





Good Soil

Good soil is fertile and rich, “yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” It receives seeds allowing roots to grow deep, thus, providing nourishment to the entire plant.

**Lesson: An open heart receives God’s Word, producing much fruit.**

## G. Weeds Among Good Plants (The Enemy’s Work)



**Matthew 13:24-34 New International Version (NIV)**

<sup>24</sup> Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. <sup>26</sup> When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. <sup>27</sup> “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ <sup>28</sup> “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ <sup>29</sup> “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

### Background:

Once again, the people gathered around Jesus would have known exactly the weed he was talking about in this parable. The weed, or tare, was called bearded darnel which in its early

stages so closely resembled wheat that it was impossible to distinguish the difference; thus, trying to pull it out would have meant removing the wheat, as well. The roots were so inextricably intertwined that it simply could not be accomplished. The process for harvesting the wheat could have been completed in the following manner:

1) Since the darnel was shorter than the wheat, the crop was harvested over the top of the offending plant and then the entire field was set on fire. Alternatively, another choice as the reaper reaped, would be to separate the two, dropping the darnel in bundles to be burned.

2) If there was not very much darnel amongst a field of wheat, the crop was picked and the women would separate the grain of wheat from the darnel.





Since the darnel was gray in color, and easily distinguishable, the possibility of a mistake was very small. However, since the darnel was semi-poisonous, it was critical to be vigilant. (So serious that even the Roman laws had included a penalty for failing to remove the darnel.)

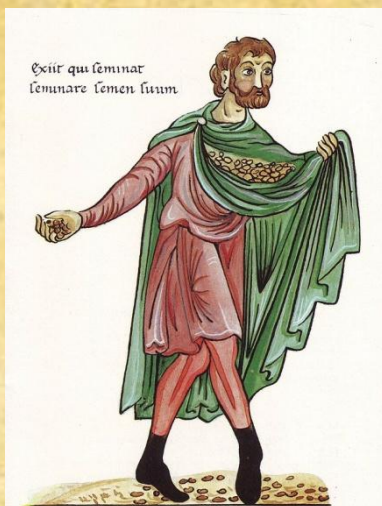
\*\*\**(This parable was also directed at the disciples as well as the Pharisees because of their disapproval of the kind of people whom the world considered as unsatisfactory that had gathered around Jesus. They were simply unclean and untouchable subjects. SO, ONCE AGAIN, THE ACTIONS OF JESUS WAS TO GO DIRECTLY IN THE FACE OF INTOLERANCE.*

**Lesson:** Leave the judgment of others to God; who knows all the facts. In addition, the weeds were symbolic of the enemy of God, Satan, whose goal is to assault mankind.

**Background:** The next two parables Jesus told of the growing seed and mustard seed have similar lessons. One thing the Bible states is how much discouragement the disciples were feeling and would experience in spreading the message of the kingdom. As the masses gathered around Jesus, it would become obvious to them that a large number of the listeners were rejecting the words of Jesus and simply dropping by the wayside. Our Lord also knew that this would be just the beginning of the obstacles they would face in launching his church.

**Lesson:** Do not be discouraged by small beginnings for, with God behind them, they will turn into mighty acts and make the intended mark our Father has in mind. Move forward one small step at a time and keep focused on God.

## H. Growing Seed



Mark 4: 26-29, [World English Bible](#)

He said, "The Kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed on the earth, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he doesn't know how. For the earth bears fruit: first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe, immediately he puts forth the sickle, because the harvest has come."

*"Hortus Deliciarum, Der Sämman" by Herrad von Landsberg - Hortus Deliciarum.*

## I. Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31 - 13:32 ([World English Bible](#))

<sup>31</sup> Another parable he put forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:<sup>32</sup> Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.





Mustard seeds are the small round seeds of various mustard plants. The seeds are usually about 1 or 2 mm in diameter. Mustard seeds may be colored from yellowish white to black. They are important herbs in many regional foods. The seeds can come from three different plants: black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), brown Indian mustard (*B. juncea*), and white mustard (*B. hirta/Sinapis alba*).

**Lesson:** The kingdom of God which initially starts small grows to be the biggest of all garden plants. It was used later on as Jesus taught about faith.

### ***J. Hidden Treasure (Joy of finding the kingdom)***



Matthew 13:44, World English Bible

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found, and hid. In his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field."

*Parable of the Hidden Treasure by Rembrandt (c. 1630).*

**Background:** The idea of a finding a hidden treasure in a field may seem farfetched to many of us. However, since Jesus lived in the land where many wars occurred, hiding valuables in the earth was thought to be the safest place. Thus, this parable was well understood.

**Lesson:** The kingdom of heaven is more valuable than anything else we can have, and a person must be willing to give up everything to obtain it. (Footnotes—Life Application Study Bible)

### ***K. Valuable Pearl ("Pearl of Great Price") Joy of finding the kingdom***



Matthew 13: 45-46

...45"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

**Lesson:** Like the merchant, we should earnestly seek the kingdom, be totally committed to it, keeping our focus always on God.

(PARABLES CONTINUED IN CHAPTER 6)



**Sources:**

**"The Parables of Jesus" by William Barclay**

**"The Challenge of Jesus' Parables" edited by Richard N. Longenecker**

**"The Parables of Jesus" by James Montgomery Boice**

**"The Parables of Jesus" by Arland J. Hultgren**

**"Studying the Parables of Jesus" by Peter Rhea Jones**

***"Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist," by Brant Pitre***

***"Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story," by Brant Pitre***



**GROWING IN THE WORD**



- 1) Suggested Hymn: "What A Friend We Have In Jesus" from devotionalembbers.com hymnal as played by Brad Jent. Remember that playing a hymn prior to beginning your time together allows clarity of mind to take place.**
- 2) It is important to focus on the four component parts the "New Exodus" as described at the beginning of this chapter. Read each one out loud and spend time discussing it as a group. As you study Scripture, the fact that Jesus had to address these religious beliefs will promote greater understanding of the approach and words he used.**
- 3) Now move to the definition of parables and compare the example listed that related to King David against the style Jesus used for teaching the people.**
- 4) Spend time going over the Sowing Seeds Parable and discuss the types of soil in Bible lands as compared to ours today. Using the parables, apply the meaning of each to the here and now.**
- 5) Which one of the parables in this section helped you the most? Discuss if willing.**
- 6) Compare the audience gathered around Jesus to your congregational members today. (Likeness and differences)**
- 7) Which disciple did you choose to sit and walk beside on the journey with Jesus? Will you remain with that particular one or select another as time passes?**



### Prayer

Dear Lord,

We realize the importance of walking beside your disciples in this your final three years on earth. Help us understand that you were in the process of creating the Bible history that we are now privileged to study at will. Although your audience was hearing your concepts for the first time, we have the opportunity of deeply studying the written form of what occurred within just a few precious years.

Father, please help us to realize that having access to the written document of your teaching does not give us an advantage without the commitment to study, pray, and grow while humbly listening to the Holy Spirit on a daily basis for guidance.

As we walk with you down the dusty highways and byways surrounded by the downtrodden, open our eyes to your vision, give us ears to hear distinctly the meaning you desire, and create within each heart the thirst for even greater knowledge.

We close this prayer in a time of gratitude for the patience, mercy, and love you extend to us each and every day of our lives. May your name be praised forever and ever! Amen!



# Chapter 7

## MORE PARABLES



"OldRoadFromJerusalemToJericho" by שוורץ אליעזר - ירושלים - he.wiki. Licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons



## INTRODUCTION

As the writer researched the parables of Jesus using a variety of sources, it soon became crystal clear that this method of teaching was the primary technique Christ chose in getting his point across to his audience. Also, one only has to read his masterful words to realize how picturesque the scenes were that he painted in the minds of the masses that surrounded him. Only our Lord would have the ability to get his listener to picture vividly “a camel going through the eye of a needle”. Using the Aramaic language of the Jewish people he profusely focused on the concept of the kingdom of God using such clarity and drama that not only could the Jewish people comprehend his message, but also the officers in Roman- dominated Palestine. As Jesus revealed God as the Redeemer of humanity throughout the three years of his ministry on earth, not only did he invite all in his presence to receive the good news of the kingdom , but even the generations to follow; meaning all of us. However, he also stressed the fact that understanding would not be automatic for anyone, but would require every individual to put forth the necessary energy and effort to comprehend. The Scripture from *Matthew 11: 15*, “*Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand*” makes this abundantly clear.

Therefore, since the parables of Jesus are labeled by many Bible scholars as the centerpiece of his work and are understood universally, the writer felt it critical to devote another chapter to them. Although you will note that it was not possible to write about all of them, the chart included in the last chapter will offer you a source for locating any you desire to personally study.

*Parables - by James C. Christense*

### III. PARABLES OF WISDOM

#### *L. Wise And Foolish Virgins (Also called” The Parable of The Ten Virgins”)*

*Matthew 25:1-13, World English Bible*

*Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. Those who were foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, "Behold! The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!" Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise answered, saying, "What if there*





isn't enough for us and you? You go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves." While they went away to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins also came, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us." But he answered, "Most certainly I tell you, I don't know you." Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

### **Background:**

Using the concept of marriage in this parable was very wise because of the common understanding by his Jewish audience of the laws to be followed. According to Jewish custom, marriage typically involved two stages:

1) Kiddushin or erusin—a time when the marriage contract was arranged by the parents of the bride and groom. This time of engagement would have meant that the couple was legally married, with dissolution occurring only if the husband divorced the wife. (See Matthew 1: 18 on Mary and Joseph's relationship for added depth.) Sometimes land passed from one family to another as the bride's dowry.

2) One year later, the marriage was celebrated when the groom came to collect his bride. After a proper ceremony, a marriage feast occurred that lasted one week. The bride was about 12-13 years of age and the groom around 18. You will find more on this in the chapter on miracles when Jesus turned the water into wine, as well as the one on Christ's Return.

**Lesson:** When Jesus returns to take his people to heaven, we must be ready. Spiritual preparation cannot be bought or borrowed at the last minute. (Life Application Study Bible)

### ***M. Parable of the Rich Fool***

*The Parable of the Rich Fool by [Rembrandt](#), 1627.*



*[Luke 12:16-21](#), [World English Bible](#)*

He spoke a parable to them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth abundantly. He reasoned within himself, saying, 'What will I do, because I don't have room to store my crops?' He said, 'This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns, and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. I will tell my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease, eat, drink, be merry."' "But God said to him, 'You foolish one, tonight your soul is required of you. The things which you have prepared—whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."



**Lesson: If you accumulate wealth only to enrich yourself, with no concern for helping others, you will enter eternity empty handed. (Life Application Study Bible)**

#### **N. Wise and Foolish Builders**

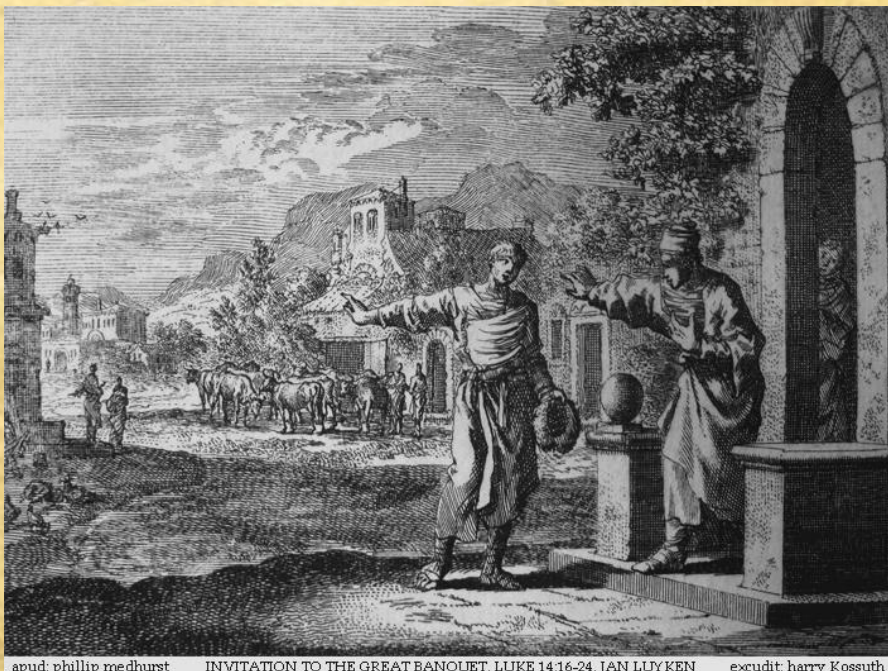


*Matthew 7: 24-27, World English Bible*

*Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn't do them will be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."Bell Rock Lighthouse - Biographical Sketch of the Late Robert Stevenson"*

**Lesson: If you want a life that will last for all eternity, build on Jesus, the solid rock.** "The Parables of Jesus" by James M. Boice

#### **IV. PARABLES OF SALVATION**



#### **O. Invitation to a Banquet (Also called the Great Feast)**

**Luke 14:16-24 NIV**

**16** Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. **17** At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' **18** "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' **19** "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please



excuse me.' 20 "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' 21 "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' 22 " 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' 23 "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. 24 I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.' "

### **Background:**

The setting of this parable is thought to have been in the home of a Pharisee where Jesus' disciples were present. The Greek definition for the word banquet could also be used interchangeably with an actual banquet or simply the noon meal of the day. Additionally, many scholars thought this parable from Jesus was in response to a guest's question that was present around the banquet table. Also, during the time of Christ, it was a common occurrence for two invitations to be issued to intended guests; one announcing the meal and the other to inform those chosen when the meal was ready to be served.

Therefore, according to Arland D. Hultgren author of "The Parables of Jesus", the first invitation that went out could have been referring to an earlier era of proclamation of the kingdom, which was done by the prophets, while the second invitation by the master's slave could correspond to the ministry of Jesus himself (including his disciples). The refusal of the final summons might mean those rejecting the preaching of Jesus, (meaning mankind), and the master who prepares the banquet along with the final judgment, as God.

It was also believed that a very clear message in this parable is being sent by Jesus that the people labeled by society as untouchables or unclean were open and responding to the message of Christ, and eligible for full participation in the kingdom of heaven. No difference was being made between the guests based on status in the community; a fact that remains true today for all of us. The inclusive nature of the Christian community is at the very heart of this parable; meaning the Lord's Supper is open to all who accept the invitation. In spite of this opportunity offered by Jesus, some individuals will be simply so trapped by their own busyness or feelings of self sufficiency that the opportunity of obtaining eternal life will pass them by due to self-righteousness, apathy, or ignorance; thus Jesus' words from **Matthew 7: 21-23**, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

**Lesson:** This parable stresses the necessity of preparing ourselves to come into the presence of God. First we must accept the invitation by repenting of sin, followed by a journey of discipleship in his kingdom. Thus, it is not about going through the act of worship, but truly praising God with an open heart and mind; knowing it is all about him.



**\*\*\*Writer's note:** It is important to remember the impossibility of the human eye to be single, but instead finds itself glancing toward man's own honor because of wearing an opinion of self worth that prevents a clear vision of God's glory. Yet, the necessity of stepping out of the way to make room for our Father to be exalted is paramount to all mankind.

## **P. Pharisee and Tax Collector**

**Luke 18:10-14 King James Version (KJV)**



Pharisee and the Publican by James Tissot

**<sup>10</sup> Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.**

**<sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.**

**<sup>12</sup> I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.**

**<sup>13</sup> And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.**

**<sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.**

### **Background:**

Obviously from verse 10, both men were Jewish and went to the Temple to pray; a shocking statement from Jesus right from the start on this parable. After all, the publican (tax collector) was considered to be of disreputable behavior; a person who made a living by overcharging people on behalf of the Roman Empire. Thus, the fact that Jesus used the example of the tax

collector going to the Temple to pray must have carried great shock value to his audience. After all, how could he be there alongside the Pharisee who was classified by the masses of people at the time as being proud and self-righteous? Still, in spite of their superficial behavior, they were known to be held in high regard by the people. In *Matthew 6: 5*, Jesus went deeper by stating, *"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."*

It is important to note the ease with which Jesus states this parable; especially given the criticism he had already been receiving for even associating with people that were not deemed as acceptable by those in the upper class of the hierarchy.



Last, it is critical to compare and contrast the descriptions given portraying the words the two people prayed. The content and actions of the Pharisee were proud and self-righteous, while those of the Publican were sincerely humble, pleading to God for mercy.

**Lesson:** Prayer should be from an open, humble heart, totally focused on God rather than self to allow healing and growth to occur. It is a personal, private conversation with the Father.

## V. CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP (Life of the followers of Jesus)

### Q. *Lamp on a Stand*

Luke 8: 16-18 American Standard Version



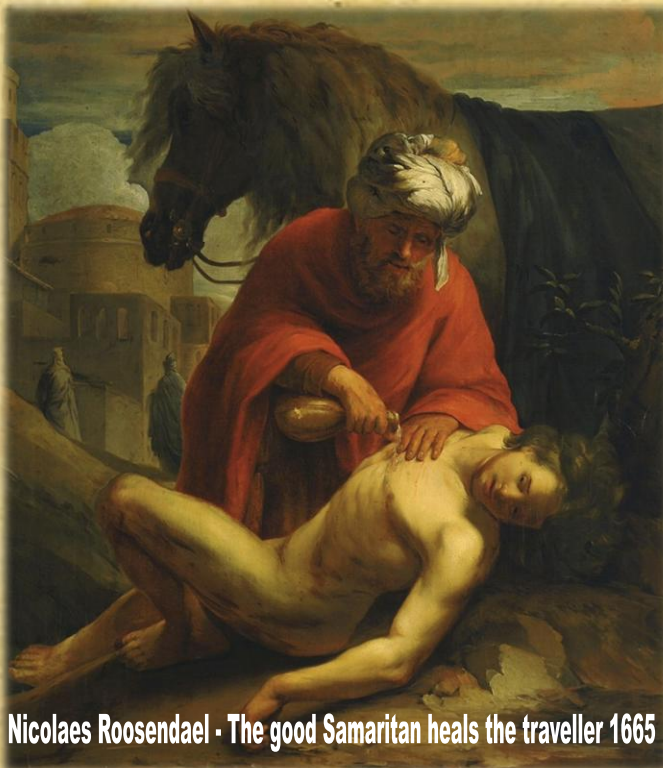
"And no man, when he hath lighted a lamp, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but putteth it on a stand, that they that enter in may see the light. For nothing is hid, that shall not be made manifest; nor [anything] secret, that shall not be known and come to light. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he thinketh he hath."

**Lesson:** (Life Application Study Bible) When the light of the truth about Jesus illuminates us, it is our duty to shine the light to help others. Our witness for Christ should be public, not hidden.

From St. Paul Methodist Church, Springfield, MO.

### R. *Good Samaritan*

Luke 10: 30-37



A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said: "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the

Nicolaes Roosendael - The good Samaritan heals the traveller 1665



**man who fell into the hands of the robbers? He said: "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him: "Go and do likewise."**

#### **Background:**

Although the parable of the Good Samaritan is often thought to be self explanatory, it is critical to put it in context of why Jesus created this well know picture story. The Jewish people gathered around Jesus would most certainly have been familiar with God's commandment in the Torah to love others. Thus, when an expert of the law stood up to test Jesus by first asking "What must I do to inherit eternal life," Jesus automatically leaned on **Leviticus 19: 18** by stating, **"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."** However, hearing this reply, and being in need of self justification, the man immediately asked Jesus for a definition of neighbor.

In addition to setting the stage as to who asked the question, it is critical to plug in the fact that Jewish people looked down upon Samaritans and were forbidden to associate with them in any manner. This population group was the new and mixed inhabitants whom the king of Assyria had brought from Babylon that had settled in Samaria in place of the original people that had been removed into captivity. There was deep seated hatred between Jews and Samaritans. (Thus, the reason for the expert of the law to be in need of justification, plus his approach in tricking Jesus) As Jesus beautiful parable unfolded, the shock that rumbled across the minds of the listeners must have been like thunder. Once again, our Lord was dramatically laying down the gauntlet as to the expected behavior of citizens living in God's kingdom; a tremendous departure from the norm. It is also important to note that Jesus was not just trying to get attention for attention's sake, but truly wanted the people he loved to get back to the basics of the Ten Commandants. Paul repeated the teaching of Jesus due to his belief that to love one's neighbor as oneself summarized the entire moral law of the Old Testament.

**Lesson: Drawing no lines of distinction, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." (Luke 10: 27)(KJV)**

*Good Samaritan by  
Ferdinand Hodler (1885)*

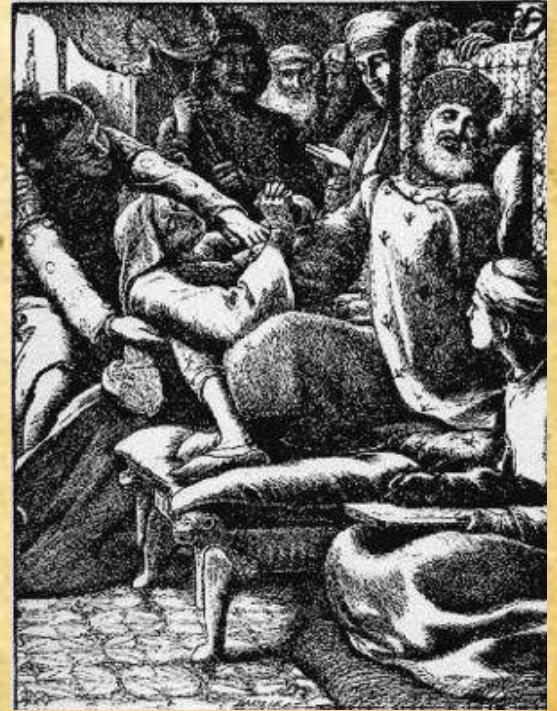




## R. Persistent Widow and Crooked Judge

Luke 18:2-8 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>2</sup>He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. <sup>3</sup>And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'"<sup>4</sup>"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, <sup>5</sup>yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"<sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup>And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? <sup>8</sup>I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"



**Lesson: Persist in prayer, never giving up by keeping your request always in front of God. He loves us and will always hear our cries for help.**

The Hebrew phrase for God is love = אהבה אלוקים (elohim ahava)

## VI. JUDGEMENT

### R. Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30 English Standard Version (ESV)



<sup>14</sup>"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants<sup>[a]</sup> and entrusted to them his property. <sup>15</sup>To one he gave five talents,<sup>[b]</sup> to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. <sup>17</sup>So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. <sup>18</sup>But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup>Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' <sup>21</sup>His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.<sup>[c]</sup> You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>22</sup>And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' <sup>23</sup>His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>24</sup>He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' <sup>26</sup>But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?



<sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. <sup>30</sup> And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

**Background:** In this parable, Jesus is letting mankind know that God in all his wisdom gives everyone special gifts (talents) to use in spreading the good news of his kingdom. Since he knows us better than we know ourselves, they are bestowed on each person based on his/her abilities, which he expects to be used and developed through his guidance. Then, we are to invest them wisely by serving as a disciple in his kingdom. The main point is not to compare our talents and abilities to those of others, but to use what we have received wisely for the glory of God. Laziness, fear, and procrastination are unacceptable in the eyes of the Father. Waiting for all the lights to turn green before moving forward will take an individual to the land of "NO WHERE"! Have courage and understand without doubt, that every human being sins, makes mistakes, and falls short of the mark; a part of the process that God totally understands; thus, the reason for his grace.

**Lesson:** In the book, "The Parables of Jesus" by Arland J. Hultgren, the main idea of this parable is stated crystal clear with the following statement:

*In the words of Martin Luther, "Sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more."*

*"The words of promise from Jesus, inviting disciples into the joy of his kingdom, are meant to be heard by all who do not worry too much about securing their own lives, but get on with lives of self-abandon and witness, knowing that the grace of God in Christ will more than compensate for any mistakes they might make."*

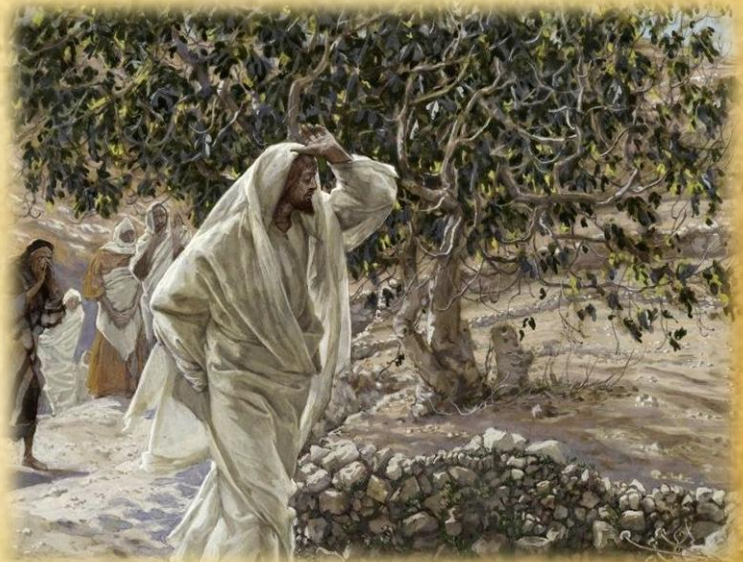
When each of us is standing in front of God's throne, just as in the parable of the talents, we will be held accountable!

### **S. Parable of the Fig Tree**

**Luke 13: 6-7**

*And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. Z"And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?'*

**Lesson:** God's patience will not be extended forever to those who do not bear fruit in his kingdom.





## T. Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16: 19-31



19“Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20“And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22“Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23“In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24“And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’ 25“But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26‘And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.’ 27“And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house— 28for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ 29“But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30“But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if

someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ 31“But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

*The Rich Man in Hell by James Tissot, ca. 1890.*

### Background:

This parable would have been one of great shock value to those gathered around Jesus due to the mindset that wealth was a symbol of a person’s righteousness. Thus, when our Lord reversed the notion by rewarding a diseased beggar and punishing a rich man, the atmosphere must have been filled with gasps and faces wearing horrified expressions. After all, it was believed the downtrodden in society were unclean and deserving of their plight because of sinfulness.

Then, as we recall the parable discussed previously of the talents and the necessity of using ones blessings to the glory of God, the consequences for noncompliance is sent home by



Jesus like a knife to the heart in this graphic story. The rich man was hard hearted in spite of his blessings and focused only on self gratification.

**Lesson: The following two verses in the Bible best demonstrate the attitude of God toward helping the downtrodden in society.**

*Deuteronomy 15:7 ESV*

*"If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother,"*

*1 John 3:17 ESV*

*"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"*

### **TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION**

At this point, it is the writer's hope that you the reader have drunk deeply of the beautiful, picturesque parables of Jesus and found that only his truths can satisfy your insatiable thirst for more. As each story unfolded to an audience that lived during the time of Christ, were you able to place yourself in the plot? Did you identify the downtrodden in society that need your help? Were you able to recognize that both then and now, tares still grow among the plants? Certainly, as a Christian, you must live daily in an extremely chaotic world where the key for growth is focusing on the race set before you by your Creator. Have you discerned your talents and dedicated them to the growth of his kingdom through discipleship? In the parable of the prodigal son, did you identify the father's love as an example of God's love for you?

In addition, to the application of the parables to our own lives, let us pause in a time of contemplation and concentrate on the sacrifice of Jesus. God of very God, the Great I Am, Alpha & Omega, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, needs nothing from mankind at all. Yet, in order to draw us back to him and prepare us for coming into his presence, he lived in the harshest of circumstances traveling relentlessly telling stories to mere human beings who lacked the ability to understand heavenly things and, at the same time, possessed an unwillingness to change. Instead, they were waiting for him to satisfy their need of immediate gratification; relief from their human condition in an unforgiving world. Yet, our Lord tolerated their rejection, feeling inwardly brutalized with every step he took. However, instead of giving up, he loved his creation so deeply that he walked resolutely to the cross.



Finally, it is the writer's hope that you placed yourself in the audience as one of the individual's in the mass of those gathered at the Savior's feet. After all, we are those people! No matter the race, color, or station in life, the parables Jesus told then are equally poignant to all of us. Therefore let each of us pause, look into the Master's face, and allow the lessons to penetrate the very fiber of our being. Friend, Jesus is waiting for you to open your heart to his messages of the kingdom and follow where he leads you every moment of your life. Amen!

\*\*\*\*Just as a way of review, use the painting below of "The Parables of Jesus" by James Tissot and try to identify the parables. You might even desire to enlarge the painting on a screen and let the group join in the fun. As you locate and name the parable, try and recall the lesson for each.





Sources:

"The Parables of Jesus" by William Barclay

"The Challenge of Jesus' Parables" edited by Richard N. Longenecker

"The Parables of Jesus" by James Montgomery Boice

"The Parables of Jesus" by Arland J. Hultgren

"Studying the Parables of Jesus" by Peter Rhea Jones



### **GROWING IN THE WORD**



- 1) Suggested Hymn: "His Eye Is On A Sparrow" can be found in [devotionalembbers.com](http://devotionalembbers.com) by opening the hymnal. (Please recall that playing music prior to studying brings you into the moment and supports mental acuity.)
- 2) You have just read numerous beautiful parables as told by our Savior that are as fresh today as then. Now that you have completed a large number, do you have a favorite?
- 3) Locate the ones that pertained to the necessary steps for receiving eternal life. Which one spoke to you personally? It gave new meaning to the Bible being like a sharp Sword, didn't it?
- 4) How could you use parables in proclaiming the Word of God as a disciple? Remembering that 80% of the population learns better visually, rather than using auditory skills, how could the parables satisfy this fact when telling the good news of the kingdom?
- 5) Given this statistic above, how could you relate the parables Jesus constructed with his great ability to paint with words?
- 6) Choose one of the parables and read it slowly out loud as a group. Did that process change the image in your mind that Jesus portrayed? Did it change your impressions of the main idea?
- 7) When reviewing the numerous paintings of a given parable, why are there so many different impressions drawn of it? What influences might cause this to occur?



## PRAYER

Dear Kind Father,

As we have read many of your beautiful parables, it is apparent why another word for you is the Great Creator? Then when we look around at the magnificence of nature, it should come as no surprise that your parables were so incredibly picturesque. You not only charm the eye with textures and colors in the landscape, but accompany it with fragrances that are unforgettable to our sense of smell. Added to all of this is the beautiful sounds of peace that invite the ear to coax our entire being into coming alive with an energy that surpasses all understanding.

As we leave this chapter on parables, may we always treasure them as gifts to use throughout our lives in a variety of ways, not only to provide solace for our own souls, but for others as well.

In closing, we ask you to write the parables on our hearts with indelible ink so that their memory will last us until we kneel at your feet in heaven.

All these things we pray in your precious name and for your sake! Amen!



## *Chapter 8*

# MIRACLES OF JESUS



"Water into Wine" compliments of Austin Avenue United Methodist Church, Waco, TX



## REASONS FOR MIRACLES

Although in the previous chapters we have stressed the earthly life of Christ and the impact it had upon his teachings in Scripture, it is now necessary to broaden that focus based on the fact that Jesus was both **human** and **divine**. Since it was important for our Lord to endure the temptations and hardships that his children encounter on their earthly journeys, it was obvious that he drank from the cup of life that a mere human experiences. However, this chapter's topic on the miracles he performed automatically takes us deeply into new territory; that of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Since the mission of our Lord was to deliver the message that he was the Son of God and the long awaited Messiah, it was necessary to establish this fact clearly in the minds of his own people. Throughout the Old Testament, the cries of the Jewish people were repeatedly and passionately sent heavenward in prayer for the long promised Messiah(also referred to as the New Moses) to arrive with the mission of delivering them out of the hands of their oppressors, thus, ushering in the Messianic Age; "Olam Hava (world to come)."

In the "Complete Jewish Bible" written by David H. Stern, he outlines the prophecies from the Old Testament (Tanakh) that must be fulfilled by Jesus (Yeshua) in order to be accepted as the long awaited Messiah; familiar Scripture used as a measuring rod by the Jews to evaluate the statements of an individual making this claim.

Thus, the following Scriptures from this list offer an explanation as to the reason Jesus performed miracles throughout his ministry:

**Isaiah 61: 1-2 "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn..."** *(Life Study Bible, New International Version)*

Jesus then quoted these words in **Luke 4: 18-21**, as he read to the people in the synagogue, stopping in the middle of Isaiah 61: 2 saying, **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."** Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."** *(Life Study Bible, New International Version)*

Another prophecy listed by Stern from the Old Testament (Tanakh) was that the long awaited Messiah would have a ministry of healing. **Isaiah 35: 5-6** states this by reading, **"Then will the**



**eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.”** *(Life Study Bible, New International Version)*

Then, as John the Baptist was sitting in prison awaiting his death and needing confirmation that Jesus was indeed the Messiah for whom he had paved the way, Jesus responded with these words found in **Matthew 11: 5, “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.”** *(Life Study Bible, New International Version)*

In addition, it is important to point out that during the time of Christ’s ministry on earth, it was a common occurrence for individuals to place claim on being the long awaited messiah. Thus, not only did people view all announcements with a jaundice eye, but needed miraculous proof beyond any possible doubt for a person making this proclamation to even capture their attention; thus, the arrival of the miracles of Jesus.

### **THE COMPASSIONATE MESSIAH**

Before concentrating on the miracles Christ performed, let us focus on life for the downtrodden during the time our Lord walked the earth in human form. Recalling back to an earlier chapter that described the vast number of Jewish people that were frantically struggling to survive every moment of each day was truly astounding and appalling to say the least. Given this situation, it is important to recognize the difficulty Jesus faced in delivering the message of the kingdom; which was that of addressing people wearing disease ridden bodies as the result of abject poverty; making it almost impossible for his message to resonate in their minds. What was the likelihood for individuals to concentrate on heavenly things when their physical bodies were crying out for relief? What a mass of hideous sickness must have thrust itself into the path of our Lord. Given the weakened physical condition of the many suffering from disease states the atmosphere would have reeked with the foul odors resulting from their lots in life. Witnessing constantly those suffering from ulcers and putrefying sores must have always been in the path of Christ. The horrifying cries constantly uttered by those enduring the agony of existing under the monstrous evil of oppression must have been ever present no matter the road Jesus chose to travel.

Yet, dear reader, Scripture clearly states that not once did our Lord show any sign of distaste or disgust, but instead viewed them with a heart full of compassion and pity. **Matthew 11: 28-30** best describes how Jesus felt and feels today about his children who suffer in life by stating, **“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”** *(Life Study Bible, New International Version)*



Thus, the actions of Jesus are best described by reading from the book of Isaiah 42: 3; the scroll Jesus had not only memorized as a child, but read aloud in the synagogues upon many occasions; words that lived in the heart of Christ as evidenced by his consistent behavior during his time on earth. **"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."** (*Life Study Bible, New International Version*)



*"THE SICK WAITING FOR JESUS TO PASS BY", by James Tissot*

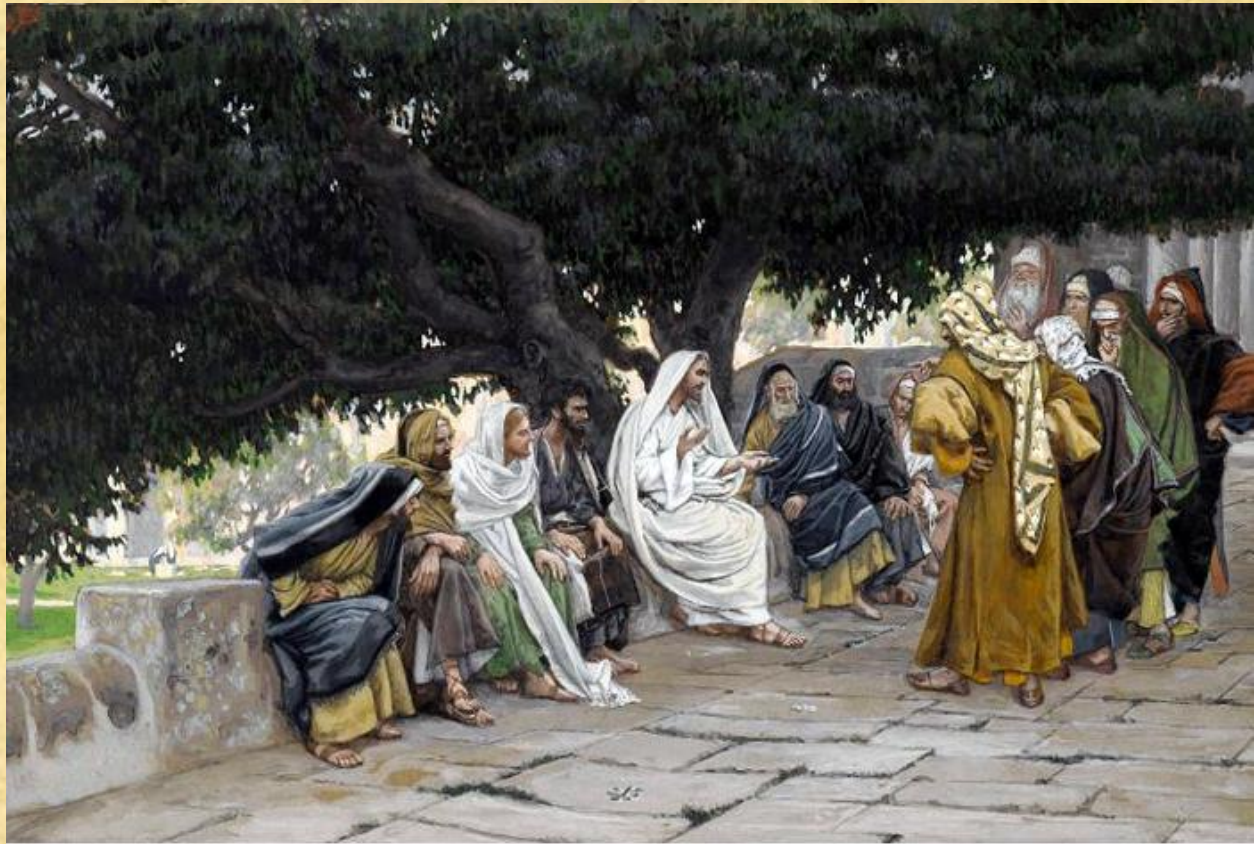
The actions of Jesus clearly set him apart from those claiming to be messiah! Our Lord went against the teachings of the law by associating with people labeled by the religious leaders as being untouchables and unclean. The act of connecting with them in any manner made the one doing the touching, unclean, as well. In Biblical times, it was believed those classified as downtrodden in society were there because of being punished for a committed sin. Everything from being poor to suffering from physical illness was viewed as being in this condition as the result of sinful behavior; thus punishment straight from God.

Consequently, when the compassion flowed from the heart of Christ like a crystal clear stream from the desert, great multitudes followed him and he healed them all! The heat of fever, the lethargy of palsy, filth of leprosy or the rage of madness were no match for the Jewish Messiah's power that came from the mighty hand of God! Down every path, throughout the villages and in every corner of the fields, the divine power of the Lord



triumphed over evil. Pause and think for a moment how the people who suffered from years of disease and starvation reacted to the healing actions of Jesus. It is no wonder he had to escape to quiet places during the night or in boats floating on the water with the purpose of communing with his Father in a time of restoration. Yet, this time alone in the presence of his Father was so critical to his existence that it was always a top priority; thus never missed or ignored.

Unfortunately, these actions from our Savior caused an enormous schism between the rulers of the day and Jesus. In their eyes, he was breaking the law; actions that were punishable by



The Pharisees and the Sadducees Come to Tempt Jesus by James Tissot

death! After all, not only was the ministry of Jesus viewed as a radical departure from the law, but also posed a threat to the leaders' base of power. Thus, it was understandable, after viewing the great masses of people clamoring after Jesus it was no wonder the attention of the Jewish leaders was quickly captured. They were convinced that this person claiming to be the messiah was definitely going to draw the attention of the Roman officers who would then label it as insurrection, and at the same time, diminish their base of control. Therefore, the leaders joined forces in planning ways to trick Jesus into making a fool of himself by demanding to see miracles, thus, setting him up for failure while simultaneously breaking the law.



Matthew 16: 1-4 shows not only the response of Jesus to the Pharisees and Sadducees, but also lets everyone know that he did not perform miracles for show. They had tried to explain away Jesus' miracles as a sleight of hand coincidence and use of evil power. However, since they believed that only God could do a sign in the sky, they were certain that the request as recorded below by Matthew would be way beyond Jesus' ability; thus setting him up for failure.

**Matthew 16: 1-4---"The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away. (By using the sign of Jonah, who was inside a great fish for three days, Jesus was predicting his death and resurrection.) Life Application Bible New International Version)**

## **MIRACLES OF JESUS**

Although the miracles of Jesus are recorded in the other Gospels, the ones described in this chapter will be centered on the seven from the book of John with the exception of Calming the Storm and the Transfiguration. Since the thrust of the writing in John is to stress the deity of Christ, we will pay close attention to those he chose to pass along. One thing scholars point out is that three signs of the Old Testament (Tanakh) prophecies are fulfilled in the book of John.

- 1) All power and authority are given to Jesus as the Son of Man.
- 2) The lame and sick are healed.
- 3) The dead are raised to life.

Before we center on the first miracle Jesus performed, not only is it important to marvel at the jubilation expressed by the poor souls healed of a disease that had caused each minute of their lives to painfully drag along, it is critical to be conscious of the inward change acceptance of salvation had upon those paralyzed by despair. When the Lord spoke God's Words of Power, the feelings of joy and peace that replaced torment were astounding. Think of Mary Magdalene described in Luke from whom seven demons had been removed. So immeasurably was her life changed, that Scripture portrays her as being a devout follower of Jesus; even placing her at the resurrection site as the first to behold the risen Christ.

Thus, it is important for us to not distance ourselves from Mary's story because of the date in history her healing occurred. No matter the point in time when evil is removed, the act is too great without discerning it; making the new life imparted too remarkable to not be perceived. "By his stripes we are healed". (Isaiah 53: 5) Also, Jean-Pierre Isbouts author of "In the Footsteps of Jesus" wrote: "What is clear, however, is that the miracle accounts appear



in the oldest strata about Jesus---the earliest traditions that circulated before they were collected and edited by the evangelists.” Unlike now, people living during the time of Christ believed that miracles were symbolic of the supernatural power of God.

*Edelfelt Christ and Mary Magdalene 1890.JPG*







### WONDEROUS ACT OF JESUS

#### **WONDEROUS ACT**

	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>John</b>
Jesus cleanses a leper	8: 2-4	1: 40-45	5: 12-16	
Heals a centurion's servant	8: 5-13		7: 1-10	
Heals a disciple's mother-in-law	8: 14-15	1: 29-31	4: 38-39	
Heals the sick and possessed	8: 16-17	1: 32-34	4: 40-41	
Jesus calms the storm	8: 23-27	4: 35-41	8: 22-25	
Jesus sends demons into the swine herd	8: 28-32	5: 2-13	8: 26-33	
Jesus heals a paralyzed man	9: 2-8	2: 3-12	5: 18-26	
Jesus raises the leader's daughter	9: 23-26	5: 35-43	8: 49-56	
Jesus heals the hemorrhaging woman	9: 20-22	5: 25-34	8: 43-48	
Jesus cures a possessed mute	9: 32-34			
Jesus heals a man's withered hand	12: 9-14	3: 1-6	6: 6-11	
Jesus heals a possessed blind-mute	12: 22-24		11: 14-17	
Jesus feeds 5,000 people	14: 13-21	6: 34-44	9: 12-17	6: 1-14
Jesus walks on the sea	14: 25-27	6: 48-52		6: 19-21
Jesus heals a woman's daughter	15: 22-28	7: 24-30		
Jesus feeds 4,000 people	15: 32-39	8: 1-9		
Jesus heals an epileptic boy	17: 14-21	9: 17-29	9: 38-43	
Jesus sends a tax coin in a fish's mouth	17: 24-27			
Jesus heals a blind man/two blind men	9: 27-31	10: 46-52	18: 35-43	
	20: 30-34			
Jesus makes a fig tree wither	21: 18-22	11: 12-14		
Jesus casts out an unclean spirit		1: 23-28	4: 33-37	
Jesus heals a deaf-mute		7: 32-37		
Jesus heals a blind man in Bethsadia		8: 22-26		
Jesus escapes from the raging crowd			4: 27-30	
Jesus commands that fish are caught			5: 1-11	
Jesus raises a widow's son			7: 11-17	
Jesus heals a crippled woman			13: 11-17	
Jesus heals a man suffering from dropsy			14: 1-6	
Jesus cleanses 10 lepers			17: 11-19	
Jesus heals a servant's ear			22: 50-51	
Jesus turns water into wine				2: 1-11
Jesus heals an official's son				4: 46-54
Jesus heals an invalid				5: 2-15
Jesus heals a man blind since birth				9: 1-41
Jesus raises Lazarus				11: 1-44
Jesus commands that fish are caught				21: 4-8

*This chart taken from "Biblica The Bible Atlas Barron's \* Typed with bolder print to accommodate the vision issues of the elderly*



## MIRACLE #1: JESUS TURNS WATER INTO WINE



Marriage-at-Cana by Vladimir Makovsky 1887

**John 2: 1-11**

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee, Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." This the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. *(Life Application Study Bible, New International Version)*



The Free Dictionary by Farlex defines a miracle as “an event that appears inexplicable by the laws of nature and so is held to be supernatural in origin or an act of God.” Furthermore, words from C. S. Lewis add to this by stating that “a miracle is something beyond man’s intellectual or scientific ability to accomplish.” Both definitions fit the first miracle Jesus is said to have performed; turning water into wine at the marriage celebration in Cana.

However, when one takes a deeper look at the significance of this miracle occurring at the beginning of our Lord’s ministry, we must first recall God’s relationship to the children of Israel from Isaiah 54: 5, “For your husband is your Maker, whose name is the LORD of hosts; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, Who is called the God of all the earth.” (NIV) This Scripture clearly describes God’s position to his chosen people as that of a husband or bridegroom when entering into the original covenant with them. Unfortunately, his chosen bride, the children of Israel, did not hold up their end of the covenant agreement, thus, ending this partnership. Although the relationship as described in the Old Testament between God and his people was not a lasting agreement, Scripture consistently refers to a period in time when the Father, not willing to give up on the concept of marriage, would establish with his bride a new covenant; a promise that was taught to generation after generation of the Jewish people.

Thus, when Jesus walked past John the Baptist, he spoke these words as recorded in **John 3:28-29** New King James Version (NKJV) **<sup>28</sup> You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ <sup>29</sup> He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.”**

In the book “Manners & Customs of Bible Lands” by Fred H. Wight, it is stated that the wedding banquet was presided over by the ruler of the feast. (Also called the master of the banquet.) It was his duty to take care of the preparations and during the feast make certain that the guests lacked for nothing. His job also included that of returning thanks at the dinner and pronouncing benedictions at appointed times. In addition, it was his responsibility to bless the wine the bridegroom had provided.

However, it appears that Mary, the mother of Jesus became acutely aware of the shortage of wine and thus set on a mission to save not only the host the embarrassment by failing to follow the protocol of correct hospitality, but also that of preventing him from breaking the law regarding such. Through the gesture of seeking help from Jesus, she has immediately placed her son in the position of the bridegroom; the individual responsible for providing wine. However, as the conversation between Mary and Jesus unfolds, her son’s reply to the request, **“Dear woman, why do you involve me?”** and **“My time has not yet come.”** **John 2: 4** (*Life Application Study Bible—New International Version*) have created much debate. One viewpoint held by scholars when Jesus states his time has not yet come relates directly to the shedding of his blood on the cross for our sin; a point that will be fully discussed when he shares the last



supper with his disciples as described in a later chapter. Regardless, Jesus' actions set the entire feast astir. Specifically calling for the six stone water jars that were normally used for ceremonial washing that would hold 20-30 gallons to be filled to the brim with water, our Lord was leaving no room for doubt as to the magnitude of the miracle he was getting ready to perform. Certainly, no individual could think wine had been added to the water in the jars, but would fully realize that a **supernatural happening had occurred**. The words that came from the lips of the master of the feast must have set the entire banquet abuzz. Thus, since all residents of the village usually were invited to the wedding festivities, an ample number of people witnessed the first miracle of Christ.

**Result: The first miracle of Jesus at a wedding in Cana not only caused his disciples to believe, but also allowed Jesus to send a clear message to the Jewish people that he was, indeed, the promised Messiah for which they hoped; the long awaited marriage between God the husband with his people once again; meaning Jesus was to be the BRIDEGROOM of the Second Covenant. The drink the people tasted was supernatural wine from heaven.**

#### MIRACLE # 2: HEALING THE ROYAL OFFICIAL'S SON IN CAPERNAUM

Healing the royal official's son by Joseph-Marie Vien, 1752.





#### John 4: 46-54

Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour." Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed. This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee. *(Life Application Study Bible, New International Version)*

The royal official, thought to be in the service of Herod, had traveled 20 miles with the goal of seeking the assistance of Jesus. Even though he had legal authority over our Lord, the use of the word "sir" clearly shows the man reversed roles, placing himself at the mercy of Christ. Even though his actions showed great humility, his words also signaled a strong faith that he believed Jesus to be under the power of God. In addition, when his servants met him with the good news that his son would live, he immediately gave all credit to Jesus by announcing to those around him the very second when the Lord had performed the miracle. At that moment in time, by giving the glory to Christ, he not only had become a powerful disciple for our Savior, but in the process had led his entire household to the Lord.

**Result:** Certainly it is obvious from the royal official's behavior that he had confidence that Jesus could heal his son. However, at the same time, he bowed in reverence to the Lord by obeying Jesus' directions without hesitation. When Christ told him to go home, he immediately departed; thus, a demonstration of great faith. In addition, even though he could of feared showing weakness in front of his household, he remained faithful, giving all credit to Jesus by sharing the time the miracle was performed, albeit it 20 miles away. It is critical for all of us to internalize the fact that distance, time, or space does not prevent our Lord from working in our lives. He is master over all. Unfortunately, how many times have we put so much space between ourselves and Jesus that he is unable to reach us? Bend the knee in humility, pray, and believe!



**MIRACLE # 3: CHRIST HEALING THE PARALYTIC AT BETHESDA**

*Christ healing the paralytic at Bethesda, by Palma il Giovane, 1592.*





### John 5: 1-18

Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie---the blind, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" Sir, the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' ...." *(Life Application Study Bible, New International Version)*

First, it is important to include **John 5: 4** from the Holman Christian Standard Bible stating, "because an angel would go down into the pool from time to time and stir up the water. Then the first one who got in after the water was stirred up recovered from whatever ailment he had", to shed light on the lame man's reply to Jesus' question about wanting to get well. It was well known during this time that at certain seasons, an angel of the Lord would come down and stir the waters. The first person entering the pool after the water had been stirred was healed from his infirmity. The Pool of Bethesda is a pool of water in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem, on the path of the Beth Zeta Valley whose remains were uncovered by archaeologists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their find exactly matched John's description as recorded. This particular pool was also mentioned in Second Kings as well as Isaiah.

**Result:** This miracle was an example of the sovereign act of healing on Christ's part; truly a demonstration of mercy. If you then continue reading the verses that follow in this chapter, you will soon discover that Jesus sought the man out and reminded him that his healing lasted and to stop sinning for he knew the man needed to also be spiritually forgiven. (Evidently, many of the reported healings at the pool were not actual happenings and were without lasting power.) Then, dear friend, read on and witness the reaction of the Jewish leaders to the healing of a man that had been living in despair for thirty eight years. They were not rejoicing that he was no longer trapped inside a body that did not work, but used it as a way of pointing out that both Jesus and the man had broken the law by working on the Sabbath. This incident also sheds light on Jesus' stance that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Do you take time to rejoice when others are blessed?



**MIRACLE # 4 FEEDING THE 5000**



*Feeding the multitudes by Bernardo Strozzi, early 17th century.*



### John 6: 5-14

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, **"Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."** *(Life Application Study Bible, New International Version) (The Jewish people believed the supernatural manna would reappear through the long-awaited Messiah)*

Miracle of the Loaves and fishes by James Tissot

This painting gives the scope of the miracle by visually seeing the large number of people present.





Before focusing on the miracle where Jesus fed the 5000 people, it is important to visit Numbers 27: 16-17 from the Old Testament and center on the phrasing used by Moses and again by Jesus in his ministry. The Scripture below occurred just after Moses had been led to the mountain by God to look upon the Promised Land and was told to replace himself as leader with Joshua. Moses' reaction was as follows:

Moses said to the Lord, "May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd." . (Life Application Study Bible, New International Version)

The book of Mark, 6: 34 notes that Jesus not only had compassion when he saw the large crowd following him, but also compared them as being like sheep not having a shepherd. Once again, it is obvious that Jesus was well acquainted with the Torah, and at the same time was the Son of God who wove a silver thread of continuity from Exodus to Revelation in the Bible. Even when Hoshea, the leader to replace Moses was assigned his new name, "Joshua", one can see the hand of God at work well ahead of the miracles performed by Jesus. (The name Joshua is also the original Hebrew form of the Greek name Jesus. The shortened form of Joshua is the name Jeshua.) Does this offer confidence that our God is truly in charge and is surprised by no event regardless the historical date?

Result: Then, as we view what the disciples found when searching for food stuffs available in the enormous crowd, please note that "BREAD" was at the forefront of the miracle. In a previous chapter, we learned that bread was the food that provided sustenance for most people and also centered on Jesus describing himself as the "Bread of Life." Thus, in this miracle prior to serving the people, he looked toward heaven and prayed to his Father before breaking the bread. Here we have Jesus, called the "Bread of Life" as well as the "Good Shepherd", supplying nourishment to his people. Folks, please note that the Lord showed compassion, lacked nothing as far as the ability to meet the challenge of the massive number of mouths to feed, remembered to go to his Father in prayer, and then filled the bellies of all present with leftover food which his disciples gathered. HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD! Even though the disciples doubted based on what they viewed as impossible circumstances and limitations, the Master supplied and met the challenge. Have no doubt, dear one, our Lord is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. As the Shepherd of your life, he can supply your every need and never be without a solution or run short of answers.

The first letters of the Greek words for *Jesus Christ*, *Son of God*, and *Savior* spell the Greek word fish. The fish is an early symbol for Jesus Christ and also for the believer. (Christian Believer—Knowing God With Heart and Mind by Abingdon)





## MIRACLE # 5 JESUS WALKS ON WATER

## MIRACLE # 6 JESUS CALMS THE STORM

(Jesus Calms the Storm not found in John, but similar so included)

Let us first focus on the personality of the Sea of Galilee; the lake on which the next two miracles performed by Jesus occurred. Lying low in the Great Rift Valley, surrounded by hills, this lake could have been classified as being extremely changeable. Although wearing an incredibly calm appearance in the morning, by mid-afternoon, the heat of the Rift Valley would suck down the cool air of the heights, causing mighty squalls to erupt that built into treacherous waves. Although the angry waters returned to a glassy stillness within thirty minutes, the possibility of encountering one of these acts of nature could strike fear in the hearts of the most experienced sailors; fishermen like Peter, James, and John. Even with their vast knowledge that came from sailing vessels on this familiar body of water, it was impossible to predict the arrival of a disturbance on this fickle lake. Thus, two miracles that Jesus performed demonstrating his power over nature to his disciples occurred on this very site; one where he walked on water to reach them and the other when he commanded a raging storm to cease.

Please keep in mind the timeline under which Jesus is operating for preparing his disciples for his departure; being three short years. When he was no longer visible in their eyes, he knew as his messengers, they would be going through many storms while spreading the good news of the kingdom. He also was aware their mind set regarding the coming messiah rested upon knowledge obtained from Old Testament Scripture. Thus, if the Lord wanted to establish his relationship with God in their eyes, he recognized the necessity of relying on the teachings from both Job and Psalm to connect himself directly to Jehovah (YHWH). Since the New Testament did not exist, it is critical to recall that as Jews, his disciples would have been familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures showing the ability of God to defeat the unruly powers of nature's chaos.

*Job 9: 8*

*"He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. (New International Version (NIV))*

*Psalm 77: 19*

*Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. (New International Version (NIV))*

When Jesus walked on water toward his frightened disciples, as well as calmed the storm while sitting in the boat among them, it was clearly an unveiling of his divine identity. In both



miracles, Jesus demonstrated he was in control of nature and did it with an unperturbed calm that sent an important message to his followers of his power and authority.

**MIRACLE # 5 JESUS WALKS ON WATER**



*Jesus walks on water, by Ivan Aivazovsky (1888)*



## John 6: 16-21

**'When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. But he said to them. "It is I; don't be afraid." Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.'** *(Life Application Study Bible, New International Version)*

Please note, when Peter saw it was Jesus, in his usual display of exuberance, he jumped out of the boat and noisily made his way toward the Lord. As long as he believed, he walked on water. However, when doubt entered his mind, the stormy waves caused fear and terror to rage. No matter, it is important to realize that Jesus scolded him only for his doubt. After all, he courageously stepped out of the boat and made every attempt to get to Christ. Have you ever been afraid to step out of the boat into unfamiliar waters?

Also, the response of Jesus, "It is I; don't be afraid," an opening Greek phrase, has been identified by scholars as a statement belonging among those called his "I am" sayings; thus a way of establishing his identity as the long awaited Messiah and connection to God.

**Result: By walking on water, Jesus not only showed his mighty power over the forces of nature, but also demonstrated through Peter's actions that faith is the key.**

Let us now move on to the miracle when Jesus calmed the angry waters by focusing on his exact location in this storm as compared to the one where he walked on water.

## Mark 4: 35-41 (English Standard Version ESV)

**On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."<sup>36</sup> And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.<sup>37</sup> And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.<sup>38</sup> But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"<sup>39</sup> And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.<sup>40</sup> He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"<sup>41</sup> And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"**

In the last miracle, the disciples were by themselves in the boat because Jesus had chosen to be alone in prayer with the Father. Therefore, his disciples, having followed his directions to go ahead, found themselves facing the battle of their lives against waves that had a record of winning by the number of lives they had claimed over time. We must note, in the miracle when Jesus commanded the waters to be still, he was in the boat fast asleep while his



disciples took control of the vessel. Thus, although possessing full knowledge their Lord was in their presence, they displayed the same fearful reaction in both miracles.

However, one noticeable difference between the miracles is the reaction of Jesus to their cry, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" When he was awakened by their desperate call for help, he strongly rebuked their actions by shaming them for their "little faith."

#### MIRACLE # 6 CHRIST CALMS THE STORM



*Backhuysen, Ludolf – "Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee - 1695" by Ludolf Bakhuizen*

**(Note how the artist captured the violence of the storm)**

**Result: This particular miracle is thought by many scholars to be a message to not only his disciples, but all followers of Christ, meaning us, too, that we are to not pray out of fear, but out of a deep-seated faith in God. Believers, rest assured that God is with us and is always taking care of us.**



## MIRACLE # 7 JESUS HEALS THE MAN BORN BLIND



*Healing the Man Born Blind by El Greco, ca. 1570 (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden).*

### **John 9:1–41**

9 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, <sup>4</sup>who sinned, <sup>5</sup>this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but <sup>4</sup>that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> We must <sup>4</sup>work the works of him who sent me <sup>4</sup>while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, <sup>4</sup>I am the light of the world.” <sup>6</sup> Having said these things, <sup>6</sup>he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. <sup>7</sup> Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud <sup>7</sup> and said to him, “Go, wash in <sup>7</sup>the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and <sup>7</sup>came back seeing.

**REACTION OF THE NEIGHBORS**<sup>8</sup> The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, <sup>8</sup>“Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” <sup>9</sup> Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” <sup>10</sup> So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” <sup>11</sup> He answered, <sup>11</sup>“The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” <sup>12</sup> They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

**REACTION OF PHARISEES**<sup>13</sup> They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup> Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup> So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” <sup>16</sup> Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not <sup>16</sup>from God, <sup>16</sup>for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, <sup>16</sup>“How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And



<sup>16</sup>there was a division among them. <sup>17</sup>So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, <sup>18</sup>“He is a prophet.”

**REACTION OF PARENTS**<sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup>The Jews<sup>L</sup> did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight <sup>19</sup>and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” <sup>20</sup>His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. <sup>21</sup>But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” <sup>22</sup>(His parents said these things <sup>23</sup>because they feared the Jews, for <sup>24</sup>the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should <sup>25</sup>confess Jesus<sup>2</sup> to be Christ, <sup>26</sup>he was to be put out of the synagogue.) <sup>27</sup>Therefore his parents said, <sup>28</sup>“He is of age; ask him.”

**REACTION OF MAN**<sup>24</sup> So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, <sup>25</sup>“Give glory to God. We know that <sup>26</sup>this man is a sinner.” <sup>27</sup>He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I<sup>L</sup> was blind, now I see.” <sup>28</sup>They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” <sup>29</sup>He answered them, <sup>30</sup>“I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” <sup>31</sup>And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but <sup>32</sup>we are disciples of Moses. <sup>33</sup>We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, <sup>34</sup>we do not know where he comes from.” <sup>35</sup>The man answered, “Why, this is <sup>36</sup>an amazing thing! <sup>37</sup>You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. <sup>38</sup>We know that <sup>39</sup>God does not listen to sinners, but <sup>40</sup>if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. <sup>41</sup>Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. <sup>42</sup>If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” <sup>43</sup>They answered him, <sup>44</sup>“You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they <sup>45</sup>cast him out. <sup>46</sup>Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in <sup>47</sup>the Son of Man?” <sup>48</sup>He answered, <sup>49</sup>“And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” <sup>50</sup>Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and <sup>51</sup>it is he who is speaking to you.” <sup>52</sup>He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

**REACTION OF THE LORD**<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, <sup>40</sup>“For judgment I came into this world, <sup>41</sup>that those who do not see may see, and <sup>42</sup>those who see may become blind.” <sup>43</sup>Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, <sup>44</sup>“Are we also blind?” <sup>45</sup>Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, <sup>46</sup>you would have no guilt; <sup>47</sup>but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains. (English Standard Version) (Subheadings above taken from “The Miracles of Our Lord by Charles Caldwell Ryrie)

In order to gain a full understanding in this miracle of Jesus’ teachings, it was critical to supply a larger amount of Scripture than usual. Also, by borrowing from Charles Caldwell Ryrie’s classification of reactions the writer felt it would offer a greater understanding of the miracle’s impact, and also display how difficult it was for our Lord to get across his message for the arrival of the kingdom of heaven.

First, do you find the neighbors reaction of denial of the healing by convincing themselves that it was not the blind beggar? Their attitude toward the miracle causes the statement, “Seeing is believing” to not hold up, doesn’t it? Can you identify with this behavior?

Second, note the path the Pharisees chose to take; one that would not allow a change of mind. Even after irrefutable evidence, some clung to their original position. Are you identifying with this as well? Do you have an open mind to new information or change?

Third, did the posture of the blind man’s parents cause you to gasp in disbelief as they proceeded to disassociate themselves with their own son? Does that give you a feel for the enormous fear that surrounded the people when Jesus walked the earth? Does that fear still exist today? Can you think of instances witnessed during your life on earth of this happening?

Next, were you able to have sympathy or empathy for the man, as a new believer, having to face such enormous, seemingly insurmountable forces when truly everyone should be



rejoicing because he was healed? Having never seen an angry face before in his life due to blindness, what impact do you think this had upon the situation? Were you relieved when Jesus came to the rescue of this new believer? In discipleship, do you see the importance of coming along beside someone who has just become a Christian?

Last, does this miracle add new meaning to Jesus calling himself the “Light of the World”? Light always overcomes darkness? Our lives are truly transparent to the Lord. That is why all the secrets of mankind will be revealed during the judgment to come.

**Result: Does God’s grace take on special meaning at this point?**

#### MIRACLE # 8 RAISING OF LAZARUS



*The Raising of Lazarus, by Duccio, 1310–11*



**John 11:1-45 English Standard Version (ESV)**

**The Death of Lazarus**

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

<sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So, when he heard that Lazarus<sup>[a]</sup> was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. <sup>7</sup> Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." <sup>8</sup> The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" <sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." <sup>11</sup> After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." <sup>12</sup> The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." <sup>13</sup> Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, <sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." <sup>16</sup> So Thomas, called the Twin,<sup>[b]</sup> said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

**I Am the Resurrection and the Life**

<sup>17</sup> Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles<sup>[c]</sup> off, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. <sup>20</sup> So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.<sup>[d]</sup> Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup> She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

**Jesus Weeps**

<sup>28</sup> When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." <sup>29</sup> And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup> When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. <sup>32</sup> Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved<sup>[e]</sup> in his spirit and greatly troubled. <sup>34</sup> And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

**Jesus Raises Lazarus**

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup> When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." <sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."



In order to have a better understanding of what Jesus would have seen and heard upon arrival at Lazarus' tomb, the stage needs to be set as to the usual (funeral) customs followed at that time in the Bible Lands.

First, Jesus would have heard "The Death Wail" of those mourning the passing of Lazarus from a long distance away because of it being a sharp, shrill, ear-piercing shriek. (As described in the book called "Manners & Customs of Bible Lands" by Fred H. Wight.) This custom, announcing the death to the entire neighborhood, according to Wight, began back in Egypt after the first-born lives were taken at the time of the plagues. This would take place until the burial was completed; a process that was done quickly. As a show of grief, some people tore their garments and wore sack-cloth, as well. Although there are differences of opinions, some scholars have written that people believed the spirit of the deceased would linger around the burial site for three days. This point also has been stressed because Jesus purposely waited four days to arrive, knowing he was being summoned to save Lazarus. Even if they believed the spirit lingered three days, the fact that the people gathered were about to witness a resurrection miracle, was dramatic, to say the least. Other scholars tie the three day period of belief directly to the length of time Jesus would remain in the tomb after crucifixion. However, as resurrection people, not only did the raising of Lazarus hold significance to those present, but to all of us as well.

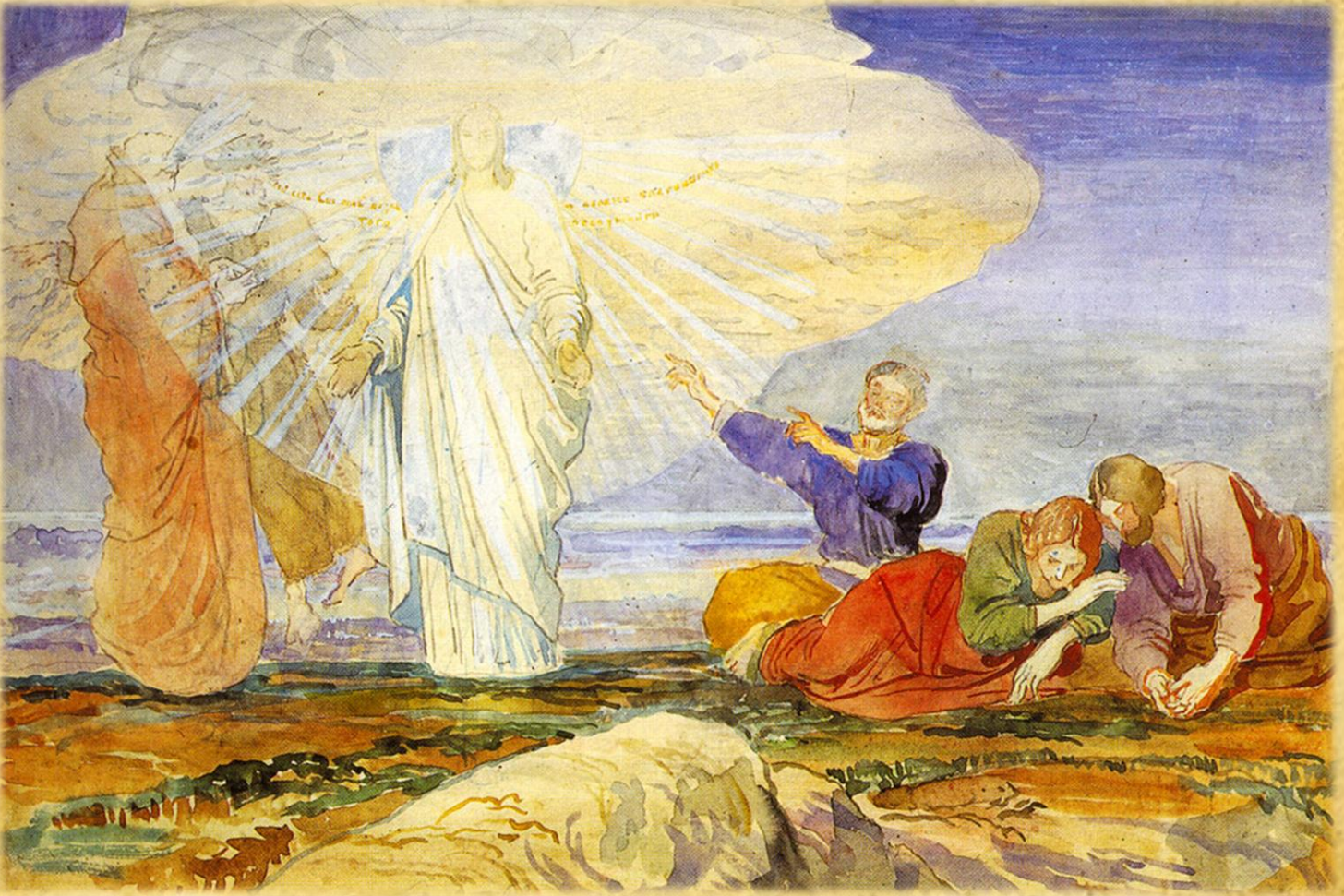
In addition, it is important to recall the close friendship between Jesus and Lazarus' family members; their home being a sanctuary for him throughout his ministry. Thus, when he saw both Mary and Martha displaying such intense sorrow, Scripture reads that "Jesus wept." There are also scholars that feel Jesus may have shed tears, not only due to his friends' sorrow, but also because of the reality of dying; especially since at creation, death was not a part of God's plan. Regardless, our Lord demonstrated his great compassion through shedding salty tears and becoming extremely troubled. Even with the knowledge that Lazarus would live, he still felt enormous compassion for his children; a point that should bless every heart.

**Result: Jesus passed the ultimate test of faith, proving he was the Messiah, thanked the Father for something not yet accomplished, and triumphed over the grave. This miracle certainly was a prelude of his personal victory over the grave that was yet to come after being crucified; an act that would impact every Believer throughout all generations. A notable difference between our future resurrection and the one Lazarus experienced is the promise from God that we will all be given new, perfect bodies, free of pain and suffering for all eternity. In this miracle, although Jesus restored Lazarus' deteriorating body back to life, it would have been the earthly one everyone recognized; not eternal, but one that would eventually have to face death again. Since God never breaks his promise, does the smile you are wearing match mine?**

**PLEASE LOOK CLOSELY AT THE PAINTING AND NOTE THE EXPRESSIONS OF THOSE GATHERED AROUND THE GRAVE SITE OF LAZARUS.**



## MIRACLE # 9 THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS



*Transfiguration by [Alexandr Ivanov](#), 1824*

**Matthew 17:1-9 (English Standard Version (ESV))**

### The Transfiguration

17 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son,<sup>[a]</sup> with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." <sup>8</sup> And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

<sup>9</sup> And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."



The Transfiguration, the most marvelous of all miracles that served as a prelude to the Resurrection of Jesus, transpired on “a high mountain apart”, in the presence of only his most trusted disciples; Peter, James and John. Can you imagine their surprise and shock to see not only the Master dazzling radiantly, but also joined by Moses and Elijah; two historical figures that, as Jews, they had been taught about since birth? (Moses representing the Law (Torah) and Elijah, the Prophets; two principal divisions of Hebrew Scriptures in Jesus’ day) One significant point regarding their presence was based around the promise of redemption in the Hebrew Bible. Then, when God spoke to them in a cloud, it would have been reminiscent of the same happening at Jesus’ baptism. Additionally, another incident in Scripture relating to God’s voice coming from a cloud can be tied directly to a request by Moses of God found in Exodus 33: 18-20, when God was asked by Moses to show him his glory. God’s response was to clearly let Moses know that no person could see the Father’s face and live. As human beings, we simply are not equipped to comprehend the fullness of God because we are finite while our Father is infinite. This fact alone lets us know why Jesus told his three disciples to tell no one about the Transfiguration. They simply would not understand until after he had been resurrected from the dead. *(The Jewish people also expect a new Moses in the promised new covenant and kept asking Jesus if he was the new Moses. Yes, Jesus can be described as the new Moses in the Second Covenant for which they hoped.)*

**Result:** The mysterious, yet marvelous Transfiguration of Jesus allows us to clearly understand that Christ is the bridge between humanity and God. Please note that this is the only miracle where the focus is on Jesus; unlike all the others where human lives were touched in some way. It is also described by some as being a pivotal moment; a time where human nature meets God; the meeting place for the temporal and the eternal. In addition, since Elijah and Moses were present, it gave authority to Jesus’ words that he indeed was the Messiah. Also, as a Christian, the fact that Moses and Elijah reappeared after death, offers concrete evidence that the promise of God regarding our eternal life exists as a basic truism. Even though we think of Moses and Elijah as extraordinary, they, like all of us, were simply mere ordinary humans through displaying faith, trust, and humility were blessed by God.

#### TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION:

After focusing on these wonderful miracles of Jesus, isn’t it astounding how much God desires to have us know him? Hopefully, these wonderful acts have been an inspiration and have served as a divine revelation that has touched your heart to the core. Certainly it should be clear that their main purpose was for God to reveal himself to all mankind through his One and Only Son. Not only did Jesus show his divinity and connection to his Father, but also made apparent that his mission on earth was to deliver the good news of the kingdom as the long anticipated Messiah of the Jewish people. Ladies and gentlemen, this is only a glimpse of the magnitude and mighty power of God. As **John 21: 25** stated, “**Jesus did many other**



things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." (Life Application Study Bible, NIV)

In closing, as we arise each day and feast our eyes on the beautiful display in nature that our creator has made with the touch of his mighty hands, let us all be mindful that it is not enough to just realize there is a God. Certainly, the miracles Jesus performed while being both human and divine during his earthly sojourn, should prompt each of us to raise our voice each day saying, **"THOU ART MY GOD."** (Psalm 63)

SOURCES:

*"MIRACLES OF JESUS" Richard S. Ascough*

*"MANNERS & CUSTOMS OF BIBLE LANDS" Fred H. Wight*

*"COMPLETE JEWISH BIBLE" David H. Stern*

*"THE MIRACLES OF OUR LORD" Charles Caldwell Ryrie*



**GROWING IN THE WORD**



1) Before you begin this lesson, please go to [devotionalembbers.com](http://devotionalembbers.com) and open the hymnal that contains an array of beautiful well loved hymns played on the organ by Bradley Jent and choose one prior to reading or discussion. Not only will this ready your mind for receiving God's word, offer a feeling of peace, but also serve as a way of promoting mental clarity.

2) Which miracle touched your heart the most? Perhaps it was one you chose from the list that was not focused on in the collection.

3) Do you feel God still performs miracles today? Make a list together of miracles.

4) Describe a miracle that occurred in your life or someone with whom you are acquainted.

(One elderly man in a residential care facility, when asked to tell about a miracle, vividly revisited his life as a medic in the military during World War II when he treated a critically ill German soldier. When the man, classified as "the enemy", was taking his final breath, the medic and the soldier bonded with the realization they both were God's children. He was asked at that moment in time by God to pray for his enemy. And....he did! During the winter season of his life when he revisited the story, he sobbed uncontrollably. (This was a miracle that remained fresh in his mind for all time.)



**5) Closing Prayer (Please say a prayer of your own or use the one below at the conclusion of this collection on miracles.**

**Closing Prayer**

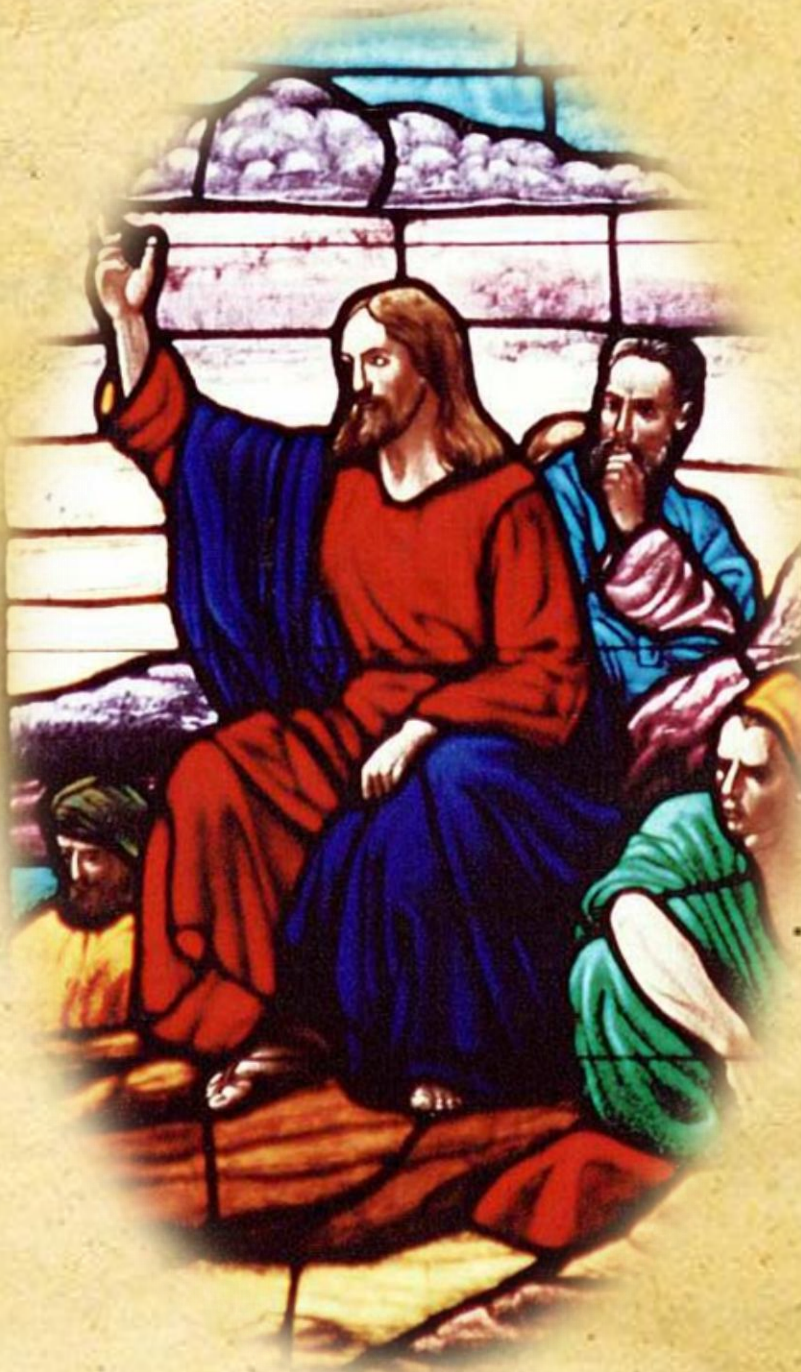
**Dear Lord,**

**Thank you for loving us so much that you chose to dwell among us as Jesus, your One and Only Son. The wonderful miracles you performed revealed who you are to every one of us. You taught us how to have courage in the face of the most challenging circumstances and that all your children are loved dearly by you. You tenderly touched the downtrodden and were patient with their lack of understanding. Clearly, dear Father, all creation belongs to you. Throughout the Bible, your silver thread can be followed from the beginning to your return. Nothing on earth is surprising to you; a thought that will offer comfort to your children living in a world where everything seems to be spinning out of control. Through accepting you as Savior and repenting of our sins, you have promised that a miraculous new and perfect body awaits us in eternity. As the Great Promise Keeper, we believe! Amen!**



## *Chapter 9*

# **SERMON ON THE MOUNT**



"SERMON ON THE MOUNT" Compliments of Austin Ave United Methodist Church, Waco, TX



## INTRODUCTION TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

**Matthew 5: 17** (KJV King James Version)

**Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.**

Jesus made it extremely clear that he had not come to earth to destroy the law that God had established through Moses as recorded in the Old Testament; the moral law that reveals the very nature and will of God. Instead, by taking a closer look at the Sermon On The Mount, we will quickly discover Jesus unveils a graphic picture of how a Christian is expected to obey the law; meaning it is much easier to study God's laws and tell others how to put them into practice than to personally obey them both outwardly and inwardly. Since God judges a man's heart as well as his deeds, false piety will never please the Almighty.

Thus, the message of Jesus was centered on the spirit, not the letter of the law. In order to understand this principle, I invite you to open the hymnal on this site and locate the hymn played by master organist, Brad Jent, called "His Eye Is On A Sparrow." Brad has committed all the old familiar notes (Represent the Law) that make up the melody to memory. Yet, as you listen to his rendition, you will hear how the Holy Spirit flowed through his entire being (spirit of the law) to produce sounds that brought the song to life and made you feel as if you could actually see and hear the sparrows gracefully flying among the branches covered with dew kissed leaves. Since Brad allowed the Spirit to guide him as he played each note, the end result was a passion filled melody that is alive with the ethereal sounds of heaven. In short: (Law=notes or melody) and (Spirit=expression or the life and passion of the melody)

Simply stated: The law was the commandments of God. The spirit meant obeying them both inwardly and outwardly. Jesus simply wanted the people to practice the timeless commands that God had established and follow with strict obedience. In other words, just as Moses had received the law at Mt. Sinai, Jesus was delivering the message as to how children in the kingdom of God were to fulfill them. The people he was speaking to were trying to obey so many laws made by the Pharisees that it was impossible to live one day without sinning. It has been stated that over 600 laws could be broken in a single day; as judged by outward appearance only. Jesus is setting a totally new standard; raising the bar to an all time high. Yet, to those who felt imprisoned by a mountain of manmade rules, liberation had probably arrived. On the other hand, Jesus was also painting the picture that it is in the heart where attitude and allegiance lie. Since, in the eyes of God the heart is an open book, false piety is out of the question. As the Sermon on the Mount unfolds, keep in mind that Jesus is offering a fuller understanding of what God intended when he made the law in the presence of Moses. He was trying to get people to understand and apply the law as it was originally intended; meaning it is as fresh for Christians today living in the kingdom of God, as then.



## ATTRIBUTES OF A CHRISTIAN

At this point in your journey through “My Jewish Messiah”, you have probably chosen your favorite disciple to accompany and are both mesmerized beyond words at the parables and miracles Jesus has performed. Also, at this juncture, since news about Christ has spread all over Syria, large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan are clamoring after him, now presenting to you a challenge in locating a spot close enough to hear his words of wisdom. Has your disciple of choice been able to keep his equilibrium because of the popularity of the Master? After all, it must be a wonderful compliment to have been chosen as one of his twelve disciples out of all the potential candidates. Is it even possible to keep the enemy called PRIDE from entering the scene? Certainly, our Lord who sees the heart of every individual recognized this as a growing concern in the group of men he had chosen. As he listened to their comments about the position they would fill in the arrival of the kingdom he had described, Jesus knew it was time for a heart to heart conversation before the crowd of people caught up with them again.

Therefore, he went up the mountainside, gathered his disciples around him, and began warning them about the temptations they would face as his followers. Above all, the Lord knowing the reward they were anticipating for being his followers would not occur in their life time on earth, realized the importance of getting them to understand the code of conduct needed for operating in the kingdom of God; self importance not being acceptable.

Thus, it is at this point the content of Jesus’ message takes on a depth in meaning that has not been heard before by anyone in his presence. Rather than using extremely descriptive words filled with beautiful picturesque visual images to stress his point, all those in his presence quickly recognized the Lord was laying out for all his followers what would be expected behaviorally for citizens belonging to the kingdom of heaven. Thus, in a poetic structure consisting of only eight verses, he delivered to his disciples what we all know today as the Beatitudes; constituting that of a general summary of Christian teaching.

In the book “The Sermon On The Mount” written by Emmet Fox, we are reminded that in these general teachings by Jesus that he was concerned with one’s mental state. The Lord fully recognized that “if one’s mental state is right, everything must be right, too.” Whereas, Fox stated, “If these are wrong, nothing else can be right.” He also indicates the stance of Jesus as being ant-ritualistic, anti-formalistic, and lacking detailed instructions. Look carefully at the word **Be.....attitude.....**as that of being in the right attitude or frame of mind.





## THE BEATITUDES

The eight Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 during the Sermon on the Mount each begins with:

*Blessed are...*

*....the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. (5:3)*

*....those who mourn: for they will be comforted. (5:4)*

*....the meek: for they will inherit the earth. (5:5)*

*....those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they will be filled. (5:6)*

*....the merciful: for they will be shown mercy. (5:7)*

*....the pure in heart: for they will see God. (5:8)*

*....the peacemakers: for they will be called children of God. (5:9)*

*....those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*



(All stained glass windows of the Beatitudes are by permission of St Peter 1" by Weglinde - Own work. Licensed under CC0 via Commons

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St\\_Peter\\_1.jpg#/media/File:St\\_Peter\\_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St_Peter_1.jpg#/media/File:St_Peter_1.jpg))

### 1) "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

As you read this first Beatitude, it is important to stress that meanings of some English words have changed since the time of Christ on earth; thus causing us to scratch our heads in wonder at times. In this first one, the application of the words "poor in spirit" does not mean for us to define it as poor-spirited. As Fox indicates in his book "The Sermon On The Mount", to be poor in spirit is to have emptied one's self of all desire to exercise personal self-will, and renounce all preconceived opinions in the wholehearted searched for God." Did I just here you gasp saying, "That's me Jesus is talking about?" There is an old saying that when you are feeling God is far away, take a look and see if you are the one who is distancing yourself from the Father through self absorption. Refer in the Bible to the conversation between the rich man and Jesus. He turned down the invitation to follow Jesus because of love for his earthly possessions. The poor are not as likely to be tempted by these treasures.





## 2) "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted".

Do you recall in the Bible where Jesus is described as weeping over Jerusalem as well as at his friend Lazarus' funeral? Another Scripture to consider is from **Psalm 119: 136**, "My eyes shed streams of tears because men do not keep thy law." These instances will automatically expand the definition of mourning in Beatitude # 2. Instead of thinking of the act of mourning as occurring only when a person dies, it is necessary to open the mind to a different type of sorrow; grief over the loss of self-respect, another's wretched behavior, others misfortune, or the lack of morality in society as a whole.

John R. W. Stott in the book "The Message of the Sermon on the Mount" restates this Beatitude in a very interesting manner by writing, "Happy are the unhappy". In other words, it is during times of adversity that mankind tends to focus on God and cries out for help. An example of this is to think back on 911 when terrorists entered our borders causing the world's inhabitants to gnash their teeth and mourn not only the loss of life, but that of a nation's innocence, as well. In fact, the first Sunday after this horrible attack, churches were full to overflowing with frightened individuals seeking comfort from God. Unfortunately, only one week later, attendance in religious institutions

noticeably decreased and continued to follow suit, signaling people were back in the mode of self-reliance or in possession of apathetic feelings once again.



## 3) "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth"

Before grasping the full meaning of the message Jesus was delivering in this statement, one must center on the words **meek** and **earth**. Otherwise, given the definition in society today regarding an individual being meek, our mind would immediately think of a willow in the wind; of one unable and unwilling to stand up in the face of adversity. However, this was not the meaning Jesus had in mind. Instead, let us focus on a common Christian definition that appears throughout a number of writings defining it as, "**strength under control.**" Another way to reconfigure it in your thinking process is to quote from **Colossians 3: 12** by saying, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." This flies in the face of people in today's world named as successful or popular, doesn't it? Add to this Emmet Fox's definition of **earth** from his book, "The Sermon On The Mount", as meaning "**the whole of your outer experience**" and it all is crystal clear. How would the world look if mankind lived out Beatitude #3 using this clarified meaning?





#### 4) "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they will be satisfied."

Do you remember when the Prodigal son was so starved for nourishment that even slop he was feeding to the pigs would have tasted like a gourmet meal? Have you ever needed liquid so much that your mouth felt like that of a parched desert ground? Conjuring up these images in your mind lets you know the intensity Jesus desired his followers to have when hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Unfortunately, in order for Christians to reach this level of desire, it takes finding a way for each individual to be delivered from the constant need of self-gratification. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones succinctly states this in his book "Studies in the Sermon on the Mount" with these words, "To hunger and thirst after righteousness is to desire to be free from self in all its horrible manifestations, in all its forms." Certainly in order to walk with God, we must have fellowship with him in Spirit and Truth; being on a journey where his Light illuminates our every step. Before you view that as an impossibility, humbly kneel at the altar of prayer asking God to transform your hunger and thirst for righteousness in such a deeply profound manner that you will search desperately for it all the days of your life. Amen! **Philippians 1:21** (New International Version (NIV))<sup>21</sup> "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," succinctly says it all.



#### 5) "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy"

At this juncture, you will note a sequential order in Jesus' teaching, by comparing the first four to this the fifth Beatitude. If we have shown great hunger and thirst toward God's Word, the Lord is now describing an expected outcome of a Christian's behavior. Rather than enjoying revenge or being quick to judge others with an iron fist, we will now speak and act in a merciful manner toward our neighbor. The definition of extending mercy certainly does not imply that one should pretend wrong is not transpiring in today's world. Jesus does not want us to look the other way when an injustice is occurring; a message he sent during his ministry on earth through the people with whom he chose to associate; meaning the downtrodden in society. In other words, merciful doesn't mean being so laid back that not much matters in this world.

Additionally, one must also be cognizant of the link between mercy and grace. Comparing the differences between the definitions of these two words adds clarity beyond measure. **GRACE IS GETTING WHAT YOU DO NOT DESERVE whereas MERCY IS NOT GETTING WHAT YOU DO DESERVE.** Since we all consistently sin and fall short of the mark, the act of showing grace and mercy is paramount to our very survival as people. Being of this attitude is Christ's point.





#### 6) "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

The Scripture from **Proverbs 23: 26** stresses in the mind of the writer what it means to be pure in heart by stating, **"My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways."** If we hunger and thirst after righteousness, then showing mercy and grace to others will bring us closer to being pure in heart; a behavior that must be practiced all the days of our lives.

An example of this was experienced by the writer as she ministered among the residents at a local nursing home as a volunteer reader. One Thursday when rotating among the dining tables in animated conversation with the residents, a sweet little old soul opened her arms indicating the need for a hug and surprised the writer by whispering in her ear, "I can see Jesus in your face." Interestingly enough, as the writer looked deeply into her beautiful blue eyes, she was certain beyond doubt that at that very moment in time, she saw the face of God!

If one's life is about dying to self and allowing God to take the lead, the ordinary will become extraordinary, rainbows will fill the skies, and dark clouds will turn into sunshine. As we love our neighbors as ourselves, we will see the face of God everywhere we walk.



#### 7) "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."

**John 17:23 New International Version (NIV)** <sup>23</sup> **"I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."** Since Jesus was very clear that citizens of the kingdom should carry one another's burdens; it would require the body of Christ to be unified and filled to overflowing with peacemakers. This command is certainly to the point, but less than simple to live out because it requires Christians to view life through the scope of what is best for others rather than self. Thus, it may call for silence through the act of endurance rather than offering loud resistance to preserve one's fragile ego. How much violence occurs today because of the attitude, "You discounted ("dist") me?"

However, by no means does this call for a Christian to always behave in a passive manner and take the path of least resistance; meaning "let sleeping dogs lie." Being a peacemaker may require having crucial conversations; a time when the words spoken, out of love, are hard to say but are necessary for another to hear; thus, viewing the individual through the light of God's Word, not from the vantage point of thinking, "Why is he/she like that?"





## 8) "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven".

As usual, just when we see a pattern developing in Jesus' teaching, he calls us to attention with a challenging Beatitude like that of facing persecution because of believing in him. Righteousness as a Christian should never be that of acting in neither a fanatical nor overzealous manner; or for assuming the role of a martyr. Jesus most certainly was not a martyr, because he could have called the legions of angels to his rescue at anytime. He resolutely made the decision to die as a sacrifice for our sins.

The fact is, no matter how much attention one pays to that of peacekeeping, the obvious may occur when two value systems collide. Not everyone is going to like or agree with you. However, as Christians, we should practice the behavior that "It is all right to disagree as long as it is done agreeably." Jesus is very clear about the fact that his followers are going to have trouble in this world. Just stop and read about the hardships his disciples incurred; resulting in all being killed, except for John. Also, Dietrich Bonhoeffer certainly internalized the concept of what it meant to suffer because of his stance regarding the Nazi regime. He suffered imprisonment, the threat of torture, danger to his own family and even death. If we are suffering as a Christian for mirroring the actions of Jesus, then we can make the assumption that we are being persecuted for righteousness sake.

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The Sermon on the Mount; the longest recorded sermon preached by Jesus, thought to have lasted for several days, made it very clear as to what was expected of his followers, not only then, but also today. His words are considered timeless because of their ability to address all generations of believers. It is thought by many scholars to have been his most important message; one that is passed lightly over by some and ignored by others because it is misunderstood and makes many believers uncomfortable to the point of squirming. Perhaps this, too, is one of its purposes. Since, as self-centered human beings, we must be placed between a rock and a hard place by the hand of God before being brought to attention, Jesus minced no words in declaring that following him was going to be far from a cake walk. In short, it required the development of traits that were not of this world; behaviors that would meet resistance in daily life.

As you independently read the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount, the following subheadings and brief descriptions have been written as a guide to promote understanding.



### A CHRISTIAN'S IMPACT ON OTHERS (Matthew 5: 13-16):



Through using the examples of salt and light, Jesus clearly sends the message of the impact a follower can offer the world at large through discipleship. Possessing little flavor as Christians, means we are of limited value to God because of being immersed in the things of this world without letting our light shine in a way that leads others to Christ. Followers of Jesus must live differently through modeling his example in ways that will demonstrate clearly what living in the kingdom is all about. Actions do speak louder than words not only on Sunday, but every day of the week.

([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Hunt-Light of the World.](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hunt-Light_of_the_World.))

### ADHERENCE TO MORAL PRINCIPLES (Matthew 5: 17-48):

In this section, Jesus teaches about the law, anger, lust, divorce, vows, retaliation and loving our enemies; as well as rules of right conduct and differences between right and wrong. In the Life Application Study Bible (*New International Version*), a Christian's adherence is described with the following words, "We, are more often than not, guilty of avoiding the extreme sins while regularly committing the types of sins with which Jesus was most concerned. In these examples, our real struggle with sin is exposed. Jesus pointed out what kind of moral principles would be required of his followers." After carefully reading the rules of right conduct in Matthew 5: 17-48, it should be stunningly obvious that mankind is absolutely overpowered by the circumstances of life. Since, throughout our journey, we allow the personal sins we commit to taint and taunt us, it is obvious how much power we assign to SIN. Solution: Through the forgiveness of Jesus, sin becomes powerless and we are set free.



*"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness". (Romans 6: 18) New International Version*

(Photo above: A page from Matthew, from Papyrus 1, c. 250 AD)



### GODLINESS OF A CHRISTIAN (Matthew 6: 1-18)

As you read and contemplate the messages Jesus delivers in Matthew 6: 1-18, it is important to always remember that every second of our lives, we are in the presence of God the Father who sees the heart. The words from the book of *Psalm 11: 4* make this abundantly clear by stating, "*The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them.*" (Life Application Study Bible; New International Version) As Jesus teaches on giving alms to the poor, sincerity in prayer and humility during fasting, common threads of warning are woven throughout regarding hollowness of action. At no time is a Christian supposed to put into practice these principles with the focus on self gratification; behaving in a way that shows only surface level piety. Pretentious behavior in following the commands of God will not be pleasing to the Almighty who knows the secrets of men.

Finally in this group of teachings by Jesus is his emphasis on forgiveness. Due to our enormous need to be forgiven by the Father every moment of our existence, Scripture offers all of us great assurance in the book of *Isaiah 43: 25* with the words, "*I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.*" (Life Application Study Bible; New International Version) In turn, the expectations of following an example of this Scripture as a Christian serves as a demonstration of how the Word cuts like a sharp sword with the direct quote from the Sermon on the Mount in *Matthew 6: 15*: "*But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*" (Life Application Study Bible; New International Version) Ladies and gentlemen, let us all focus with great attention on the fact that Jesus means business in a way that directly affects all of us. This only requires from each of us three words proclaimed to another that complete an entire sentence that is packed with potential for a positive outcome by saying, "Please forgive me." (If that does not work, how about, "I am sorry.") Let us all swallow our pride, mean what we say, and comply!

### ASPIRATIONS OF A CHRISTIAN (Matthew 6: 19-34)



A warning straight from the lips of Christ against storing treasures on earth that will simply waste away begins this group of verses. Since society equates personal wealth with being successful in life, people are conditioned into believing happiness revolves around the almighty dollar, minus the thought of sharing with others.

After reading these verses, the writer was reminded of a conversation she held with a sweet old soul that sounded like she had been in the presence of Jesus as he delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Still wearing her apron



that held the aroma of freshly baked bread, she joyfully entered a retail store holding a hand written list of necessities. It was obvious from her demeanor that all was well with her soul. Her soft silver hair worn up on top of her head allowed everyone in her presence to witness the sweetness in her sky blue eyes and bask in the warm glow that radiated from her face. Every person she met was the beneficiary of a smile and words of encouragement. Even though she was a stranger, the writer could not resist asking how she had arrived at such a peaceful state of mind. In a kind voice that matched her appearance she replied, "Honey, I have never seen a casket hooked to a U-Haul. The Lord provides for my every need. I want for nothing because of his love. What I classify as a treasure will be received in heaven, not on earth. Have a wonderful day, sweet one."

Then, as a part of the verses on treasures, Jesus surprises us by including a lesson on the eye being the lamp of the body; which requires researching the Old Testament Scriptures before a connection between the two concepts occurs. Giving alms to the poor was a duty of those living during the time of Christ. If anyone viewed those less fortunate with haughty eyes that were filled with disdain for their plight in life, it was thought their own soul was full of darkness. It is important to view others as being worthy of being blessed; thus a reason to share with others in need. Thus, the eye then serves as a lamp of the body; sending a clear message whether the individual has a soul filled with light or darkness. Remembering that everything belongs to God should help all of us realize that blessings are for blessing others.



#### **HOW A CHRISTIAN TREATS OTHERS (Matthew 7: 1-20)**

(A c. 1619 painting by [Domenico Fetti](#) entitled *The Parable of the Mote and the Beam*.)

***"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*** (Matthew 7: 1-2) *Life Application Study Bible, NIV* Does this Scripture cause you to flinch and feel uneasy? Have we all not been guilty of this behavior? It is much easier to build oneself up by tearing down another's actions, isn't it? Yet, when we do this, somehow the end result lacks satisfaction. There is not one with a clean slate when it comes to this action. However, let us ask the Holy Spirit to assist us in changing this challenge before the plank in our eye gets so big that judging others becomes a



conditioned response. Jesus continues with words that give us even more reason to contemplate this behavior by saying, *"So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."* Need he say more?

#### **A CHRISTIAN'S DEDICATION (Matthew 7: 21-27)**



As we conclude reading the last portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes the gate to eternal life as being very narrow; a path few will choose to follow because of the behavior required for its citizens. He also warns that many will be misled by false teachers offering an easy road, filled with messages of self-gratification. Then, in the last words of his sermon, he closes by offering the only sure way to heaven by letting everyone know the importance of building our spiritual house on the solid rock; meaning Jesus himself. If we use Christ as our compass, we will stay on the straight and narrow, never losing sight of our eternal home; HEAVEN! •

*(Photograph "Narrow Is The Way" courtesy of Melody Childers)*



### **TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION:**

Throughout the three years Jesus conducted his ministry on earth, his behavior served as an example of everything he told us to do when delivering the Sermon on the Mount. He was faithful first to his Heavenly Father by constantly staying in touch with him through prayer. He showed mercy, grace, and made peace whenever possible. The courage he demonstrated in going about his Father's business was astounding; refusing to back down when confronted by his enemies and never faltering when his task at hand was that of reaching out to individuals labeled as unclean and untouchable; the downtrodden in society. He was salt, light and demonstrated humility that was unimaginable. In short, he was a living example of how a Christian is supposed to conduct himself/herself as a kingdom member.

Let us close this chapter by imagining what the atmosphere around Jesus was like as his voice grew silent, signaling the Sermon on the Mount was finished. If you were sitting beside your disciple of choice, the two of you could probably have heard a pin drop or perhaps the sound of your own breathing. Then, when voices were heard, once again, do you think they were speaking to one another in puzzlement regarding the behavioral standards necessary for being children of the kingdom that were in direct opposition from the law under which they lived that was so stifling? Certainly, Scripture lets us know the people were amazed at Jesus' teaching because he spoke as one who had authority; a position unlike that of the teachers of the law who cited traditions and quoted authorities while debating constantly among themselves. Why was Jesus able to speak with such great authority? *John 1: 1-3* supplies the answer to this question by stating, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."* My friends, since God is our Creator, to him we are valuable and uniquely precious; so priceless that out of his great love for us, he delivered the greatest sermon ever known to mankind; THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT! Amen!

### **SOURCES:**

*"SERMON ON THE MOUNT," John R. W. Stott*

*'THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM," John Wesley*

*'THE PREACHING OF AUGUSTINE," Augustinus, Aurelius, Saint, Bp. of Hippo.*

*"THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT," Emmet Fox*





## GROWING IN THE WORD



1) Before beginning your time as a discussion group, go to the home page of [devotionalembbers.com](http://devotionalembbers.com), open the hymnal and choose a hymn that best fits the message Jesus sent in the Sermon on the Mount. Play it for the group in preparation for working together. (I chose the hymn, "ROCK OF AGES.")

2) In researching the Sermon on the Mount, it was referred to by some scholars as being as close to fitting the definition of manifesto as they had ever seen. Read the definition of MANIFESTO supplied below and see if you agree or disagree.

**MANIFESTO**---- is a published verbal declaration of the intentions, motives, or views of the issuer, be it an individual, group, political party or government. A manifesto usually accepts a previously published opinion or public consensus and/or promotes a new idea with prescriptive notions for carrying out changes the author believes should be made. It often is political or artistic in nature, but may present an individual's life stance. Manifestos relating to religious belief are generally referred to as creeds.  
(Wikipedia)

3) Which Beatitude did you find the most challenging? Share with others if you are comfortable in doing so.

4) After the people departed from hearing Jesus deliver a standard for new behavior, and time lapsed, what challenges do you think they faced given the time and location in which they lived? Compare the challenges of following the rules for Christian living then and now. Similarities and differences?

## PRAYER

*Dear kind Father,*

*As your disciple, I have to admit that your words in the Sermon on the Mount aroused in me feelings of excitement along with fear. Energy flowed throughout my being when I thought about someday being able to sit at your feet eternally and hear the peaceful sound of your voice. Then, as you delivered powerful descriptions of how I am to treat my fellowmen, I found myself questioning my own ability.*

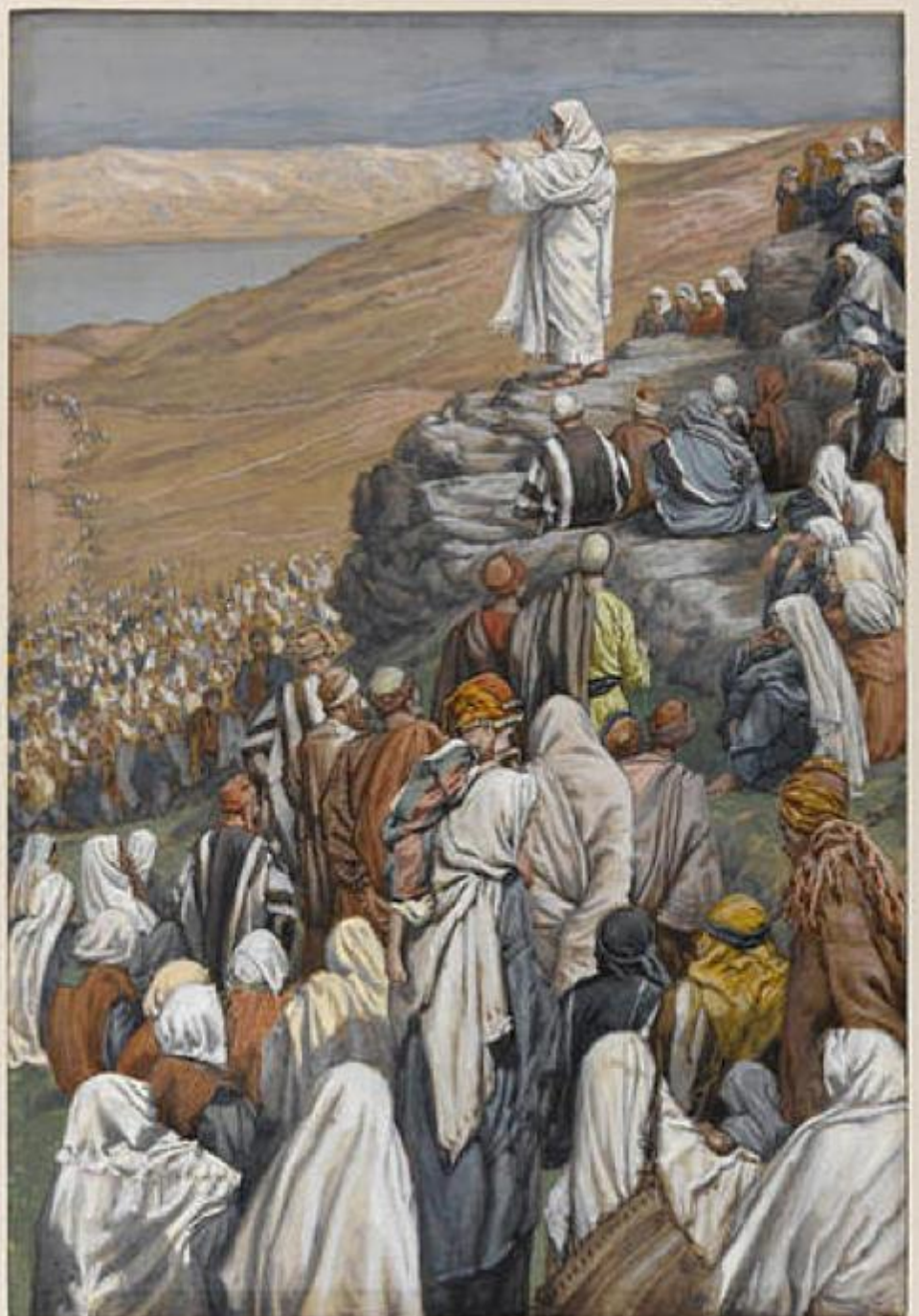
*However, the Holy Spirit whispered in my ear to take away the word "I" and replace it with "we." Stopping for a moment to contemplate, the realization swept over me that you are always at my side offering your hand along the journey toward heaven.*



*Then, as you continued to describe the expected behavior for children living in your kingdom, feelings of my own inadequacy surfaced again. As a sinner, I saw my own facial expressions of being unlovely toward others, extending closed instead of open hands, and realized it would take more than tweezers to remove the PLANK from my own eye. For these things, I ask forgiveness and the courage to extend that forgiveness to others.*

*Last, please receive my eternal gratitude for loving your creation so much that you spent several days on the side of a mountain teaching all of us how to live. You must have been drained beyond imagination. Yet, as many times as the lessons need to be repeated to this stubborn, sinful child, you are willing to comply. Please help, not only myself, but all your believers follow with complete obedience. All these things we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus.*

*Amen!*



*(The Sermon On The Mount,  
Illustration for "The Life of Christ," by  
James Tissot*



## Chapter 10

# FAITH



*God the Father with His Right Hand Raised in Blessing ((1474–1555) (drawing by Girolamo dai Libri)*



## INTRODUCTION

At this point in reading or listening to “MY JEWISH MESSIAH”, you have probably been experiencing many unique waves of emotions never before incurred due to the magnificence of our Lord and Savior’s countenance unfolding right before your eyes. If you selected one of his chosen disciples as your companion, there were probably many times when you comfortably walked together in much needed silence and contemplation. After all, the honor of being in the presence of “GOD WHO CAME TO DWELL AMONG US” had to be, by itself, truly overwhelming, astounding, and indescribable. Then, as you observed the gentleness he used as he tenderly cared for the forgotten and downtrodden in society, his sincere compassion for them must have pierced your soul, leaving its imprint permanently affixed. The endless actions of compassion you witnessed as he tirelessly ministered to those crying out in agony along the byways must have been amazing and shocking, indeed. However, never did our Lord ignore or refuse to touch even one helpless creature!

Certainly, one thing that hopefully stood out in your mind was how frequently Jesus offered prayers and petitions up to the Father with loud cries and tears. Our Lord prayed after he healed the leper, before he fed the 5000, and during his transfiguration. Then, when you could not locate him, he probably had arisen very early to spend time alone with the Father. Also, it was when you were resting your weary eyes at the end of a long day that he spent the entire night off by himself to be in the company of God in communion.

Then, when you thought every space in your brain was full to overflowing with euphoric thoughts and jubilation due to the grace that had been extended to everyone who came in contact with the Savior, you quickly surmised that walking with the “Jewish Messiah” meant tearing down the barriers of preconceived notions you had carefully built in order to receive concepts never before heard. This became perfectly clear as you sat at his feet with the masses that listened to him deliver the Sermon on the Mount. The forcefulness with which Jesus had delivered the behavioral requirements of citizens living in the kingdom of God let everyone know that a change in attitude was expected. Nothing was sugar coated regarding the effort it would take to comply. When the invitation was extended to “TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME” the picture he painted to mankind regarding expectations let everyone know it would not be a fun walk in the park. All his followers were told, without doubt, that trouble and hardship would be a part of their earthly walk. However, those who had faith and believed in God would receive the reward of living eternally with him in heaven.

Thus, when you heard him say the words, “I and the Father are one,” the depth of their meaning became crystal clear in your mind that he not only believed his mission on earth was to represent God, but to present him to mankind, as well. One thing that is obvious in this oneness with God is that Jesus never indicated he IS the Father. Although Jesus (the Son) is his agent, he very succinctly stated that it is the Father working through him; thus keeping his distinctness from him.

In short, it is because of recognizing and acknowledging the holiness of God that our Savior found it necessary to humble himself before him with every breath he breathed. Certainly, as stated earlier,



Jesus was born into this world as a blood sacrifice for our sins so that we might be drawn back to a HOLY GOD who is reaching out to his children out of love. Although our Creator desires all his children to believe and receive the offer of grace he so lovingly extends, accepting or rejecting it is left totally up to each individual. However, this gift is not possible to receive unless God is recognized as our Creator; the all knowing Holy Father!

### HOLINESS OF GOD

Thus, prior to the discussion of faith, it is important to understand, as believers in Christ, the holiness of the One we are following. In the study manual of "Christian Believer—Knowing God With Heart And Mind," by J. Ellsworth Kalas, he defines holiness as follows: "Holiness is a word found all through both the Old and the New Testaments. In the Old Testament, it is associated almost entirely with God. But because we are God's people, it becomes an issue for us too." Certainly, when Jesus delivered the "Sermon on the Mount," his message went right to the heart of this issue for all of us. Thus, throughout New Testament Scripture, purity of heart regarding each individual is referred to as critically important in developing a relationship with a Holy God.

Scriptures supporting the concept of the holiness of God are as follows:

**Exodus 15: 11---"Who is like You, O Lord, among the 'gods? Who is like you glorious in holiness?"**  
(Spirit Filled Life Bible, New King James Version)

**1 Samuel 2: 2---"No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides you. Nor is there any rock like our God."** (Spirit Filled Life Bible, New King James Version)

**Psalms 99: 1-3---"The Lord reigns; Let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim. Let the earth be moved! The Lord is great in Zion. And he is high above all the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome name. He is holy."** (Spirit Filled Life Bible, New King James Version)

As we read through the first five books of Old Testament Scripture it does not take long before we realize to what extent mankind distanced itself from God through repeated acts of sin. However, another concept that almost shouts to us repeatedly from Holy Script is the enormous love God has for his creation. After all, since God is holy and without blemish, he most certainly does not NEED anyone or anything. Therefore, it is the patience, grace and mercy he extends throughout time to man that demonstrates the depth of his love he feels for his children. Given the countless times God forgave the sinful behavior of his people offers a vivid description of the nature of our Lord. **Psalms 86: 15** succinctly states this with the words, **"But you, Lord are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."** (New International Version)

Thus, since the implication of being in a state of holiness, between what is sacred or showing total irreverence to it (acts of sin) separates the individual from his Creator, it is no wonder the pages of the Old Testament are so filled with mans attempts at restoration through offering animal sacrifices on the altar, or various cleansing rituals as specified by God through Moses. Unfortunately, the sinful nature of mankind continued and reconfigured itself into a form of justification without interrupting the desired behavior. Thus, the acts of becoming ritually pure focused entirely on ceremonies



performed to the exterior of the body; causing the messages of Jesus on purity of heart (internal cleansing) to be in total conflict with the laws added by the Jewish leaders of that time.

Before Christians view the ritual purification ceremonies practiced by the Jewish people with disdain, we must take a look at how we seek forgiveness for our own sinful behavior. Although we do not practice the same purification rituals, do we have the answer in dealing with the sins we commit? Simply by wearing religious expressions of piety, being counted as a regular church attendee, faithfully tithing, or giving to the poor still do not replace repenting of sin. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus let us know that he was asking all of his followers (meaning us) to focus on purity of heart. The words from **1 Samuel 16: 7** apply to all God's creation that state, **"But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him.**

**For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."** (English Standard Version)



As the writer's wise 91 year old friend, Mary Josephine Pascall frequently stated while wagging her finger directly at you, "Now child, why do you want to work at hiding your sinful behavior? You might as well fess up because our Lord knows what you are thinking and doing anyway? Give it up! He already knows! You can't get away with anything just because you fool every person in your path! And....child...., why would you ever want to hide from a Father that loves you so much?"

Consequently, since the act of sinning distances us from our Holy God, unless we, as Jesus taught, bow in reverence at the Creator's feet, it will be virtually impossible to ever behold the true nature of our Father and grow closer to him. As stated in an earlier chapter, man is not capable of ever maneuver the trials of life on his own. Without God, every human being is lost; no matter the material riches or position obtained. Therefore, the question in this writer's mind is, "Given this basic truism, why would anyone ever want to set out on a useless, empty journey of this sort," especially in light of the Scripture from **Jeremiah 29: 11** that reads, **"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future".** (NIV)





"Schnorr von Carolsfeld Bibel in Bildern 1860 001" by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld - Bibel in Bildern. Licensed under Public Domain via Commons -

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts....Isaiah 55: 8-9 (NIV)

### FAITH

The beginning point of having faith is believing that God exists and is the Great Promise Keeper. It is accepting the fact that God already has, and will always, fulfill his promises even though our human eyes have not seen them materialize, yet. Although many people have tried various times to offer evidence and logic that explain the existence of God, in the end, those believing in God must simply make a giant leap of trust defined as faith. **Hebrews 11: 1** states, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Thus, once the great leap of faith in believing God exists has occurred in your life, it must be pointed out that this is only the beginning of your walk with the Creator. **James 2: 19** states, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that----and shudder." Since Almighty God desires to be an intrical part of every aspect of your earthly life, in order to establish this dynamic intimate



relationship that he desires, reading his Word, spending time in prayer, and listening for his still small voice (Holy Spirit) are all critical aspects of the process.

Then, as stated in the study manual of “Christian Believer—Knowing God With Heart And Mind,” by J. Ellsworth Kalas, “Faith is as faith does”; words that require much contemplation by all those committed to a lifelong spiritual journey with God. It means being willing to follow in the footsteps of saints like Abraham who never witnessed the promises of God delivered in his lifetime, but still finished the race the Almighty set before him. Certainly, those of us that were later inhabitants of the earth recognize that his descendents became as numerous as the stars in the sky; a promise of the Father delivered according to his plan and right on time. Since the Old Testament is filled with stories of situations like this, it should be a lesson to all of us regarding our own faith walk with God.



*Betende Hände. Bleistift und Kohle auf Velin. By Otto Greiner (1869-1916)*

Consequently, it is at this point that we must center on the process used for lifting up our requests to God in prayer. Jerry Sittser, in his book “When God Doesn’t Answer Your Prayer,” stated that we would probably be surprised as to how many people within one congregation on a Sunday morning are wondering why God answers the prayers of others but not their own. Folks, I would imagine, if we are truly honest with ourselves, most of us have asked this question in our own minds more than once. In fact, it is these exact feelings experienced by many people when God did not intervene in a tragic event, which prompted them to stop believing in their Creator all together. I have heard it said by some, “If there is a God, why did he allow this to happen in the first place?”

Thus, rather than making others feel guilty during their time of doubt, we should patiently walk beside them until this conflict is resolved. At this point, if you read the Scripture below the picture of God above, you will realize that it is not possible to think like God. He is not bound by space or time; which means, he sees the past, present, and future simultaneously. He knows us better than we know ourselves and realizes precisely what we need, can handle and understand. Truly, if we were to realize what sorrows were waiting in our future, we would probably worry ourselves into a permanent state of insomnia.

Also as human beings, we are self centered beyond words when we make our prayer requests to God. Our needs and desires for solutions are generated from mere human minds that try to hem God in based on the perimeters we have established; walls that try to inhibit a supreme being that created literally everything and everyone. It is at this point that we must realize that God cannot be contained within walls that we build!

First, we have such limited vision that if God were to bestow on us our every desire, it would be calamitous for us; possibly resulting in corrupt behavior. As Jerry Sittser stated in his book, “When God Does Not Answer Prayer”: *“Spiritual power is greater than all other kinds of power because it*



*comes directly from God. It is mightier than armies and education and office and wealth. It is the power that created the world, that sustains the world, that redeems the world. It is the power that can heal the blind and raise people from the dead. It is the power that can transform the human heart. There is no power as wonderful and good as spiritual power. It is for that very reason that is so terrible and dangerous, not because of what God does with it but because of what we might do. God is merciful to us when he does not grant us such power on a whim or wish."*

Sittser went on to say, *"Unanswered prayers are God's gift to us because it protects us from ourselves. We try to change our circumstances when we pray. But God wants to change us."*

Second, we would probably treat God with very little importance, but instead more like making a purchase on line with a credit card when needing a prayer answered. Certainly, this makes the words of Jesus more understandable in **Matthew 19: 23-24**, when he said to his disciples, **"I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."** (*Life Application Study Bible, NIV*) This statement was especially shocking during that time because of the belief that being poor was the result of punishment from God due to sinful behavior. (Since society reveres the wealthy even today, the words of Jesus strike right at the heart of the matter, don't they?) Plus, people who do not know physical hunger have a tendency to feel self sufficient; thinking they are capable of managing without help from God.

In short, faith is bowing at the foot of the cross in total submission to God with both open hands and heart and believing that he truly does know us better than we know ourselves. It is realizing that we are here on this earth at this time and in this location for his purpose and pleasure; NOT OURS.

Then, when the unthinkable and unimaginable challenge rears its ugly head in our path, let the Scripture from **Isaiah 43: 1-2** sweep over us, **"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."** (*NIV*)

**Finally, does this mean we should stop praying? No!** Our God asks us to raise our voices to him when feeling pain and happiness! O Christian Believer, you may never in your earthly life see some of your prayers answered, or be unable to recognize the response from your Almighty because it is not what you imagined within your human mind as being the solution.

**Romans 5:1-5** reads that faith triumphs in a time of trouble. **"<sup>1</sup>Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have<sup>[a]</sup> peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>and perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."** *New King James Version (NKJV)*

In conclusion, when challenges in life shake your faith to the core, fall to your knees and cry out like the father who had asked Jesus to heal his demon-possessed boy when he said, **"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"** (**Mark 9: 24**) (*NIV*) Above all else, please know you are not ever alone. Jesus



promised you would never be without him; and you won't! Also, as disciples of Christ, let each of us be his reflection and wrap our arms in prayer around a child feeling doubt and pain. Go Ye!

### TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION

In order to internalize the response we should have all our lives to our Creator and his Son, let us allow the actions of the disciple Peter to lead the way. It is important to frame the actions of Peter by remembering that he was not a learned man, but an ordinary fisherman possessing a bold and brash personality. His quick reactions to situations remind the writer of a very large puppy desirous of wanting to play with his master. Lacking coordination and training, all he knew to do was to jump, lick, and wag his tail. Given this description, it is understandable why Jesus chose him, isn't it? After all, enthusiasm like Peter's would keep those around him in a positive frame of mind.

In addition, it is important to point out Peter's behavior in the miraculous draught of fishes; a miracle preformed by Jesus. If you recall Scripture, you will remember Jesus approaching the tired group of fishermen that had been unsuccessful and had returned with long faces and empty boats. When Jesus directed them to cast their nets out in a specific location, even though they knew in their heart of hearts that it was a useless recommendation, they followed his directions anyway. Then, when the boats were sagging with the abundance of fish, it was Peter that recognized and acknowledged the divinity of Jesus by falling at his feet in humble adoration and submission. Scripture from *Luke 5: 6-11* reads, *"When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink."*

"Brooklyn Museum - The Miraculous Draught of Fishes (La pêche miraculeuse) - James Tissot - overall" by James Tissot - Online Collection of Brooklyn Museum; Photo: Brooklyn Museum, 2006, 00.159.87\_PS1.jpg. Licensed under Public Domain





***“When Simon Peter saw this, HE FELL AT JESUS’ KNEES AND SAID, “GO AWAY FROM ME, LORD; I AM A SINFUL MAN!” For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners.”*** (Life Application Study Bible, NIV)

Ladies and gentlemen, let us all follow the behavior of Peter through recognizing the greatness of the Father by falling to our knees in total **reverence to a HOLY GOD**. (Before moving to the next section, focus on the painting above by Tissot that brings Peter’s reaction to life. Are you surprised that only one out of the group had this reaction? May we all model his behavior.)

Sources:

*“Christian Believer—Knowing God With Heart And Mind,”* by J. Ellsworth Kalas

*“When God Does Not Answer Prayer”* by Jerry Sittser

*“New Application Study Bible, NIV”*

*“The Spirit Filled Life Bible—New King James Version”*

*“Morning by Morning”* by Charles Spurgeon



## **GROWING IN THE WORD**



1) Before beginning your Bible Study together, I invite you to go to the [www.devotionalembbers.com](http://www.devotionalembbers.com) and open the music tab showing the selections in alphabetical order. Play the hymn, “Holy, Holy Holy, by organist Brad Jent and allow your mind to focus on the holiness of the Father.

2) Read together the Scripture from ***Isaiah 57: 15: “For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”***

Share your feelings on why our Holy God chooses to bow down and revive the heart of the contrite ones. When you come into the presence of God in prayer, what is your visual image of him? Describe your feelings of being in his presence. Discuss the word, “reverence.”

3) In the book “When God Does Not Answer Prayer, by Jerry Sittser, the following quote was used: ***“Spiritual power is greater than all other kinds of power because it comes directly from God. It is mightier than armies and education and office and wealth. It is the power that created the world, that sustains the world, that redeems the world. It is the power that can heal the blind and raise people from the dead. It is the power that can transform the human heart. There is no power as wonderful and good as spiritual power. It is for that very reason that is so terrible and dangerous, not because of what God does with it but because of what we might do. God is merciful to us when he does not grant us such power on a whim or wish.”***



Sittser went on to say, *"Unanswered prayers are God's gift to us because it protects us from ourselves. We try to change our circumstances when we pray. But God wants to change us."*

Ask someone to read this out loud slowly. Discuss what these powerful words mean to you. Have you ever wondered why God doesn't seem to answer prayer? Do you know anyone that has fallen by the wayside; no longer believing in God due to tragedy? Talk about how a disciple of Christ can walk alongside an individual in this troubled time? What can you say or do? Tie your discussion to the statement "Faith is as faith does" by "Christian Believer—Knowing God With Heart And Mind," by J. Ellsworth Kalas.

### CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Kind and Forgiving Father,

First, we praise you for allowing us to ask questions and share our times of doubt freely with you. Since you have told us our mind will never come remotely close to being like yours, it is a relief that you know us better than we know ourselves.

We openly admit that many times, confusion is such a part of our thinking process; we don't even possess the ability to figure out the questions to ask. Thus, we ask that you help us sort through the troublesome times of doubt and hold our hand when we lose our grip. Steady our feet when we stumble and fall carrying us safely toward the star that leads us home.

Holy! Holy! Holy! You are the Holy Father! We bow to you in total submission; dying to self and becoming one with you.

Amen!



The hand as an isolated motif. [Fresco](#) from [Sant Climent de Taüll](#), [Catalonia](#)



## *Chapter 11*

# THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD



"The Lord Is My Shepherd" compliments of Pitts Chapel United Methodist Church, Springfield, Mo.



## INTRODUCTION

One of the most frequently found stained glass windows in churches is that of Jesus as a shepherd surrounded by his sheep. In addition, when searching for a Scripture often quoted by people during times of life-changing events, without doubt, it will be “The Lord Is My Shepherd” from Psalm 23. Even our Jewish Messiah leaned heavily upon the book of Psalm by quoting **Psalm 22: 1: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”** when being crucified on the cross for our sin.

In the book, “Jesus and Scripture”, written by Stephen Moyise, our Lord is said to have quoted from Psalm on 11 different occasions. They are listed as follows:

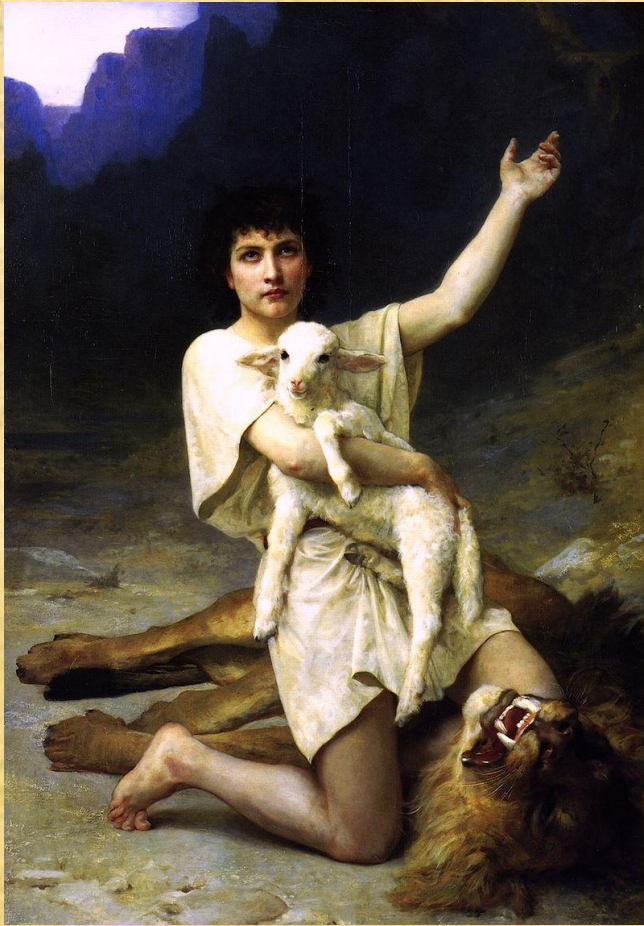
- *“Jesus outwits the Pharisees with the Psalms on several occasions ([Ps 8:2](#), [110:1](#); [Mt 21:16, 22:44](#); [Mk 12:36, 14:62](#); [Lk 20:42–43](#)).*
- *He quotes the twenty-second Psalm while dying on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ([Ps 22:1](#); [Mt 27:46](#); [Mk 15:34](#)). He then fulfills the thirty-first Psalm by committing his spirit to the Father ([31:5](#); [Lk 23:46](#)).*
- *Jesus is hated without cause, which he says the Psalms foretold ([Ps 35:19, 69:4](#); [Jn 15:25](#)).*
- *He quotes the Psalms when talking about his betrayal ([Ps 41:9](#); [Jn 13:18](#)).*
- *Jesus recalls the manna in the wilderness after feeding a multitude ([Ps 78:24](#); [Jn 6:31](#)).*
- *When the Jews want to stone Jesus for claiming to be God, he responds with a line from Psalm ([Ps 82:6](#); [Jn 10:34](#)).*
- *Jesus quotes [Psalm 110](#) when Pilate asks if he is the son of God ([Ps 110:1](#); [Mt 26:64](#)).*
- *He quotes Psalm to the chief priests and elders, calling himself the chief cornerstone ([Ps 118:22–23](#); [Matt 21:42](#); [Mk 12:10](#); [Luke 20:17](#)).*
- *Jesus references Psalm when foretelling Jerusalem’s destruction ([Ps 118:26](#); [Matt 23:39](#); [Lk 13:35](#)).*”

Although scholars hold different points of view as to the number of verses (songs or poems) in the book of Psalm authored by King David, it can be stated that he definitely wrote a sizeable number; that of being over seventy. Certainly, when reading those attributed to David, his life experiences as a shepherd freely flowed throughout the written Script. From the time he was pulled out of the field and anointed to be the future king of Israel his reliance on the wisdom and skills learned in tending his sheep served as the very foundation upon which he led his people; whether governing or leading battalions of soldiers. However, beyond doubt, David’s greatest strength was that of allowing God to direct his life. Although he stumbled painfully on his journey, he would always find his way back to the Father with his head lowered in reverence; no matter the punishment received.

Even though David, known as “The Shepherd King” is well remembered for his success as a great warrior fighting for God, when reading the work attributed to him in Psalm what becomes abundantly clear is the catalyst for defining him as a human being was **his relationship with God**. The beauty of his soul and love for the Lord shone as brightly as the star filled sky that served as a canopy above him when only a lowly shepherd. The Heavenly Father and this shepherd boy must have spent countless hours together in close communion. How our Lord must have been blessed to hear the beautiful music played just for him as David’s fingers passionately strummed the strings on the harp.



Thus, one only has to open the Bible to the following verses attributed to David below to realize why he was labeled as “a man after God’s own heart”:



*The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want ...  
(Psalm 23)*

*The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom  
should I fear ... (Psalm 27)*

*I lift my eyes to the mountains — from where will  
my help come? My help comes from the Lord,  
Maker of heaven and earth ... (Psalm 121)*

Since at age 30, David became Israel’s king and successfully reigned for 40 years, it is no wonder he was so highly regarded in the eyes of his people; prompting them to be desirous of a messiah that would restore the peaceful kingdom as started by the “Shepherd King.”  
("David the Shepherd, Elizabeth Jane Gardner" by Picture of a painting by Elizabeth Jane Gardner - National Museum of Women in the Arts. Licensed under Public Domain via Commons)

In addition, many times people have compared the life of David to that of Jesus and found astonishing similarities. Some of these comparisons are as follows:

- 1) King Saul was worried that David would take away his kingdom/power. In **John 11: 48**, the Pharisees worried unless something was done with Jesus, the Roman Government would remove their power.
- 2) Saul plotted to kill David and relentlessly pursued him. **John 11: 53** indicated that the Pharisees and other religious leaders devised a plan to kill Jesus and constantly tried to find ways to trick him into breaking the law; resulting in his trial and death.
- 3) David fled from Saul to escape death. **John 11: 54** reads that Jesus had to be constantly aware and on the move to escape his enemies.
- 4) King Saul commanded his servants to capture David or tell him where he could be found. In **John 11: 57**, the same edict came down from the Pharisees to the people.
- 5) Even though both David and Jesus had helped the Israelites, some of the people they served, provided information to the enemy.



6) Both David and Jesus stayed in close communication with God the Father.

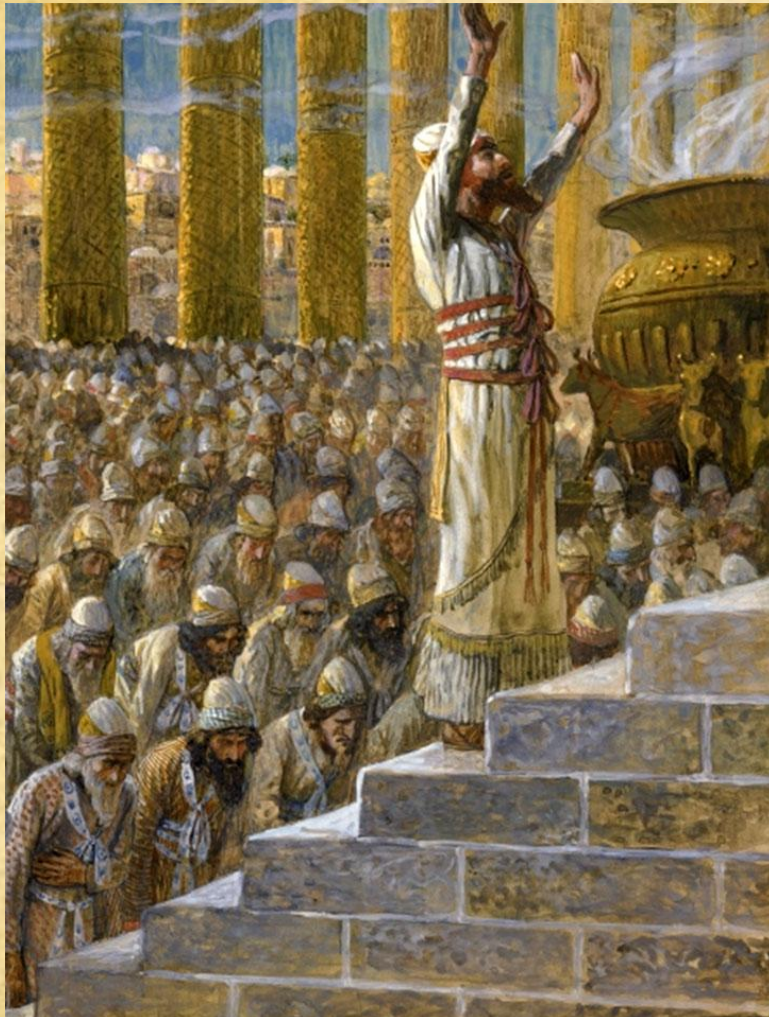
7) However, at this point, it must be pointed out that in spite of the similarities, Jesus was God who came to dwell among us and was totally without blemish; unlike the human being named David. In short, David was an earthly king while Jesus was the promised Spiritual King whose kingdom would have no end.

### A SHEPHERD PEOPLE

*“We your servants are shepherds, as were also our fathers.” (Genesis 47: 3)*

Shepherding is among the oldest occupations that began some 5,000 years ago in Asia Minor. The Holman Bible Dictionary defines a shepherd as a “keeper of sheep”; meaning caring for their every need.” Scholars have reported the Hebrew word for shepherding can be translated as “feeding” which adds even greater meaning to why the words shepherds and shepherding were used over 200 times in the Bible. In addition, the word sheep was mentioned in Scripture over 500 times; showing them as extremely important possessions of the ancient Hebrew people. Sheep were used for food products such as meat and milk, while their wool served as a source for clothing. Also, throughout Scripture, they were used in the Jewish religious ceremonies as sacrifices on the altar.

As early as **Genesis 4: 2**, Abel was described as a keeper of sheep. Certainly Scripture states the



importance of great flocks of animals to Abraham and Sarah as they traveled on their long journeys throughout the Fertile Crescent. In fact, many books of the Bible let us know the importance of sheep (thought to be fat-tailed) to the Jewish people. The fat in the tail was compared to the hump on a camel because of it being a source of reserve strength for the sheep; also providing a valuable food commodity for frying when sold. (**Exodus 29:22**) Job had 14,000 sheep. (**Job 42: 12**) King Solomon at the Temple's dedication sacrificed 120,000 sheep. (**1 Kings 8: 63**) (From “Manners and Customs of Bible Lands” by Fred H. Wight)

*(Solomon dedicates the Temple At Jerusalem  
by James Tissot)*





*A painting of Abraham's departure by József Molnár.*

History also shows that as cultivation of crops increased, shepherding fell from favor with care of the sheep designated to slaves, hired hands, or the youngest son; an explanation as to why David was called from the field prior to his anointing by Samuel. **(I Samuel 16: 11-13)**

In spite of the move toward agriculture, sheep still held an important place in the economy for people living in the Bible Lands. However, for the shepherds tending the sheep, foraging for food and water became more problematic. The next photograph you see will set the stage as to the role the shepherd played in caring for the sheep. As you view it, think of the temperature, type of climate, lack of foliage, possible sources of water, and predators, all of which, posed enormous challenges to those caring for sheep. Given the importance of sheep to everyday life during Bible times, it is hard to believe people caring for these animals were considered by society to be of such a lowly status. (Pause and relate this to career paths in your world today. Do we have the same issue regarding status?)



## SHEPHERD AND SHEEP

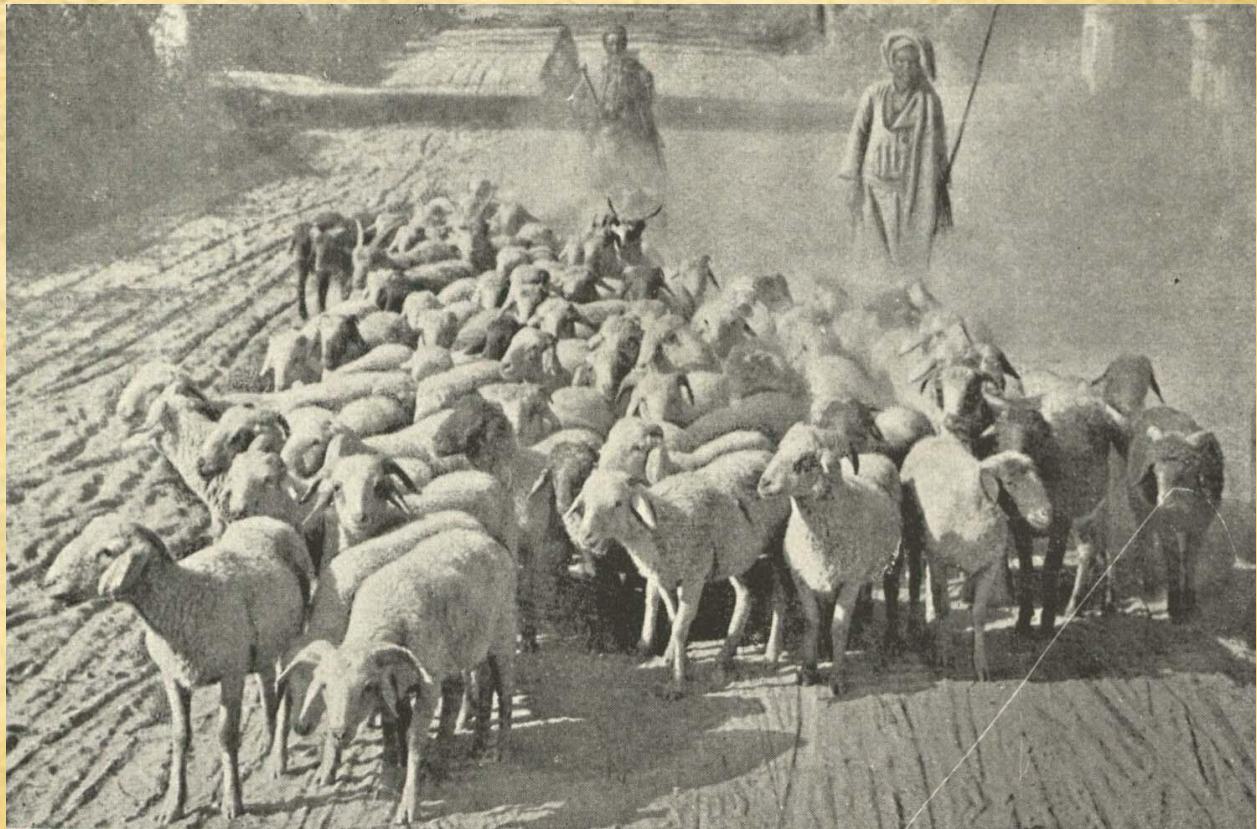
First, by drawing from Old Testament Scripture, it is clear that our Creator placed himself in the role of Shepherd and all his children as sheep right from the start. Shockingly, since the behavior of humans and sheep are mirror images of one another and the survival of the flock rests in the hands of the one caring for them, the word **sheep** in the Bible became a synonym for **mankind**. Simply stated, our Maker understands this thing called "life" is impossible for his children to maneuver alone, thus, sending the message that his presence in the role of Shepherd is essential; a fact announced repeatedly to his children.

In **Ezekiel 34: 11-16**, God speaks boldly about his role as the Shepherd of his people by stating, "For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out."As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land."I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. "I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD. "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy I will feed them with judgment." (NIV)

Then leaving no room for doubt, he emphatically states in **Ezekiel 34: 31**, "As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God," declares the Lord GOD." (NIV) Given the many times God referred to his children as sheep and his role as Shepherd, it is not surprising that this theme would continue in the New Testament. After all, since God came to dwell among us in the form of Jesus, (being both human and divine), it was only natural that the mantle of Shepherd be passed on to his Son as a part of the New Covenant. In fact, the length to which a shepherd goes to offer protection for his sheep took on a total new meaning because of the actions of our Shepherd Savior.

In addition, simply focusing on the photograph below will provide even greater understanding as to the reason Jesus called himself our Shepherd and referred to us as his sheep throughout Scripture. Mistakenly, when we quote Psalm 23 during our times of hardship, the visual image most often drawn in our mind is that of beautiful pasture lands and crystal clear flowing water. Instead, if we really get back to the basics of the origination of the words for the Psalm, in reality, the image in our mind should be based around the setting pictured below. We will then conclude that it is in times of desperation when we feel like there is nothing but dry cracked desert all around, the Shepherd of our lives will be present to provide for our every need. As this chapter unfolds one thing you will note is that a shepherd's focus was never about self, but always centered on the welfare of the flock.





*The Shepherd and his Flock, c. 1905*

Thus, IT IS THE WRITER'S HOPE THAT, as you read the remainder of this chapter, YOU WILL FRAME EVERY THOUGHT WITH THE WORDS, "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD." Through this process, you will internalize what it meant to all of us for Jesus to assume this role. As a descendent of a shepherd people, he not only understood the scope of a shepherd's responsibility, but had lived it from the time he had been born as a Jewish boy until he took his last breath on the cross. Although a carpenter, as a part of this life experience, he had become so familiar with the personality and behavior of sheep that he knew without the love and devotion of a shepherd, they would never be able to maneuver the harsh realities of their environment, thus, the Scripture from **Matthew 9: 36**: *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* (NIV) If the sheep were to flourish, the shepherd had to focus on each one rather than his own personal needs. He had to die to self and center all his efforts on feeding and caring for his sheep.

W. Phillip Keller in his book "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23", states clearly what happens if the shepherd does not put the welfare of his sheep first with the words, *"Sheep are notorious creatures of habit. If left to themselves, they will follow the same trails until they become ruts; graze the same hills*



*until they turn to desert wastes; pollute their own ground until it is corrupt with disease and parasites.”* Folks, isn’t mankind guilty of this in today’s world?

### **A SHEPHERD’S FOCUS**

The following brief description of a shepherd’s clothing and equipment will give you an idea as to the type of a life a keeper of sheep led. As you read the list of supplies he used day after day, ask yourself if you would have been able to live the life of a shepherd. *The clothing and equipment a shepherd would have needed during Bible times was very simple and functional as compared to what people today possess. His main garment worn against the skin would have been a tunic with a cummerbund as a belt at the waist. A mantle made of sheepskin would have protected him from the elements; with the fleece side turned inward. Sandals designed with straps that wrapped around his ankles served to protect his feet from being bruised and battered by sharp rocks and thorns. As a headpiece, he wore a simple woven cloth of wool. On his shoulder would hang a bag or scrip, sometimes called a keli that was made of leather that held his necessities; meaning food supplies (bread, olives, dried fruit, and cheese) along with medicinal ointment for tending to the animals. A ram’s horn would always be on his person that would be filled with oil when anointing the heads of the sheep. In addition, his own personal water flask, rod, staff, sling, dog, and musical pipe would have completed his supplies. (In David’s case, it was said that he played a harp.)* wikipedia



*Shepherd's equipment*

*Bedouin Shepherd Boy*



## ROD

We are told in the book by W. Phillip Keller, "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23," (a must read as recommended by the writer), that a shepherd boy would take great pride in selecting just the right equipment when preparing to care for his father's herd. After selecting the ideal sapling, he would shape it into just the right size and weight for his stature. Then once carved and whittled down to perfection, he would practice using it until able to hit his target with amazing accuracy and speed; a skill that meant protecting his sheep as well as his own life. It would also be hurled through the air at sheep that decided to stray from the flock into the path of danger. Then, at the close of day, each sheep must pass under the rod upon entering the sheepfold, not only for the purpose of counting, but also to inspect every animal for signs of disease or parasites. Since the sheep's wool is remarkably thick, the shepherd would move it against the grain of the coat, separating it allowing an inspection all the way to the skin of the animal. Keller labels the shepherd's rod as his weapon of power, authority, and defense.

**\*\*The rod for us is the Word of God; with application of authority and divinity. Psalm 139: 23-24 "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (NIV)**

## STAFF

The shepherd's staff was a long, slender wooden stick (containing a hook on one end) that was designed and shaped with the needs of the sheep in mind. Keller describes its function as being totally for the comfort of the sheep and sites three important uses for it.

- 1) It was used to lift a new born lamb that had become separated from the mother without having to touch it; thus, preventing the odor his hands bear from being transferred to it. This thoughtful action created an intimate bond between the ewe and lamb.
- 2) Another important use for the staff was to reach out and draw an individual sheep (whether young or old) close to him for a time of personal fellowship.
- 3) Additionally, the shepherd would lay the tip of the long stick against the animal's side and apply pressure when the sheep was straying or when needing to be rescued from danger.

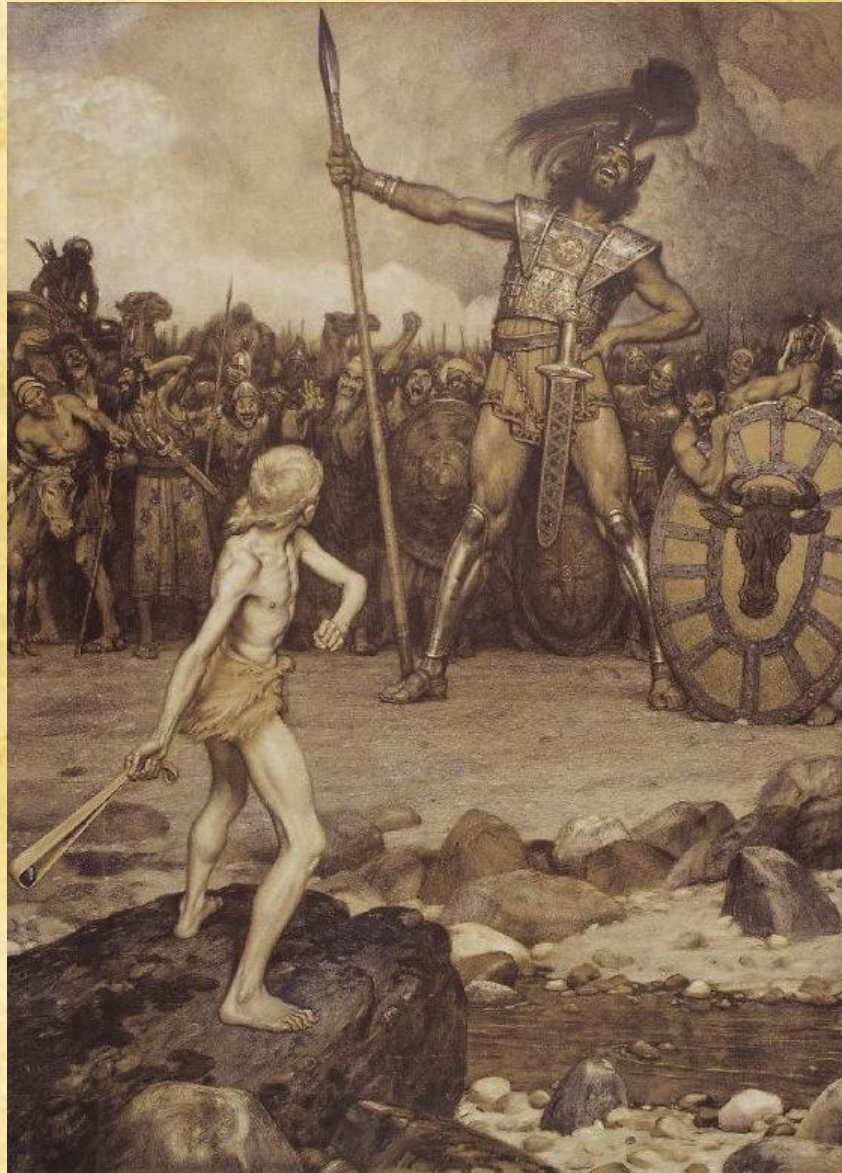
**\*\*Keller describes the rod as the Word of God, while the staff is symbolic of the Spirit of God. We know this as the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life; that of our Counselor. Ladies and gentlemen, do you agree that human beings can be placed in all three uses for the staff as listed above?**

## SLING

The sling is usually well known because of the Bible story of David and Goliath. "A sling had a small cradle or *pouch* in the middle of two lengths of cord. The *sling stone* was placed in the pouch. The middle finger or thumb was placed through a loop on the end of one cord, and a tab at the end of the



other cord was placed between the thumb and forefinger. The sling was swung in an arc, and the tab released at a precise moment. This freed the projectile to fly to the target. The sling essentially worked by extending the length of a human arm, thus allowing stones to be thrown much farther than they could be by hand.” (Wikipedia)



David and Goliath, a colour lithograph by Osmar Schindler (c. 1888)

**\*\*Compare the battles we must face during life's journey to that of David and Goliath. The Lord will be at our side just as he was with David. Since the great Promise Keeper has said he will never leave or forsake us, it is important to focus on him and believe. *"It is the Lord who goes before you. He will***



**be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed." Deuteronomy 31: 8 (ESV)**

### **CAST DOWN SHEEP**

Once again, W. Phillip Keller in the book "A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23" offers information about sheep becoming cast down that will forever shed new light on the Scripture from **Psalm 43: 5 that reads, "Why , my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."** Keller writes, "Sheep are built in such a way that if they fall over on their side and then onto their back, it is very difficult for them to get up again. They flail their legs in the air, bleat, and cry. After a few hours on their backs, gas begins to collect in their stomachs, the stomach hardens, the air passage is cut off, and the sheep will eventually suffocate. This is referred to as a "cast down" position.

When a shepherd restores a cast down sheep, he reassures it, massages its legs to restore circulation, gently turns the sheep over, lifts it up, and holds it so it can regain its equilibrium." If this is not done, the sheep will not survive.

**\*\* 1 Peter 5: 7 lets us know clearly how to deal with our own troubles in life with the words, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (Stained glass window from United Methodist Church, Waco, TX)**





## ANNOINTING

Even though the shepherd had constantly to be vigilant as to the best places for his sheep to receive nourishment, it was equally important that he check daily for the parasites that can make the animals experience sheer misery. Since the goal of the pesky parasites was to lay their eggs in the wet nose mucus of the animal resulting in unbearable inflammation that would drive the flock to madness; each animal must be checked daily. Otherwise, not only would there be a lack of comfort, but the shepherd would witness his precious animals bumping their heads against anything around to stop the distraction; even to the point of killing themselves.

Therefore, in anticipation of this eventuality, the shepherd packed a special ointment in his bag prior to departing for other locations. In ancient Israel, a concoction of olive oil and spices was used to pour over the head of the sheep to prevent the invasion of the parasites. W. Phillip Keller described his solution as follows: "At the very first sign of flies among the flock, he would apply an antidote to their heads. I always preferred to use a homemade remedy composed of linseed oil, sulphur and tar which was smeared over the sheep's nose and head as a protection against nose flies." This treatment resulted in making the wool too slick for the parasites to penetrate.



(Sheep being anointed with oil, artist unanimous, public domain) Note animal horn being used as the tool that held the oil)



Since another meaning for the word anointing is, “Chosen One,” it was a part of the religious ceremonies as a consecration for office or for service to God. ([Exodus 29:7](#); [Exodus 40:9](#); [2 Kings 9:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:8](#); [James 5:14](#)). Another name for our Jewish Messiah was “The Anointed One”.



Cornelis de Vos, *The Anointing of Solomon*. According to 1 [Kings 1:39](#), Solomon was anointed by Zadok.

**\*\* Anointing is still used in churches today for those going into religious service, suffering from illness, or for receiving the blessing of the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is pointed out that as a Believer of Christ, although not formally being touched with oil, we should daily seek the anointing of the Spirit through prayer and communion with God.**

#### **THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP** ([JOHN 10: 1-18](#))

*“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.*



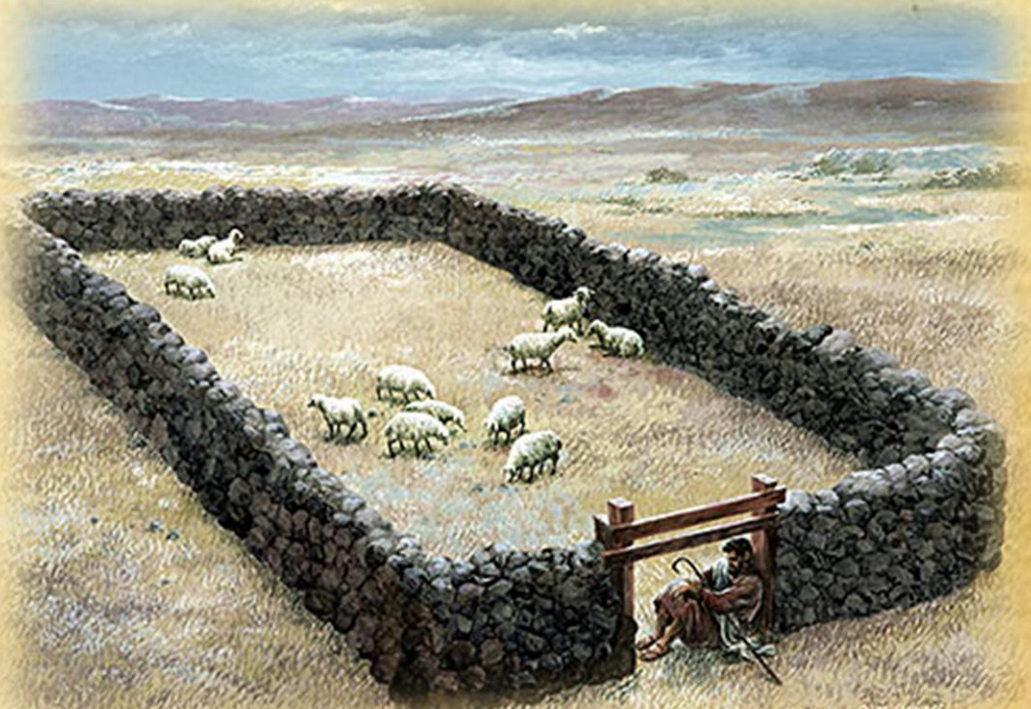
<sup>7</sup> Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.<sup>[a]</sup> They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

<sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” (NIV)

Let us first begin this section with the reason for a sheepfold. As stated earlier, as each sheep entered the gate, the shepherd used his rod as a way of inspecting for parasites. When each animal walked under his rod, his focus was based totally around its wellbeing. Not one passed without notice. Perhaps this is a good indication of why self-centeredness was not even a remote possibility for a shepherd. Then when all was well, the shepherd would recline in the doorway or gate of the sheepfold offering assurance and protection. Nothing entered without his blessing. At anytime the flock became restless, all the shepherd had to do is speak softly; allowing the animals to hear his voice. They were so attuned to its sound that none other could replace it. The sheep would follow no one else but their compassionate shepherd. It was out of love for his flock that he even knew each one by name. That is why it was impossible for an imposter or a hireling to shepherd healthy sheep. They simply lacked the compassion and love for each animal to establish this type of relationship.

(Sheepfold  
public domain  
artist unknown.)





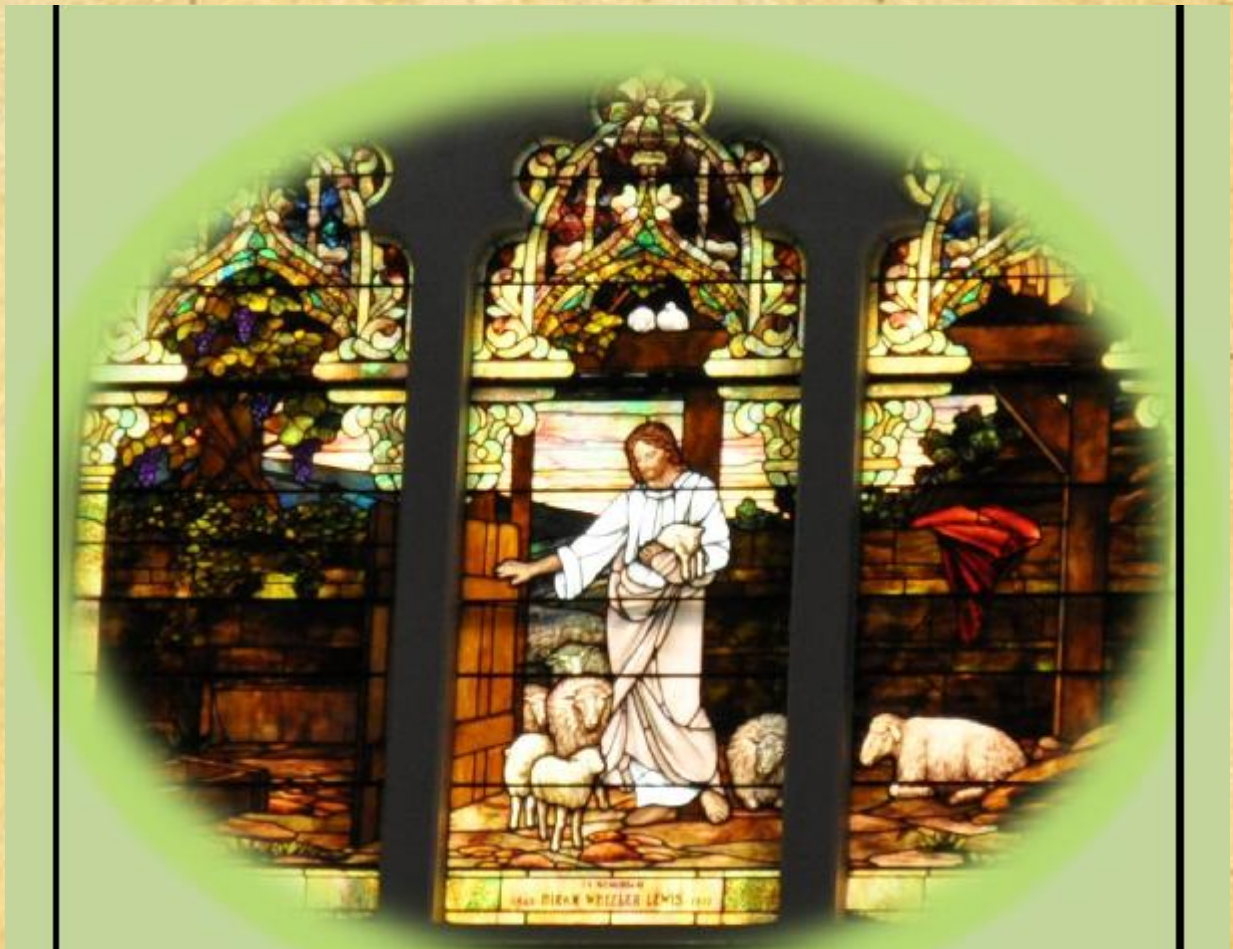
One of the sweetest, most compassionate, incredible Scriptures in the Bible for all of God's children is when our Jewish Messiah calls himself "THE GOOD SHEPHERD." Simply slowly reading the Scripture from John above aloud will allow your mind to understand how our God views his creation. It has been stated often that we are objects of his affection because he CHOSE to create us; to breathe his very life into each individual at birth. Then, in addition to being made by the work of his hands, the fact that he never takes his eyes off each individual from the beginning to the end of life on earth, gives us pause to recognize with certainty that we are a shinned on people. Thus, when darkness falls threatening to cover our soul in thick layers of confusion, misery, and anxiety, knowing we are in the care of our Good Shepherd will provide courage to journey one small step at a time, unflinchingly, toward the light. Under our Lord's tender care, we will not feel constrained or confined, nor ever allow our hope to be diminished.

Certainly, by using the drawing above and visualizing ourselves as one of the sheep inside the sheepfold with Jesus always present at the gate, will allow all of us to face the chill when the cold winds of winter tenaciously blow and howl without ceasing. No failure of a meticulously planned future, broken heart, health challenge, or death of a loved one will ever have to be faced alone. The Good Shepherd knows our every thought and realizes what we need before the prayer for assistance leaves our lips. Realizing we are like sheep that are helpless and always in danger of going astray, he will use his rod and staff to right us once again. In fact Scripture assures us that his love is so great for his sheep that he pursues us all our earthly lives; not wanting one member of his flock to be lost from him.

However, at this juncture, it is important to state that free will comes into play as to the certainty of each individual's future. Although our Lord is always wooing his sheep to become a part of his flock, he will never force the issue. First each person must recognize him as Savior, repent of sins, and invite him to enter our heart which then guarantees the privilege of being forever in his care. It is the writer's hope that you have already committed your life to Christ. **If not, you are encouraged to pause at this moment in time and do so before it is too late.** Once this is done, it is important to die to self and allow your mind to recognize the sound of his voice just as the sheep did as described above. The more you practice listening for him, the easier the process will become. He may speak to you in Scripture, through another individual, or send a thought through your mind unexpectedly. **Matthew 7: 7** offers this assurance with the words, "**Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.**" (NIV) If you have difficulty hearing him, be persistent, keep asking and listening. After all, the Shepherd has the answer and is always right on time; even if the answer is "no". Also, be aware the solution you desire may not be the one he provides. His thoughts are not your thoughts.

Let us now pause for another moment and view the stained glass window called "THE SHEEPFOLD" compliments of First Presbyterian Church, Wichita, Kansas, allowing the fact that our Lord is willing to be the keeper of his flock; meaning all mankind. Please note the warmth, love, and compassion he exudes as he stands at the gate to the sheepfold. He truly is worthy of our praise and adoration!





("The Sheepfold Door" stained glass window courtesy of First Presbyterian Church, Wichita, KS.)

### TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION

Isn't it amazing how our thinking process and view toward life changes as we approach the winter season of our earthly journey? The reasoning behind the old adage, "Youth is wasted on the young", seems to become clearer with each passing day, doesn't it? What we think is in our best interest does not even come close to being the proper solution. In fact, how many of us, when thinking about the events of the past say right out loud, "How did I ever make it through that impossible trial?"

Yet, we failed to recognize the answer to this question was in full view right from the start. The inability to solve this riddle of life transpired because the window through which we were peering was clouded by the reflection of our own face, thus, blocking the image of our Lord from sight. Certainly, although the adage was coined about youth, it has been long accepted that lessons are hard for every individual to learn; no matter the season of life. How many bumps on the head do we need to endure before speaking first to our Lord prior to determining which path we pursue?



As we have followed our Jewish Messiah down the highways and byways that would be home to the final three years of his life, as our Great Shepherd, the fact that he was constantly inviting “sheep” into his sheepfold should have been abundantly clear. He made no difference between the rich or poor, sick or healthy, as he extended the offer of eternal life to one and all; regardless of race or color. His behavior served as a living example of how important it is to love the Father first and also thy neighbor as thyself.

Additionally, he stood and fed his sheep using parables that were absolutely stunning due to their structure being filled with picturesque beauty and simplicity. He performed miracles that were filled to the brim with compassion and love; acts that left us speechless and at a loss for words. Then, as he delivered the Sermon on the Mount that announced the kingdom of heaven had arrived on earth, he meticulously described what was expected of its citizens; meaning his followers. Did you, like this writer, feel the power of God flowing from his entire being with every word he spoke? Even though we were receiving his message through the Word, could you still feel the mighty hand of God piercing your soul? Regardless of the fatigue that penetrated his human body, he relentlessly moved forward with determined steps in a resolute manner; all while staying in constant contact with his Father. Ladies and gentlemen, we witnessed in action, the Good Shepherd, lovingly “feeding” his sheep. That is why his words to Peter from John 21: 15 now become so poignant in our minds that read, *“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs.’* Then, as we read aloud the instructions from *1 Peter 5: 2*, our marching orders are quite clear. We are told, *“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve”.*(NIV)



Finally, let us end by focusing on the words of Jesus when he told us that a shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. Oh, how telling these words from our Lord were at this point! Although, at the time, the mere human beings that had followed and listened to every word that passed his lips would not have possessed the potential for understanding the true meaning of his words, those of us living at this time in history know exactly what awaits our Savior. Thinking back to the image of the sheepfold that held his contented flock, the Good Shepherd would soon choose to take the place of his sheep by suffering death on the cross; sacrificing his own life for theirs/ours; an act performed out of love, not due to guilt or sin. **GO YE!**

*(“The Good Shepherd”), stained glass window on previous page, compliments of First Presbyterian Church, Pittsburg, Kansas)*



Sources:

*"A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23" by W. Phillip Keller (Recommended Reading by Writer)*

*"Christian Believer—Knowing God With Heart and Mind" by J. Ellsworth Calas*

*"Life Application Study Bible" (NIV)*

*"Jesus and Scripture" by Stephen Moyise*

*Wikipedia.com*

*Faith Lessons Series – Ray Vander Laan (1996-2012) DVD*

*"Manners and Customs of Bible Lands" by Fred H. Wight)*



GROWING IN THE WORD



**Music:** Recommendation to begin your study time by listening to the hymn "Trust and Obey" played by Bradley Jent on the organ. (Located on home page at [www.devotionalembbers.com](http://www.devotionalembbers.com))

Since we began this chapter by focusing on the Psalms written by David, let us also end in the same manner. When reading commentary on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, many scholars felt he penned these well loved words, not as a young impulsive shepherd boy, but during his final rein as King of Israel. Although some felt it was based on his experience as a shepherd boy alone with the responsibility of a flock, others surmised the wisdom these words in this Psalm deliver would have come from a wise older individual; that of a king looking back on the deliverance God provided during the many challenges he faced in leading his nation.

1) Regardless, the basic truism that a human being, no matter the age, does not possess the wisdom to conquer life, should give each one of us pause to shout jubilantly, "The Lord **"HE"** is my shepherd! In order to allow each individual to internalize the importance of this fact and write it with indelible ink on the heart, slowly read Psalm 23 in its entirety, allowing your mind to savor each word. If you are with others, join hands and say it together.





*"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."(NIV Life Study Bible)*

**AMEN!**

- 2) After reading or saying the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm together, meditate quietly as a group for a comfortable length of time on what it means to you personally. Along your journey in life, when were some instances when you could feel the Great Shepherd's presence close by?
- 3) If you feel comfortable, share these inspiring moments with the group. Do not feel pressure to respond.
- 4) If you are doing this as a church, can you think of times when the Great Shepherd led his flock? Share them.
- 5) List as a group ways in which you can follow Jesus' directions to "feed his lambs." How might you do that on a personal basis, as well?
- 6) Close by reading the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm as the concluding prayer.



## Chapter 12

# ATONEMENT WITH GOD



*"Paschal Lamb" stained glass window courtesy of University Hts. Baptist Church Springfield, Mo.*



## INTRODUCTION

It is important to begin this chapter with the concept of “LONGING FOR GOD”; a need that has found a home inside the heart and soul of every human being from the beginning of time. As Christians, we believe the story for us began in the Garden of Eden when, through actions of disobedience, two human beings separated themselves from God; behavior that impacted mankind forever; meaning their sin brought death without hope unless our loving Father intervened.

Thus, whether you believe the story to be purely symbolic or true, man's longing for God and need for atonement were established once and for all. When one understands and accepts the importance for each individual to be “at one” with the Creator, the life-long search for happiness by all people becomes clear in the mind. Since, at birth, God breathed life into each one of us and will draw that same spirit back to him when our physical body dies; it is no wonder being “at one” with the Creator is at the very core of the human experience. When communion with the Father is severed through sin, resulting in separation from him, it is truly astounding the extent to which an individual will go in order to find appeasement.

Although there are some that will deny the very existence of God calling it primitive and silly, others will try and satisfy the great chasm in their lives by filling the emptiness with material things, fads, or significant causes to join as a way of replacing the eternal solution. Added to this wild and crazy search is the monster called PRIDE that often will result in the inability of some to make a stand on believing in Jesus because of fear of what others will think, or refusal to admit to a mistake.

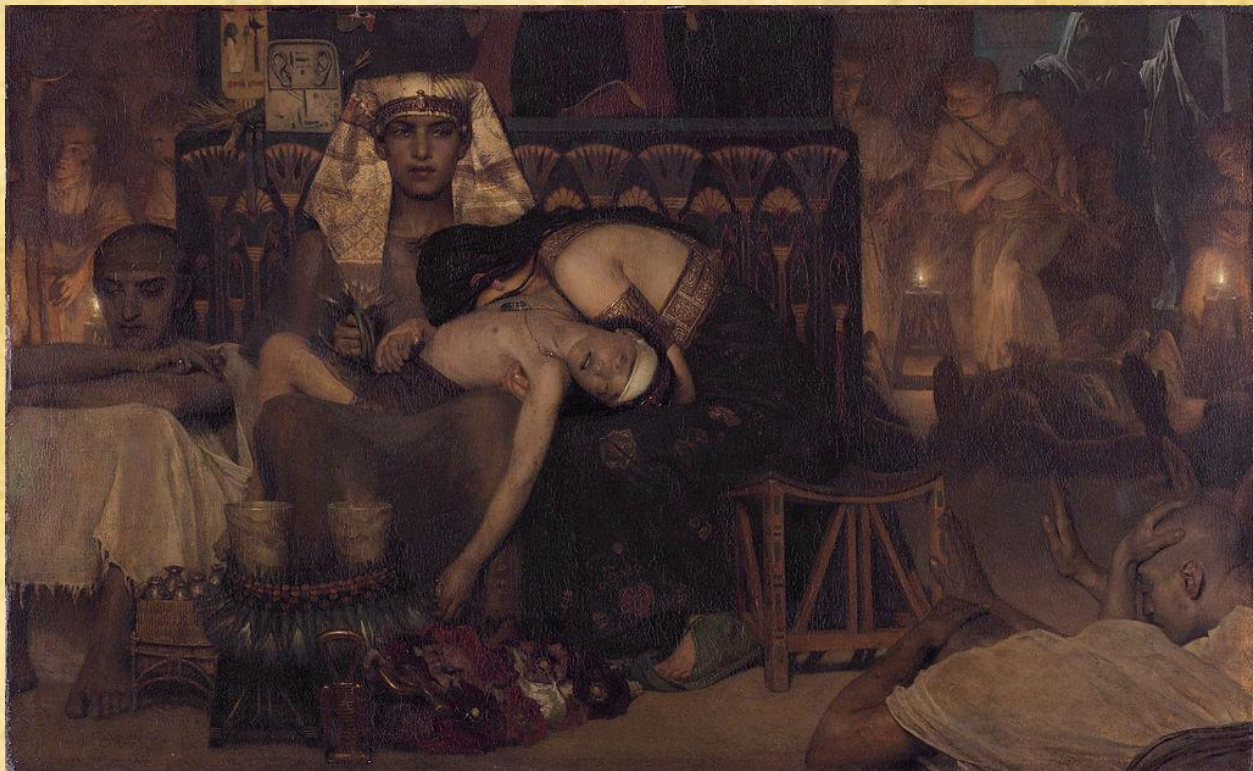
Ladies and gentlemen, as a volunteer in the nursing home, I have witnessed personally God's saints taking their final breath of earthly air with joy and jubilation as well as unbelievers crying out in fear from never having accepted Jesus as Savior; thus dying in a state of total separation from their Creator. Sadly, I will always recall one unbeliever having a sign posted on her door, “Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ is never to be alone.” Having refused all invitations to Christ and then in an advanced state of mental deterioration, time for connecting to the Father had expired and FEAR dominated.

Therefore, I urge one and all to read this chapter with an open heart and willingness to receive the urging of the Holy Spirit. Also, if you are around those that have not made their way to the Father, please consider reading this chapter together in a loving manner. Sweetly, as two children of God, let his all encompassing love wrap you in his mighty arms as he beckons you toward a closer walk with him. To intimately know our Lord is to hunger and thirst after righteousness.



## **BLOOD AND ATONEMENT**

In order to understand why Jesus had to die on the cross to atone for our sin, we need to refer back to Exodus Chapter 12 when God was getting Pharaoh to the point that he would release the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. It is in this chapter that the death angel was to take the first born in each family unless a lamb without blemish was slaughtered and its blood was put on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where the lamb was eaten. (For detailed instructions regarding the celebration of Passover, refer to Exodus 12: 1-30; when God's chosen peoples' first born sons lives were spared as the death angel passed over the Israelites homes.)



*The Death of the Pharaoh's Firstborn (1872 painting by Lawrence Alma-Tadema)*

Also included in the Old Testament Scriptures is the description that sin is a very serious business with a Holy God; a time when mans actions are considered to be totally against the Creator. **Psalm 51: 4** succinctly states **"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge."** (New International Version) One fact that can be gleaned from the Old Testament teachings regarding sin was the break it caused in communication with the Creator; meaning it was considered a life and death situation. Thus, throughout the book of Leviticus, it is made perfectly clear under the first covenant the only way forgiveness (cleansing) for sin could occur was through the blood of an



animal without blemish; especially a lamb sacrificed on the altar. The reason presented for the sanctity of the blood was because the **life** of a creature is found in the **blood**. **Leviticus 17: 10-12** (NIV, New International Version) **"Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood---I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar: it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, "None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood."** (To read about the ritual of sacrifice in detail, you may desire to turn to Leviticus 4: 27-35.)

Consequently, as we note the continuous silver thread God weaves throughout the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments regarding the instances when he had to step in and save human beings, it should become apparent, once again, that man is not capable of dealing with life experiences by himself. Only our all knowing Father is able to save mere mortals; no matter the number of people classified as "EXPERTS" in this world offering solutions. Scripture also states that God can make foolish the wise; those that think they are above Bible teachings, relying only on self or accepting the thoughts of mankind.

Therefore, when God made a covenant with the Israelites that they were to become his chosen people, he intended them to be a witness to others. In other words, they were blessed to be a blessing to others; a concept they did not understand. Instead, their feelings translated into that of exclusivity rather than inclusivity. (Be careful about pointing judgmental fingers in their direction regarding this attitude. That same danger exists today in churches, as well.) As a result, no matter how many times they sacrificed animals on the altar seeking God's forgiveness, or how often God saved them from total destruction as a people, the Old Testament is replete with circumstances describing them repeatedly falling away from God due to sinful actions and disobedience.



*High Priest Offering Incense on the Altar (illustration from the 1894 Treasures of the Bible)*



## A NEW COVENANT

Given the fact that the Old Covenant (First Covenant) was broken by God's chosen people, the Scripture from Jeremiah below describing the chance for a new beginning clearly shows all mankind the Father's true nature; that of the all consuming love he has for his creation.

### **Jeremiah 31: 31-34 (ESV)**

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

In order to clearly understand God's purpose for the New Covenant, it is important to recall the role the shedding of blood plays in making atonement with him by focusing on the book of Hebrews.

### **Hebrews 9:22 (New International Version (NIV))**

**"In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."**

Folks, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin which had to be done in order for man to be drawn back to the Creator. Therefore, possessing unimaginable love for his children, the Father found a way to run right along beside them with an offer of forgiveness and grace that would make man acceptable in his sight once again. **SINCE IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO DIE HIMSELF, THE SHEDDING OF BLOOD WOULD BE ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF HIS ONE AND ONLY SON; JESUS.** John 3: 16 reads, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Therefore, through the actions of mercy and grace, Jesus was born into this world for the sole purpose of dying on the cross at Calvary as a blood sacrifice without blemish that would offer atonement for all God's creation. (The holiday Christians celebrate called Christmas is far more significant than focusing simply on Baby Jesus being born in a manger, isn't it?) Do you now understand why the word "unfathomable" is often used when describing God's love for his children; meaning you? Even the name God assigned to his One and Only Son before taking on human form and being received by his loving earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, held extraordinary significance. Following the customs practiced during Biblical times, even his name described his mission because of its definition. (Jesus means "Savior," and is the same name as Joshua in the Old Testament.) Friends, our Jewish Messiah was born already crucified before uttering his first cry!



## THE LAMB OF GOD

As Isaiah speaks about Israel straying from God, he refers to them as wandering sheep and prophesies that they will be led back into the fold by the Messiah yet to come. Going further, he then depicts their Savior as being in the position of a sacrificial lamb; meaning he will be pierced for their sins. Isaiah 53: 6-7 distinctly points to Jesus as being the perfect blood offering from God; thus, establishing the name for him as, “THE LAMB OF GOD,” with these words:

*“We all like sheep, have gone astray, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” (NIV)*

Since Bible Scripture refers repeatedly to the importance of the Isaiah Scroll and the numerous times it was read in the synagogues, it is certainly predictable for John the Baptist to lean on the Scripture quoted above when he saw Jesus walking by. As a



forerunner with the mission of paving the way for the Lord, and in the process of baptizing people with water, every aspect of his words were providential when he exclaimed, *“Look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.’”*

Jesus (on the left) is being identified by John the Baptist as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”, in John 1:29.<sup>[1]</sup> 17th century depiction by Vannini.

Then, in the book of John 1: 32-34, John the Baptist discloses the reason why he was able to verify Jesus by stating, *“I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. I have seen and I testify this is the Son of God.’” (NIV)*





"Trevisani baptism christ" by Francesco Trevisani - <http://www.1st-art-gallery.com/Francesco-Trevisani/The-Baptism-Of-Christ,-1723.html>.  
Licensed under Public Domain via Commons

Also, looking closely at the words John spoke when he saw Jesus shows the providence of God going even deeper. Although John would have probably been so familiar with the Book of Isaiah that he had committed it to memory, thus, being aware of the prophesy about the awaited Messiah, there still would have been no reason for him to identify Jesus as "THE LAMB OF GOD," unless arranged by God, himself. This, folks, is a moment of enlightenment!

Then, moving along in Scripture to the writing of Paul in **1 Corinthians 5: 7**, when he includes in his words to the church, *"For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed,"* even more credence is added to the concept.



Last, it is important to note in the book of Revelation that Jesus is referred to as "THE LAMB," twenty-nine times; the first being chapter 5: 6, *"Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders."* (NIV)

Lamb bleeding into the Holy Chalice, carrying the vexillum. (Wikipedia)

Also, Scripture reads that Jesus was both human and divine because of being the Son of God and the Son of Man. In fact, Jesus referred to himself as being the Son of Man over eighty times in the New Testament; a preferred title he desired for himself that truly demonstrated humility and commitment to his



mission. As “THE LAMB OF GOD,” Jesus had been sent by the Father to reclaim a world whose inhabitants had broken their communication with the Creator through sin and disobedience. Thus, realizing he had only three years to announce himself as Messiah and deliver the good news of the kingdom, the resolve he demonstrated in choosing and preparing his disciples was understandable. He not only taught them continuously, but also demonstrated the Fruit of the Spirit through his behavior and showed them above all how important it was to stay in communion with the Father. Yet, all the while, Jesus described as the man of sorrows, knew his destiny was crucifixion on the cross; a death that was outlawed later due to it being such an inhumane method of punishment. Would you be able to function in life possessing in advance information on the horrible death you would encounter? Most of us would probably become mentally insane out of fear and angst.

### TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION

It is certainly easy to understand the desperate need of mankind to be saved by the Creator. However, the concept of a human sacrifice in the form of Jesus our Savior presents a challenge for many people due to the shedding of blood through death on a cross. If we are truly honest, there probably have been times when we ask the questions to ourselves, “Why did God not choose another way to forgive us? Why did his Son, Jesus, have to die?”

In answer to those questions, this writer will bluntly state that it is impossible for the human mind to understand the things of God; this being one of them. Thus, at this point, the words I pray are, “Dear Lord, please help me to understand the things you desire me to know and accept the fact that as a mere mortal, I do not possess the ability to ever think like you. Without your love and understanding, I am lost.” **Isaiah 55: 8** states: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.* (NIV)

Then, when the writer reaches the point of complete frustration and totally at a loss as to wrapping her arms around a situation, she simply quotes from **Psalms 46: 10**, *“Be still and know that I am God.”* (NIV)

*No matter our lack of understanding, let us celebrate with great joy the Second Covenant of our Lord and the gift of eternal life it offers through the shedding of the blood of Christ to all who repent and believe he is the Messiah, Savior of the World. Then, when focusing your eyes on the blood stained empty cross, let us further be reminded that our Lord was resurrected and sits at the right hand of the Father arbitrating for each one of us. Having lived on this earth in the form of the Son of Man, he understands all our sorrows and temptations.*

### Sources:

“Christian Believer; Knowing God With Heart and Mind” by J. Ellsworth Kalas

“New International Application Study Bible (NIV)







### **GROWING IN THE WORD**



- 1) Are the images you have in your mind regarding atonement that moved from the sacrifice of animals on the altar as described in the Old Testament to that of the blood of Jesus being shed for our sins troublesome? Share your feelings.
- 2) Is it difficult to explain to an individual hearing it for the first time? Share your ideas on how this might be accomplished. What if you are presenting it to a high school or college age student? Might your approach differ?
- 3) Brain storm as a group, ways to explain atonement to others.
- 4) Remember the faith walk differs with every individual. Some people seem to accept Christ as Savior and have a gradual growth as a believer, while others appear to have no trouble with the concept and accept immediately. Talk about each type of acceptance together.
- 5) How do the two journeys above impact the role of going along beside the individual as a disciple?
- 6) In closing the time together, read or sing the old familiar hymn below called, "NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS" allowing the words to demonstrate the necessity of atonement for every child of God.

#### **NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS**

1 What can wash away my sin?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
What can make me whole again?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

#### **Refrain:**

O precious is the flow  
that makes me white as snow;  
no other fount I know;  
nothing but the blood of Jesus.

2 For my pardon this I see:  
nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
For my cleansing this my plea:  
nothing but the blood of Jesus. [Refrain]



**3 Nothing can for sin atone:  
nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
Naught of good that I have done:  
nothing but the blood of Jesus. [Refrain]**

**4 This is all my hope and peace:  
nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
This is all my righteousness:  
nothing but the blood of Jesus. [Refrain]**

**United Methodist Hymnal, 1989**

**Robert Lowry (1876)**

**Amen!**

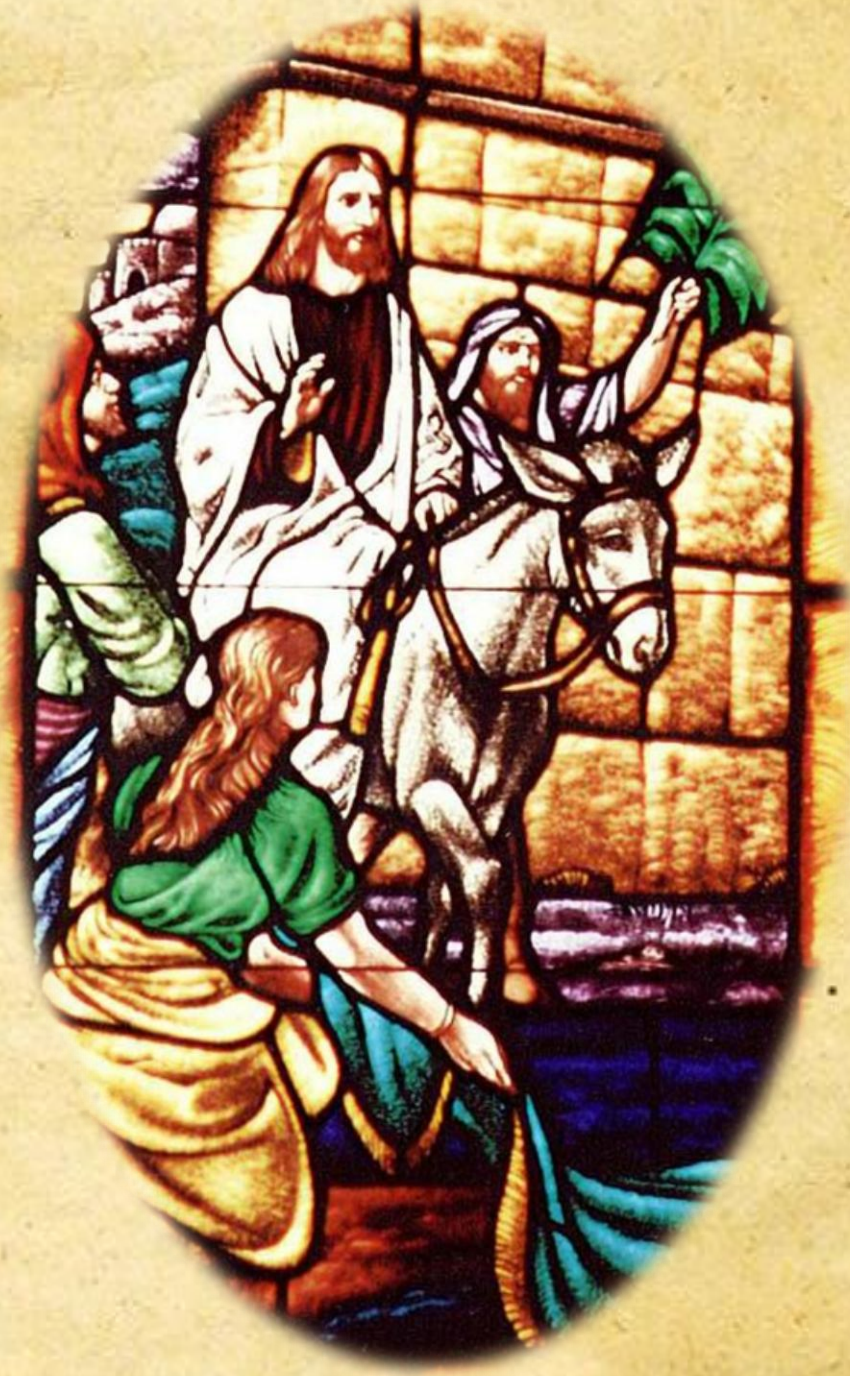


*Painting of "Jesus, Man of Sorrow," from the United Methodist Church, Mountain Grove, Missouri*



*Chapter 1*

**FINAL WEEK**



"TRIUMPHAL ENTRY" Compliments of Austin Avenue United Methodist Church, Waco, TX.



## INTRODUCTION

Hasn't it been a marvelous blessing to follow the footsteps of Jesus and watch his whole life and ministry unfold before your eyes? Throughout your journey in this collection, have you found yourself pausing frequently allowing the sweetness of his love, mercy, and compassion to saturate your hungry soul? Has it given you pause to look into the eyes of your Jewish Messiah and witness the array of emotions displayed as he healed the sick, felt anger toward the arrogant, experienced rage for those suppressing the downtrodden, and sadness for even the individuals that rejected his message of the kingdom? Oh, what breathtaking beauty we have noted in those eyes! Since Jesus was God who came to dwell among us, did it register in your mind that you were seeing the eyes of the Heavenly Father; that as a mere human, you were invited to peer through the window of the Master's soul and witness his true character?

Certainly, if you were to search the eyes of the Lord at this juncture in his ministry, they would be vividly reflecting even a different emotion; that of an unfaltering determination due to the fact that this was to be his final week on earth. **Luke 9: 51-55** supports this stance by vividly stating, **"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."** (NIV)

Even though he, above all, was most aware of the dangers and difficulties awaiting him at every turn, he had a date with destiny that drew him like a giant magnet. By claiming the position of Messiah, he knowingly had gone against the Jewish religious establishment, not out of vengeance and hatred, but motivated by love for his creation. Being God of very God, he knew in advance that he would be facing his final destiny alone. Fear would rear its ugly head in even the hearts of his closest disciples causing them to cower and run for their lives.

Also, in spite of the fact that God is in pursuit of his children all their lives, desiring desperately for not one of them to be lost from him, Scripture has made it abundantly clear that he will never force the issue. The words from **John 3: 16 (NIV) ---<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"**, say it all. As a result, our Lord had traveled the highways and byways for three years delivering the message of the kingdom with relentless determination by using every possible method to get the good news across to his people. There was just something about God's One and Only Son that brought those in his presence to full attention. Being simply dressed as a common man from Nazareth, it was obvious that the magnetism those around him felt was coming from the very heart of the Father; a pure and shining radiance from within.

Until now, Jesus had avoided publicity and openly requested individuals he healed to keep the news a secret. Do you recall how he slipped away into the crowd unnoticed when the people wanted to crown him king? Also, as his popularity grew, he had always been on the move to outsmart those wanting to corner him with the motive of causing him harm.

However, this was the dawn of a new day; a time when he encouraged his disciples to let it be known that he would be coming to Jerusalem. The Jewish people would have the final say; that of accepting or rejecting him. The Scribes and Pharisees had predicted that his mission would be to head straight



for the Temple to announce his claim that he, indeed, was the long awaited Messiah his people had anticipated.

Therefore, having received the news in advance that Jesus would be entering the city gates on this special day, the air was explosive as uncertainty and expectancy reined. Since all men were required by Law to attend the three great feasts of Passover, the city of Jerusalem was swollen six times its size; an increase estimated by some scholars to be a growth of 150,000 people. Does this give you a feel as to the activity and noise level when Jesus would make his final entrance into the holy city? Certainly, we can be assured this would offer no surprise to him due to Scripture describing his visits at this event from birth to age twelve and beyond. Our Lord who was the child of two devout Jewish parents not only was taught to adhere to the Law, but also had grown up honoring and loving the Temple where God resided with every fiber of his being. One could surmise that, due to his love for the Father, it was the place that took total precedent in his heart.

Thus, even when he made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, an event that was prophesied 500 years earlier and recorded in **Zechariah 9:9**, many people were still not convinced of his Messiahship. **“Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”**(NIV) No matter! Jesus not only knew Scripture, but was himself the Word; thus enacted it perfectly.

Yet, given the fact that donkeys have always been viewed as lowly by society, it is certainly understandable that disappointment was the emotion experienced by those observing the one claiming to be the long awaited Messiah entering the gates of the city riding on this simple creature's back. In their eyes, Jesus should be arriving with great pomp and circumstance.

When researching the view society has toward the means of transportation Jesus chose for his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, one can understand the attitudes displayed among the crowd. It is often stated that unlike horses, sheep, dogs, or cats, donkeys seem to have great difficulty being offered a warm reception within the human heart. Still yet, donkey lore is filled with the love these animals and children have for one another; indicating the ability of this simple creature to see all the way to the core of the heart. In the book “Saving Simon”, written by Jon Katz, he indicates that in the Kabbalah, an old rabbi explains that God made donkeys the guardians of children, because children are pure and filled with love and emotion, not yet tainted and corrupted and made angry as their parents often are. The rabbi says that donkeys are sacred messengers of God, and that children and donkeys talk to one another.

Thus, as we have witnessed throughout our journey with Jesus, it should not have been a surprise when he straddled the back of this animal. As humans were dealing with their feelings of status regarding this issue, possessing great knowledge of Scripture, Jesus was adhering totally to God's plan. Therefore, being very familiar with the prophesy stated in Zechariah 9:9 regarding the future Messiah riding into Jerusalem on a donkey's back, he fulfilled it to the letter by giving the following directions to his disciples:



### Mark 11: 1-7

“When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup> and said to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says to you, “Why are you doing this?” just say this, “The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.”’ <sup>4</sup> They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup> some of the bystanders said to them, ‘What are you doing, untying the colt?’ <sup>6</sup> They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup> Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.”



*("Gérôme - L'entrée du Christ à Jérusalem - cadre" by Jean-Léon Gérôme)*

Thus, even though our Lord did not look like a king; lacking the regal sense of David, or displaying the boldness and size of Saul, this simple man riding on an awkward donkey still captured the attention of those present that day. There was simply something about this humble, compassionate man that, in the minds of those watching, struck a chord; a mysterious aura that caused him to exude the appearance of a king. How could this be? His exterior trappings did not fit their definition of how a king would present himself! Yet, Scripture states their reaction to the triumphal entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem as follows: “Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,



**‘Hosanna!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
<sup>10</sup> Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!’ (Mark 11: 8-10) NIV**

At this point, let us imagine the emotions exhibited in the eyes of our Lord as he saw the faces of many compatriots whose lives he had touched in various ways through his gracious deeds during the three years of his ministry. Then picture what expression he wore as he identified allies among the throng; people who did not desire to get involved, but at the same time wished him well. Perhaps their thinking was that the character of this man, as described by others, would bring about a positive change in some way.

As he traveled slowly through the mass of people, the eyes of Christ must have penetrated those of individuals desiring only to take advantage of the situation for selfish reasons only. They were users whose goal was to receive, not give. Remembering how Jesus felt about anyone that was neither hot nor cold, but only lukewarm, describe to yourself the emotion seen on his face when making eye contact with these individuals.

Then, there were tourists in the crowd; people who had arrived from various places all over Palestine and the Diaspora to take part in Passover that must have been absolutely shocked, puzzled, and intrigued by the happenings unfolding around them. How might they be reacting? How do you think Jesus saw them?

Last, let us not forget how familiar the faces of the objectors were to Jesus. Recalling the numerous times when their only motive was to trick the Lord into making a mistake and breaking the Law, and now hearing the loud praises coming from the voices of the crowd, do you think their blood had reached the boiling point? Are you able to visualize their eyes?

Given this analysis of the crowd and the Divinity Jesus possessed, how do you think he felt about this strange conglomeration in the holy city that day? As mere humans, motivated by the desire to please others, most of us might have been tempted to change our course! Not our Lord! Scripture clearly spelled out his reaction.

*Without doubt, our Lord knew those waving palm branches and shouting hosanna to the king, would be the same voices yelling to crucify him; yet, the cross now being in his view, he proceeded forward toward the Temple he loved.* After all, thinking back on the events of his life, the Temple was the center of his very core; the place where he went for study, debates, sacraments, and worship. However, since, due to the large crowds having gathered in Jerusalem for Passover and darkness approaching, he soon departed for a location outside the city where he would spend the night; thus bringing day one of his final week to an end. Although there is no evidence describing his choice of sleeping quarters that night, do you have any thoughts? Did you guess either at the home of his friend Lazarus or on the slopes of Olivet in the company of his disciples? Do you suppose prayer was involved?

Although scholars disagree on when the events took place during the final week of Jesus' earthly life, Scripture does tell us he arose early and headed once again toward the Temple. In route, as he turned the corner, he was able to look down upon the city of Jerusalem with the beloved Temple in full view.



The words found in **Luke 19: 37-40** offer an indication as to the joy and adoration the people felt about the Lord, the miracles they had seen, and the beloved city below. Unable to keep silent, they shouted, **"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"** Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, **"Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"** However, Jesus replied, **"I tell you, if you keep quiet, the stones will cry out."** NIV

At this point, we will need to picture the depth of sadness the disciples witnessed in the Lord's eyes as the full impact that his own people had totally rejected his teachings as the Messiah penetrated his heart like a sword. The disciples whose hearts were so full of joy must have been astounded when they saw the tears flowing from their Master's eyes. Jesus, being divine as well as human, already was aware that the destruction of the Temple would occur and the dire consequences his people would face in the very near future. Although the magnificent Temple that stood in its usual place of importance within the city he loved shone with its usual radiance, the adoration he usually felt when viewing the landscape caused his eyes to fill with tears and prompted him to proclaim **"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace---but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."** NIV (Think back to the new Exodus Pitre wrote about in his book as described in an earlier chapter. This refers to the coming of the long-awaited Messiah; but their eyes were blinded to it.) Note the disciples' reaction.



*Jesus weeps over Jerusalem by James Tissot*



Consequently, just as Jesus predicted, turmoil began exactly 40 years after he said these words. Thus, in A.D. 70, the Romans laid siege and entered the weakened city and burned it, killing 600,000 Jews. The end result was total destruction of the Temple; an event that changed their lives forever. This holy city he loved whose foundation rested upon the Salem of Melchizedek that was built on Abraham's Mount Moriah and David's Mount Zion was destroyed because of the close mindedness of the people.



*Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem (David Roberts, 1850)*

Although Scripture lets us know that on this particular day Jesus is definitely on a mission to visit the Temple, before describing the scene that followed, it will be extremely valuable to review various aspects of its construction and religious requirements. In order to understand how sacred the Temple was to the Jewish people, one only needs to refer back to the book of Exodus where numerous verses appear describing the manner in which God is to be worshiped; a detailed account of the design of the Temple and religious ceremony itself. This was never more apparent than when God was leading the Hebrews out of Egypt. The people were organized into 12 tribes throughout the entire journey. Then, when the tabernacle was constructed, each tribe had a set responsibility that was delivered in great detail.

*Model of the tabernacle in Timna Valley Park, Israel*





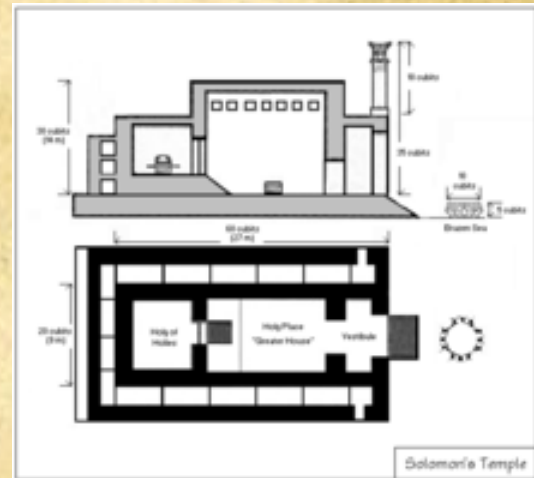
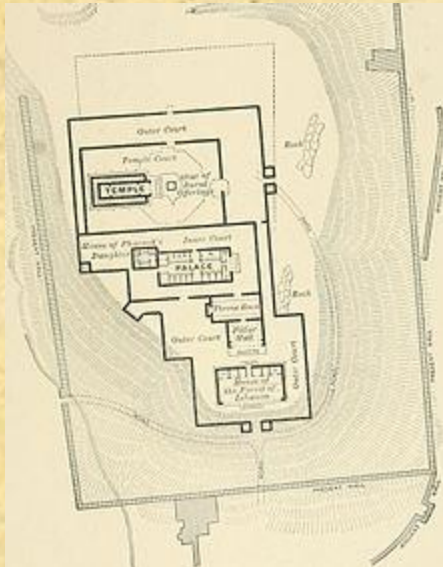
The picture below of the Holy of Holies shows how critical the religious guidelines were to the Jewish people; rules that were passed on from generation to generation. **Exodus 6: 7: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians,"** was serious business, indeed. In order for this to happen, the people had to follow the commandments of YHWH.



Description Holman The Holy of Holies.jpg [commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

After the children of Israel arrived to their permanent land, Temples were built but destroyed due to constant turmoil and invasions. Thus, under Herod's rule, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple was completed; the place where Jesus would have frequented often. Herod's Temple was one of the larger construction projects of the 1st century BCE. Josephus records that Herod was so interested in perpetuating his name through building projects, that his construction programs were extensive and paid for by heavy taxes, but that his masterpiece was the Temple of Jerusalem. As described by scholars, Herod's Temple was twice the size of the one built by King Solomon. (Called the First Temple)

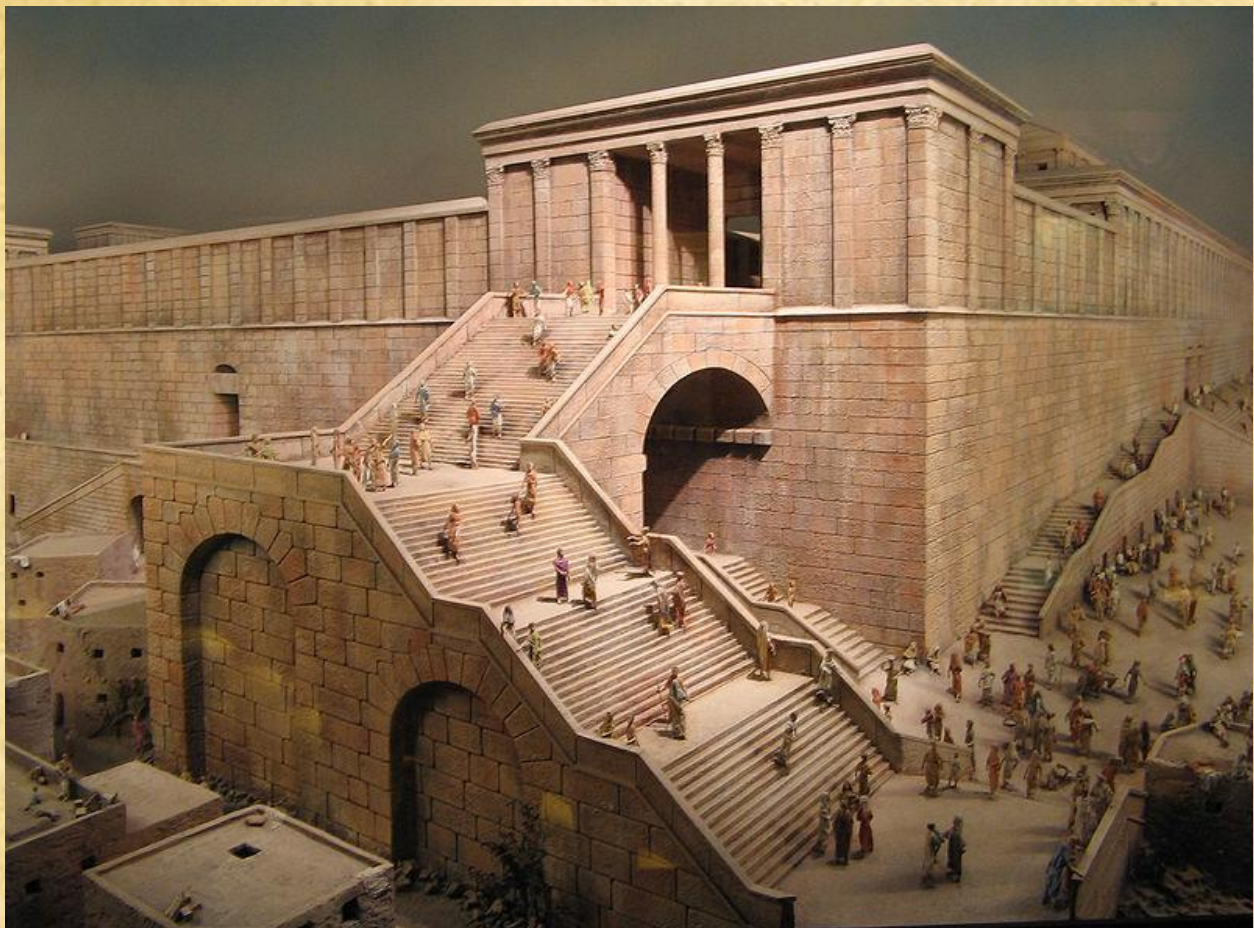




*Plan of Solomon's Temple with measurements*

*Plan of Solomon's Temple, published 1905*

Since the Temple held such an important place in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people, it is also critical to picture the emotions these thousands of tourists felt when climbing the hill up to the city of Jerusalem and fixing their eyes on its glorious beauty.



By Водник at ru.wikipedia, CC BY-SA 2.5, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7560698>



Robinson's Arch (*photograph above*) in the Second Temple Period will allow you to view the drama of approaching Jerusalem through the eyes of those gathering from great distances around for Passover. Given the fact that all men were required to attend Passover at this time of the year, are you imagining the variety of emotions they felt as they approached the Temple? Even those that had attended previous Passover Celebrations still must have felt a surge of pride when climbing these steps.

Then, upon reaching their destination, the climax of their journey had to be when they entered the sacred Temple of God; a place that held such high distinction and was the center of their teachings as Jewish people. View the re-creation of Herod's Temple below and note the extravagance of the design and the ornate building materials used.

*Description Second Temple.jpg wikipedia*



Before going inside Herod's Temple, it is important to establish what was expected of those attending Passover; requirements of the Law that created hardship on the already oppressed to the point of finding daily existence to be all but impossible. Since it was a stipulation that all males be in



attendance, as soon as the great Temple doors swung open, the attendees literally flooded the forecourt called the Court of the Gentiles. In the book, "In the Footsteps of Jesus" by Jean-Pierre Isbouts, it was indicated that those entering the Court of the Gentiles passed the soreg, the boundary beyond which no Gentile was allowed to enter, and immediately climbed a multitude of 15 unevenly raised stairs in order to gain entrance into the Court of Women. (The uneven stairs were purposely constructed to promote those entering to ascend slowly and with great reverence) All around the Court of the Women (Jewish women could not go beyond this court) stood 13 horn-shaped depositories (*shoparoth*) earmarked; each for a specified purpose. When you view the particular uses of these containers, it will soon be obvious why Passover for most of the people, in spite of being devout Jews, became a hardship and makes one wonder if some of the beauty of the Temple was diminished in their eyes.

#### Depositories:

(Two were set aside for the half-shekel Temple Tax required to be paid by everyone)

(The remaining chests were for collecting donations of wood and incense to be burned in the Temple, for pigeon offerings, or for voluntary gifts.)

In order to understand how Jesus felt about this forced giving, it is important to read **Luke 21: 1-4** that states, **"1As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. 2He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 3"Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."** (NIV)

*(Painting by James Tissot called, "Watching Holy Week Unfold")*





At this point, are you grasping the other side of the story; a graphic visual image of the suffering endured both then and now by the downtrodden in society? As our Lord sat and watched this time of giving, the difference between the lavish gifts presented by the rich and those of the poor broke his heart.

Ladies and gentlemen, given the fact the pious Jewish community members throughout the Roman Empire made contributions in this manner, the Temple Treasury was so enormous that it was described as a type of central bank. Additionally, since the high priest dispensed the surplus as he saw fit, are you able to surmise the fact that the downtrodden were never even a passing thought in the process?

Furthermore, to add insult to injury, the Temple even had only one type of currency permitted; a coin they designed for just this purpose. Thus, to go to a moneychanger located on premises in obtain the proper form of tithe.

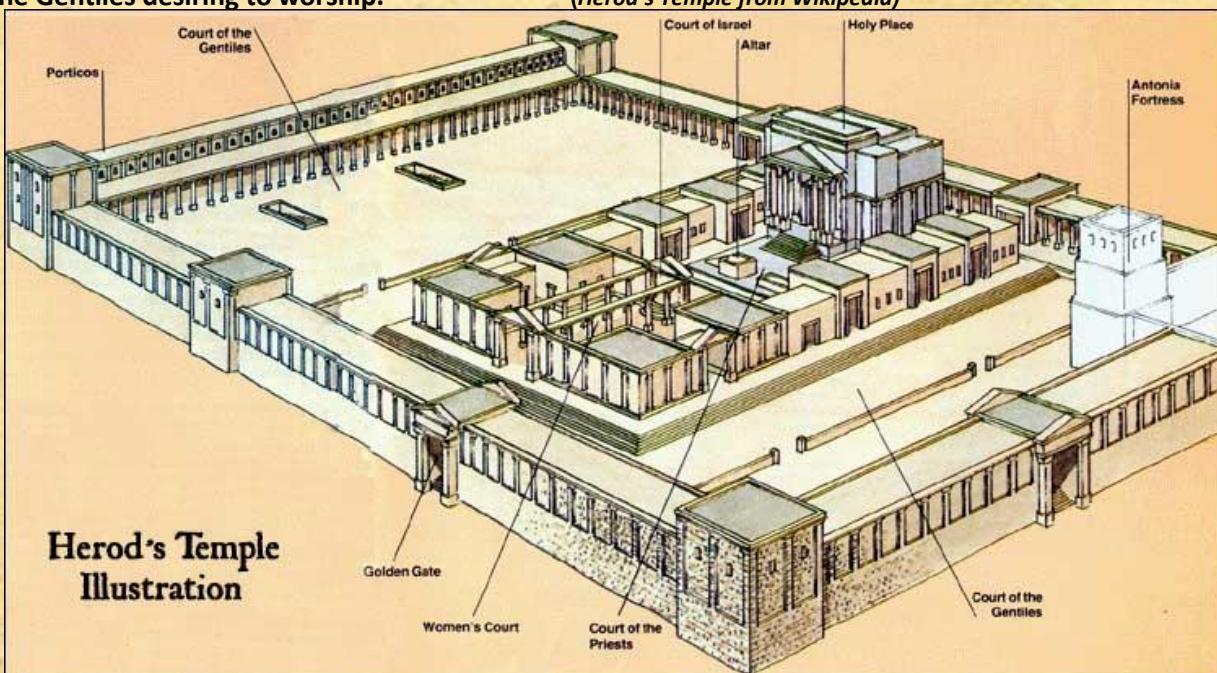


people had order to

(A coin issued by the Jewish rebels in 68 CE. Obverse: "Shekel, Israel. Year 3". Reverse: "Jerusalem the Holy", in the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet Wikipedia)

Moneychangers and merchants that had booths set up in the Temple Court of the Gentiles did big business on Passover due to so many Jewish people attending from foreign countries. Taking advantage of the situation, they were known to gouge those being in this predicament. At the same time, since those attending were required to offer a perfect sacrifice, the stalls and cages that cluttered the same area were being sold to people at exorbitant prices; making the merchants wealthy beyond belief. Extortion had become accepted and expected by the rulers of that day. Not only were they capitalizing on the poor who were already in dire straits, but taking up the space for the Gentiles desiring to worship.

(Herod's Temple from Wikipedia)





Consequently, are you able to picture the eyes of Jesus that were fuming with righteous indignation upon entering the Temple scene on this particular day? When our Lord witnesses his creation being persecuted and prevented from coming to him, truly there are no words that can be chosen to describe his feelings; a warning to everyone even today!

At this point, we will let Scripture from **Mark 11: 15-19** from the Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with the subheading, Jesus Cleanses The Temple, tell the rest of the story: <sup>15</sup>Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; <sup>16</sup>and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. <sup>17</sup>He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'?  
But you have made it a den of robbers."

<sup>18</sup>And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. <sup>19</sup>And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples<sup>[a]</sup> went out of the city."

**John 2: 15 (NIV)** gets even more graphic with this event by stating: "So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables."

Did it surprise you when Jesus stepped right into the middle of all the activity that was occurring in the Temple even though the practice was condoned by the religious leaders as acceptable in God's house? Certainly, our Lord's reaction should not have been a surprise to those that frequented the Temple because of making his past objection to this practice well known. Was his level of anger a shock because of your preconceived notion of having been told by him to turn the other cheek? Perhaps at this point, we should focus on the fact that he had repeatedly told them with words how reverent God's creation should be toward the Father. Then when words had obviously failed, he turned it into one powerful demonstration, didn't he? It is thought by many that his reaction was proportionate to the results he desired.

At this point, given the Temple scene as described above, how do you think Jesus felt about the actions of the two people below that occurred much later in history?

1) In 1906, Sinclair a writer acquired particular fame for his classic muckraking novel, *The Jungle*, which exposed conditions in the U.S. meat packing industry, causing a public uproar that contributed in part to the passage a few months later of the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act.<sup>[1]</sup>

2) Bonhoeffer was known for his staunch resistance to the Nazi dictatorship, including vocal opposition to Hitler's euthanasia program and genocidal persecution of the Jews.<sup>[2]</sup> He was arrested in April 1943 by the Gestapo and imprisoned at Tegel prison for one and a half years. Later he was transferred to a Nazi concentration camp. After being associated with the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler, he was quickly tried, along with other accused plotters, including former members of the Abwehr (the German Military Intelligence Office), and then executed by hanging on 9 April 1945 as the Nazi regime was collapsing.  
*Wikipedia*





Christ driving the Traders from the Temple by Spanish Artist El Greco (1541-1614)

As this scene ends, it is important to point out that anger did not establish itself as a permanent guest in the heart of Jesus. He had reacted appropriately and then regained control; demonstrating for everyone how the emotion of anger should be handled. Otherwise, allowing it take up a dominant position in his heart would have rooted out the real purpose for which he was sent to earth; a lesson for all mankind.

Therefore, as Jesus continued what was to be his final week on earth, he did not lose sight of his goal; that of concluding his three year ministry according to his Father's plan. Although there is much debate as to when the remaining events occurred, there is total agreement that they, indeed, took place. Given the positive responses of the masses, the religious leaders relentlessly hounded him, peppering him with trick questions at every turn. Surprisingly, the three religious groups, consisting of the Herodians known for following Herod, the Pharisees considered to be strong Jewish patriots, and the priestly aristocratic Sadducees actually joined hands as a united body in an effort to discredit the



Lord in the face of the crowd by entrapping him.. Jesus spent an inordinate amount of time patiently answering them while possessing full knowledge of their true motives. Even though he fully recognized and dreaded the horrible death on the cross that shortly awaited him, he still had the gumption, patience, and courage to heal people of infirmities and quietly teach his disciples. **2 Timothy 4: 6-8** that clearly teaches all of us about following in Christ's steps while on earth that reads, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. **7** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; **8** in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing," was being modeled for us by our Jewish Messiah on, this, his final week. Since death by crucifixion was no stranger to our Lord, even though he was fully aware of his fate, through his behavior, he was making these last moments his finest week ever. What courage and strength the people must have witnessed as they looked into the eyes of Jesus during these precious moments remaining of his earthly life. Are you picturing the eyes of our sweet Savior at this moment?

As we bring the events covered in this portion of Jesus' last week on earth to a close, you will now need to turn the page and gather with him in the upper room for his last supper with the disciples; a time that was so powerful and magnificent that it deserves a chapter of its own. Come! Let us join hands and hearts while taking communion with our Lord!

#### TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION

During our time of contemplation, we will use a parable from **Luke 20:9-19** Jesus told during his final week on earth with the goal of not only interpreting it, but also applying to ourselves as Christians.





## Luke 20:9-19 English Standard Version (ESV)

### The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

<sup>9</sup> And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. <sup>10</sup> When the time came, he sent a servant<sup>[a]</sup> to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup> And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup> And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. <sup>13</sup> Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' <sup>14</sup> But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' <sup>15</sup> And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" <sup>17</sup> But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?"<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>18</sup> Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

**Lesson: 1) the landowner—God, 2) the vineyard—Israel, 3) the tenants/farmers—the Jewish religious leadership, 4) the landowner's servants—the prophets who remained obedient and preached God's word to the people of Israel, 5) the son—Jesus, and 6) the other tenants—the Gentiles.**

It is important to recall that Jesus was speaking to the Jewish religious leaders; not the entire Jewish people. (Remember, the first church was started by Jewish people.) It is also important to note that being given the vineyard as Gentiles does not free us from judgment. Jesus lets us know clearly that we are to bear fruit as his disciples. Thus, we are expected to strap on our sandals and follow the footsteps of our Lord; ministering to all and delivering the good news of the kingdom to everyone; thus being inclusive, not exclusive. All God's children are equal in his eyes; the poor, rich, those poorly dressed, individuals of every race and walk of life. Woe to those that stand in the way of anyone desiring to come to the Lord. The faces of the congregation should be a patch work quilt of people gathering from all nations, worldwide! Go Ye!

### SOURCES

*"Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist by Brant Pitre*

*"In the Footsteps of Jesus" by Jean-Pierre Isbouts*

*"New International Version Bible"*

*"Saving Simon" by Jon Katz*

*Wikipedia*





## **GROWING IN THE WORD**



- 1) Suggested hymn before starting class: “VICTORY IN JESUS” by Brad Jent from [www.devotionalembbers.com](http://www.devotionalembbers.com). (or hymn of your choice)
- 2) Review the section in this chapter where Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding on the back of the donkey. Then pull out the groups of people Jesus made eye contact with that were along the sides of the street. Compare your own reactions to those described. Can you identify being in their position either spiritually or when dealing with contemporary issues? Go deeper by discussing ways in dealing with these types of individuals when you cross paths on common issues. What are the challenges? How might you cope as a Christian?
- 3) Given the fact that Jesus was both human and divine, how did this figure into his thoughts as he observed the mass of people in Jerusalem that day?
- 4) Review the section of this chapter when Jesus looked down over Jerusalem weeping bitter tears over not only being rejected as their Messiah, but also because of the destruction he knew would occur just a short time later. Read aloud that section and study the faces of his disciples. Placing yourself in their shoes with all that was unfolding, what were their thoughts? Did it help that they were actually there in person, or were they suffering from too much information overload? Considering the different personalities of the disciples as discussed in an earlier chapter, choose one and try to imagine his response. Which one would have been the first to speak?
- 5) Now go to the Temple with Jesus and study the painting by Tissot of Jesus observing the activity as the people paid the set tithe, what might he be thinking? Would he have been making comments to his disciples? When viewing the painting by Tissot, discuss the sights and sounds that would have been a part of the scene and make it come to life.
- 6) Jesus had tried at other times to teach that God’s Temple was to be a house of prayer, but discovered during his final week that he had spoken to deaf ears. Thus, anger surged through his entire being! Read this section and make that scene come to life with sights and sounds. Have you ever felt that kind of anger? How did you deal with it? Was the anger you felt because a child of God was being mistreated? Are there entire races of people that have been abused that caused righteous indignation to surface in your heart? Were you able to control it in a positive manner? Sometimes, we cannot solve an issue, but make only a contribution to the solution. Discuss.
- 7) Throughout this chapter, you have been asked questions. Were there questions that stood out in your mind that you wish to discuss?
- 8) Pause for a moment and evaluate your church as God’s Vineyard. Are you producing fruit and wearing the sandals of Jesus? Are you welcoming everyone and making sure all who worship are being treated with equal importance? (Perhaps a chart could be used listing the headings as STRENGTHS AND NEEDS. Remember: The Lord is evaluating us, just as he did the Jewish leaders.
- 9) Then, be really brave by asking yourself the same questions. This will be a private time unless you desire to share with the group.



## CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Lord,

As we walked beside you on, this your last week, our emotions have felt like they were on a roller coaster. Although we fully realize you have arisen and are sitting on the right hand of the Father Almighty, it is still painful for us to relive this time and keep our thoughts together. Many times our emotions get so out of control that we lose perspective. We take the situation so personally that it becomes all about us, causing pride to rear its ugly head. Help us to never lose sight of the fact that we are here at your pleasure and for your purpose. When "SELF" threatens our walk with you, remind us of the important things in life. Help us focus on the fact that our journey on earth is but a moment in time; just a blink of the eye, and what really counts is that we remain your disciples and follow in your footsteps.

All these things we pray in your precious name. Amen!





## Chapter 14

# THE LORD'S SUPPER



*Christ with the Eucharist, Vicente Juan Masip, 16th century.*

REMEMBER ME!



## INTRODUCTION

At the conclusion of the last chapter describing the events in what was to be the final week for our Lord on earth, you were issued the invitation to join the disciples in sharing the Lord's Supper with him. However, in order to better understand the words the Lord spoke to his disciples during these last precious moments in communion together, it is critical to visit the Jewish roots of how the first Passover began in Egypt. In the book of Exodus, you will locate the complete story of how God heard the prayers of the Hebrew people as they pleaded to be brought out of slavery. Answering their cry, he spoke to Moses with the following words: *Exodus 3: 7-10 (NIV) The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.<sup>8</sup> So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.<sup>9</sup> And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.<sup>10</sup> So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."*

As you recall, due to God hardening Pharaoh's heart, he repeatedly refused to set the Israelites free. Given the fact that the Creator is all powerful and omnipotent, many ask why he didn't just immediately force the issue and bring his people out of slavery. Why did he choose to inflict ten plagues against Pharaoh before persuading him to release the ill-treated Israelites from oppression? Ladies and gentlemen, the plagues served to contrast the power of the God of Israel with the Egyptian gods; invalidating them. In short, he was preparing to show his power so that all creation would know that he truly is the One and Only God! Actually, some scholars have connected several of the plagues with judgment on specific gods associated with the Nile, fertility and natural phenomena. (Blood, Frogs, Gnats, Flies, Livestock, Boils, Hail, Locusts, Darkness, and finally Death of Firstborn)

Since the Passover originated after the plague called death of the firstborn, we will focus on what transpired before and after the event. After releasing nine plagues upon Egypt, and Pharaoh still stubbornly refusing to relinquish the Israelites from his grip, God was getting ready to unleash a mighty blow that would bring the situation to a conclusion; the grand finale. Thus, he sent Moses to the Pharaoh with the following message: *Exodus 11:4-5 New International Version (NIV) "This is what the LORD says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the female slave, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well.'*

However, fully realizing the reaction of Pharaoh would be one of resistance, God then instructed Moses to prepare the Hebrew people on how to escape from being touched by the angel of death during that long and horrible night. The following summary from "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist" by Brant Pitre shows the origination of the Old Testament Passover as follows:

1) Choose and unblemished male lamb.

4) Eat the flesh of the lamb with unleavened bread.

2) Sacrifice the lamb.

5) Every year, keep the Passover as a "day of remembrance" of the exodus forever.

3) Spread the blood of the lamb on the home as a "sign" of the sacrifice.





(Painting by Tissot)

### The Passover Instituted

• 12 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, <sup>2</sup>"This month *shall be* your beginning of months; it *shall be* the first month of the year to you. <sup>3</sup>Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household. <sup>4</sup>And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take *it* according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. <sup>5</sup>Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take *it* from the sheep or from the goats. <sup>6</sup>Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. <sup>7</sup>And they shall take *some* of the blood and put *it* on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. <sup>8</sup>Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it. <sup>9</sup>Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. <sup>10</sup>You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. <sup>11</sup>And thus you shall eat it: *with* a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It *is* the LORD's Passover.

New King James Version (NKJV)



Ladies and gentlemen, think what responsibility Moses had in delivering these detailed instructions to the large number of Hebrew people. Does that tell you what God thought about his servant Moses? Although Moses felt incapable of fulfilling the enormous assignment God had described to him, the Lord knew him better than he knew himself! Also, it was an example to all of us how important it is to listen to the still small voice of Christ! In the case of the Hebrew people on this night of Passover, one can be absolutely certain of the consequences for not complying with every word that came out of the mouth of Moses. Given our stiff necks, it becomes frightening, doesn't it?

Additionally, did you note in the Scripture above that the Hebrew people did not have time to prepare bread with yeast, and were to eat their Passover meal standing up with staffs while wearing their traveling garments? This was symbolic of their faith that God was going to live up to his promise and deliver them that night! Then, later on in Scripture, you will read that they were always to celebrate the Feast of the Unleavened Bread in order to remember it was at that very time that God delivered them from death and out of the hands of Pharaoh in Egypt; freeing them from slavery.

Last, it is critical to always recall that Passover was to be celebrated as an act of thanksgiving for deliverance from death. It was not to be an "Open Table", but a **"Covenant Feast"**. **IT WAS TRULY THE LORD'S PASSOVER!** Additionally, only individuals who were circumcised and had become members of the tribe of Israel could partake of this sacred Passover meal.





Let us pause and study carefully the picture above and imagine the conversation around the table as the first Passover is carried out according to God's instructions. As they stood together around the table, what sounds might they be hearing from outside? Do you think they knew when the angel of death passed by their door? Read aloud the Scripture from **Exodus 12: 29-30 (NIV)** that follows for even greater enlightenment: **"<sup>29</sup> At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. <sup>30</sup> Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead."**



*Passover: the Death of the First-Born of Egypt by Charles Sprague Pearce*

**Exodus 12:31-32 King James Version (KJV)**

**"<sup>31</sup> And he (meaning Pharaoh) called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said. <sup>32</sup> Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also."**



Therefore, in God's good and perfect time, his chosen people left Egypt with not a hair on their head touched, carrying with them all the provisions they would need for their journey. Picture in your mind the mass exodus that occurred during the middle of the night led by God's faithful servant Moses!



*Israelites Leaving Egypt David Roberts (1828)*

View the painting above of the Israelites being told to leave Egypt during the middle of the night. Talk about faith! Not only were they accepting the leadership of Moses, an individual they had just met, but were also departing hurriedly under the veil of darkness. This event takes the definition of "FAITH" to a totally new level, doesn't it?

### PASSOVER EVOLVES

Since about fifteen centuries passed between the time of the departure of the children of Israel to that of Jesus, Passover changed in various ways. Therefore, in order to add even greater depth to what transpired at the Lord's Supper, it is now important to review some of these developments.



## 1) Location For Sacrificing Passover Lamb

**Deuteronomy 16: 5-7 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)** clearly states that God was changing the location in which the sacrificing of the Passover animal was to be accomplished; that being the Temple when Jesus lived on earth. In addition to this, Jewish Law proclaimed that all sacrifices were to be eaten within the walls of Jerusalem. Also, by this time, God had appointed the priestly duties of this type to only the Levites. **"You are not to sacrifice the Passover animal in any of the towns the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>6</sup> You must only sacrifice the Passover animal at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to have His name dwell. Do this in the evening as the sun sets at the same time of day you departed from Egypt. <sup>7</sup> You are to cook and eat it in the place the LORD your God chooses, and you are to return to your tents in the morning."**

## 2) Sacrifice Procedure Changed

Author, Brant Pitre in his book, "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist", quotes from (Josephus, WAR 6: 423-27) to provide a graphic description as to what our Lord witnessed regarding the sacrificing of the animals at Passover time in the Temple. Given this quote below, it can be emphatically stated that Jesus would have a permanently engraved image of this event in his mind.

*"So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover; when they slay their sacrifices, from the ninth hour (about 3 p.m.) to the eleventh (about 5 p.m.), but so that a company not less than ten belong to every sacrifice (for it is not lawful for them to feast singularly by themselves), and many of us are twenty in a company, found the number of sacrifices was 256,500; which , upon the allowance of no more than ten that feast together, amounts to 2,700,200 persons."*



THE PASSOVER : SLAYING THE PASCHAL LAMB.—Num. ix.

Given this description, it is understandable why some scholars wrote that lentils were added as a supplement to the Passover meal due to the portion control of the lamb designated per family.

After the blood was drawn from the sacrificed lamb, it was then poured on the altar; an image that had to be forever held in the minds of the Jewish people in Jerusalem.

Then, according to Brant Pitre in his book "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist," he quoted the writings of Saint Justin Martyr, a Christian living in the mid-second century A. D. that originated from his dialogue with



a Jewish rabbi named Trypho to show how the process for sacrificing the lambs had changed and would have been the common practice during the time of Christ. It is as follows: *"For the lamb, which is roasted, is roasted and dressed up in the form of a cross. For one spit is transfixed right through from the lower parts up to the head and one across the back, to which are attached the legs of the lamb."*

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THINK ABOUT THE NUMBER OF TIMES JESUS WITNESSED THE LAMB BEING CRUCIFIED IN THE FORM OF A CROSS; ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE FACT THAT HIS DIVINITY WOULD HAVE ALLOWED HIM TO RELATE IT TO THE MANNER IN WHICH HE WOULD DIE, AS WELL. Recalling he was both human and divine, I cannot imagine the battle going on from the point of view of being a mere human! Yet, Scripture states he resolutely walked toward Jerusalem and his date with destiny. Not even at the last minute did he turn away from his responsibility as the Son of God who had come to take away the sins of the world! THY WILL BE DONE!

### 3) View Toward Passover Changed

Another fact Pitre points out in his book is what Jewish commentary has to say about the relationship between the original Passover and that of the New Passover they were anticipating; meaning the arrival of the long awaited Messiah. Just as the Israelites were redeemed by God during the night of the original Passover in Egypt, it was believed that on the new Passover night, the anticipated Messiah would redeem them again.

### OTHER ELEMENTS OF PASSOVER

1) Manna: Even though Pharaoh finally allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt, their journey took years of wandering on the desert being in a state of total dependence on God. It is important to always recall that a cloud led them by day and a pillar of fire by night; meaning they continuously had a visible sign that he never left or forsook them.

However, Biblical history states clearly that it was during this time in the wilderness, their allegiance to God was tested repeatedly; a challenge that was described as presenting great difficulty for them



to pass. During all their trials and tribulations, they were always fed due to the special food that fell from heaven every day; nutritional sustenance called manna. Why is it important to focus on manna in relationship to the Lord's Supper? Answer: Refer to John 6: 35-59 and you will note that during Jesus' discourse describing himself to his disciples as the bread of life, that he brings to their memory the fact that their forefathers ate of this very thing that came from the hand of God. Additionally, this manna that fell daily from heaven and in ample supplies was such an important part of the Jewish Religion, that a jar of it was placed in the Ark of the Covenant along with the Ten Commandments and Aaron's rod that had budded.

*Moses and Joshua bowing before the Ark, painting by James Tissot, c.*





According to the author, Brant Pitre, even today, as we say the Lord's Prayer, and repeat the words, "Give us this day our daily bread," when deciphering the definition of "daily bread", it actually means "supernatural bread"; roots that are traced all the way back to the heavenly manna from the Old Testament.

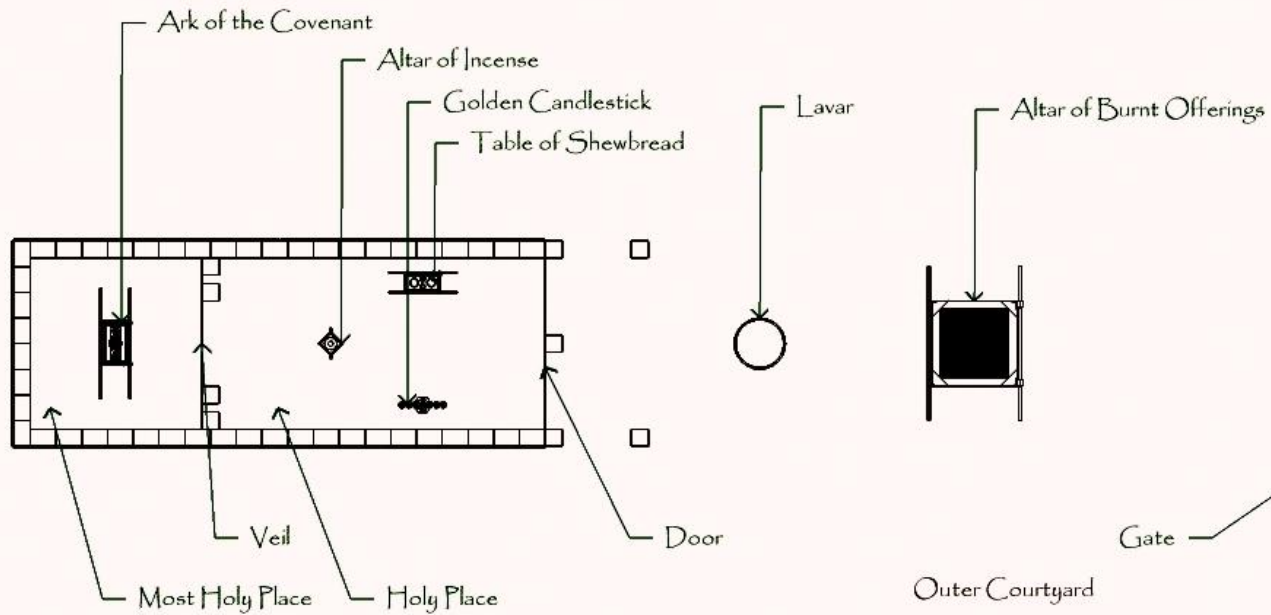
Then, going deeper, "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist" by Pitre on the subject of the manna, he describes their teachings that this supernatural bread was kept in heaven; directly in the Temple of God; meaning it was there long before being showered down upon them during their wilderness journey in the desert. Also, it is their feeling that, although their need for it ceased with their arrival into the Promised Land, in the new exodus to come that it will once again appear; thus occurring at the arrival of the messiah (or New Moses).

"(Gathering of the Manna" by Master of the Gathering of the Manna (fl. circa 1470) - from ISBN 978-90-6918-225-4, p. 215.. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons)

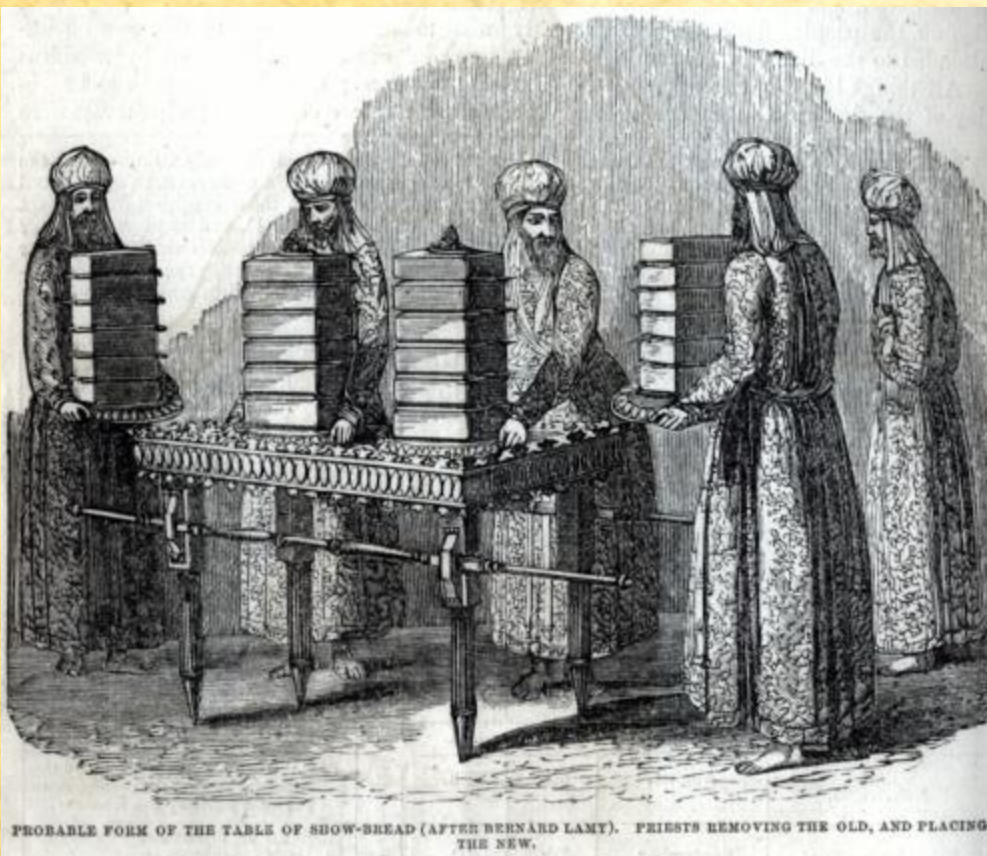
2) Bread of the Presence: (Also referred to as Shew-bread) This goes back to the heavenly banquet Moses and the elders participated in on Mount Sinai where Scripture states they ate and drank while seeing God; thus causing it to be referred to as the Bread of the Face of God. As a result, we read in **Leviticus 24: 5-9** where God gave his people specific instructions on how this special bread was to be a part of their religious service by stating, (NIV) *"And you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it. Two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. You shall set them in two rows, six in a row, on the pure gold table before the LORD. And you shall put pure frankincense on each row that it may be on the bread for a memorial, an offering made by fire to the LORD. Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before the LORD continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the offerings of the LORD made by fire, by a perpetual statute."* By reading this Scripture, you can immediately see that this was considered as a sacrifice to God.

Result: The Jewish religious ceremony consisted of a "bloody sacrifice" (Lamb) and an "unbloody sacrifice" (bread).





By Gabriel Fink



By published by Jonn E. Potter and  
Company or Henry Brill -  
Wikipedia

Let us think back to the feeding of the 5,000 when Jesus multiplied five loaves of bread and fed that enormous number. This was our Jewish Messiah sending a clear message that he was, indeed, the One! So many signs! So many miracles from Jesus! As mere humans, we get so caught up into the ordinary grind that it is hard to note the wonders around us, isn't it?



3) Wine: Brant Pitre uses in “Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist” the following quotes:

“On the eve of Passover, from about the time of the Evening Offering, a man must eat naught until nightfall. Even the poorest in Israel must not eat unless he sits down to the table, and they must not give less than four cups of wine to drink. (*Mishnah, Peshahim 10:1*)

“On the eve of Passover; from just before the afternoon daily whole offering, a person should not eat, until it gets dark. Even the poorest Israelites should not eat until he reclines at his table. And they should provide him with no fewer than four cups of wine. (*Tosefta, Pisha 10:1*)

Pitre goes on to label the four cups as follows:

**1<sup>st</sup> cup:** “Cup of Satisfaction”-- the wine was mixed with a little water and a blessing followed.

**2<sup>nd</sup> cup:** “Cup of Proclamation”—mixed with water but not consumed until questions by the father of the household were answered. Through the father’s questions, they remembered the Passover in Egypt. (Meal included: lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and 4 cups of wine)

**3<sup>rd</sup> cup:** “Cup of Blessing”—Food consumed, followed by a blessing over the third cup.

**4<sup>th</sup> cup:** “Concluding Rites”—First, the remainder of the Hallel Psalms would be sung. (Psalm 115-118) Then, 4<sup>th</sup> cup was consumed. This meant the Passover meal was now complete.

### **THE LORD’S SUPPER**

Now that the stage has been set with a foundation by providing a brief history of the origination of the first Passover, it is time to gather at the table with our Jewish Messiah and share precious fellowship and communion with him. A quote from Brant Pitre’s book, “Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist” says it best by stating, “In other words, the Last Supper was a Jewish Passover meal. But it was no ordinary Passover. It was the **new Passover of the Messiah.**” Every aspect of the new Passover the Jewish people anticipated had been unfolding right before their eyes with only a limited number recognizing it. However, it was due to those who did believe in Jesus as their Messiah that the Christian Church exists today. That meager beginning allowed Paul, a devout Jew who had an encounter with the Savior on the road to Damascus with the mission of persecuting the people of The Way, the opportunity of spreading the news of the kingdom; and becoming the author of 13 books of the New Testament.

#### **1) Preparation for the Passover**

Let us open with the directions Jesus gave on the day of Unleavened Bread to Peter and John regarding the Passover preparations; a description that fits like a glove into the history of the same as required by God when delivering his people from slavery out of Egypt. It also sends a clear message that the title, “MY JEWISH MESSIAH” was chosen accurately for the name of this collection because of the Lord’s specific instructions that reverted back to his religious teachings as a devout Jew.



**Luke 22: 7-13 (NIV)**

*"Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." 9"Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. 10He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, 11and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 12He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there." 13They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover." (Since women ordinarily carried the water from the well, not the men, this would have been a highly visible sign for the two disciples.)*

**2) The Lord's Supper**

**"The Last Supper" painting by James Tissot**



**Luke 22: 14-19 (NASB)**

*14When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. 15And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; 18for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." 19And when He had taken some*



*bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."*

Ladies and gentlemen, think back to the preparation and consuming of the Passover lamb as described in the first part of this chapter. Compare the difference between this procedure and what Jesus has stated to his disciples. He has just told all of us that he is to become the sacrificial lamb.

Additionally, let us review an earlier incident in Scripture from chapter 6 in John when the Jewish leaders disagreed that Jesus had come from heaven. The crowds had just witnessed the miracle of feeding the 5,000 out of just a few loaves of bread; the wondrous supernatural bread that our Lord provided that must have made the leaders terribly uncomfortable. In fact, they requested Jesus show them even more miracles based around the manna from heaven God had fed their people with on their journey through the desert. (Again, a reference to their belief in the new exodus) Instead, Jesus continued speaking about himself being the bread of life that had come from his father in heaven. Then, getting to the point of ridiculous in the minds of the religious leaders, Jesus continues, *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."* (John 6: 56-59) (NIV) At this juncture, many declared this teaching to be too hard to accept; prompting Jesus to even ask his disciples if they want to leave, too. However, dear sweet Peter exclaimed, *"We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."* John 6: 69 NIV; it is at this point that Jesus even prepares the disciples (without their understanding) that one of them would betray him. (Meaning Judas) Also, think about the teachings of the Jewish religion on the blood being the very life of the animal and to be treated in a sacred manner; this served as a roadblock for believing the claims of Jesus, for sure. (ARE YOU NOW SEEING THE VIVID DEPARTURE FROM THE ORIGINAL PASSOVER AND THAT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER?)

### *3) Drinking the Wine*

Luke 22: 20 then states: "In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, *"This is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."* Did you note the words, the new covenant? (Again, refers back to the belief of the Jewish people in the new exodus) However, for us, it means the beginning of what we call the Second Covenant; that of all mankind being given the opportunity of accepting Christ as our Savior because he died on the cross for us; an act of grace and gift of eternal life.

As you read the description of the Lord's supper in the gospels, you will note that as they were eating, Jesus dips bread into the bowl and proclaims that he will be betrayed by one of them; meaning Judas. However, none at the table thought anything of the fact that Judas left to fulfill the mission of betrayal as prophesied in Scripture; probably because it would have been normal as keeper of the funds to always be conducting business matters. (Even though Jesus had told them about him earlier.)





Judas Iscariot (right), retiring from the Last Supper, painting by Carl Bloch, late 19th century

Then, continuing on with the Lord's Supper, Scripture states, **'Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."** (NIV) Jesus is letting everyone know that he will not drink the fourth cup of wine until his Father's kingdom is completed.

After the Lord's Supper had been finished, Jesus then taught his disciples a lesson in a way that only he could deliver; one that would leave a lasting impression upon his followers regarding servitude to others. Wrapping a towel around his waist, followed by pouring water into a basin, he bent down and began to wash his disciples feet; an act that certainly prompted a loud objection from Peter because of Jesus behaving like a slave rather than master. At this point in the evening, Jesus was not only teaching his disciples the lesson of humbly serving others, but all of his believers, as well. In the words of Jesus, **"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."** John 13: 17 (NIV)



*Jesus Washing Peter's Feet* [Ford Madox Brown](#) (1821–1893)



So many lessons for the disciples to understand in such a short amount of time; teachings that went against the very grain of all their religious instruction handed down generation after generation; totally changed in three short years. Are you feeling their pain? Here they are, folks, partaking of their final supper with their best friend in the world, the man they believe to be the long awaited Messiah, and now he has turned their familiar Passover meal into something radically different; that now being the Passover of the Messiah. On the way to Jerusalem, they had tried to understand the words of their Lord when he said, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished."<sup>32</sup> For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on:<sup>33</sup> And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again,<sup>34</sup> <sup>(KJV)</sup> without success, and now all these happenings! The usual Passover meal had become all about sacrifice; one where their



Lord had replaced both the “*bloody and unbloody*” offering with himself as being the lamb as well as the bread; and additionally, referring to the wine as his blood.

### Time For Contemplation

Since this was the Last Supper the Lord would eat with his disciples, let us try and imagine the array of emotions he personally experienced as his eyes soaked in their precious faces one last time before the impending separation. Although he knew one day they would once again be reunited, just like a hen with her chicks, he hated the challenges they would endure for his sake. During the three years together, so many things had been shared because of being able to forgive one another’s flaws. They had been rejected, spat upon and persecuted by even the important teachers of the day, and yet recovered with a strength that deeply touched the Master’s heart. This close-knit family consisting of rag-tag, common men had welded together in spite of their differences. They had forded streams of rushing waters, found their way out of deep valleys, and climbed the highest mountains of doubt walking hand in hand.

Yet, tonight, he had to reveal to them that this would be their final time together; a message incredibly difficult for the compassionate Messiah to deliver. He could already see the waves of confusion, sadness, and fear sweeping across their faces as the evening approached its conclusion.

Regardless, this meal shared together in the upper room, although filled with angst, provided the foundation on which the church still rests; the words, “This do in remembrance of me,” would forever matter not only to the eleven, but to all Believers; always and forever.

Although our Lord was truly a devout Jew beyond measure, and held his people in great esteem, he still had the courage to change the Lord’s Passover as described in Old Testament Scripture to that of “THE PASSOVER OF THE MESSIAH.” Even though this meant restructuring the highly revered Passover he had celebrated all his life, in his usual manner, our Jewish Messiah was up for the task. Why? All because he loved his creation so much that he wanted to draw them back to him. The covenant God had instituted with his chosen people prior to bringing them out of Egypt now had been changed into a covenant that included all mankind. It had been restructured from being exclusive and for only a few, to including Jews and Gentiles alike; The Lord’s Table was now open to all.

In the next chapter, before we depart for the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus and the eleven disciples, we will gather around the Lord one last time, as he touches us to the core with his High Priestly Prayer; words spoken to the Father on behalf of all who believe. All we have to do is follow the advice of Jeremiah 29: 13, “You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.” I am willing to do that, dear friend. Are you? Come. Let us sup together as God’s precious children and accept his invitation when he said, “Remember Me!”





Sources:

- 1) *"Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist"* by Brant Pitre (Highly recommended for your library)
- 2) *"His Finest Week"* by James Roy Smith
- 3) *"The Last Supper: John"* by Scott J. Toney
- 4) NIV Life Study Bible
- 5) *"In The Footsteps of Jesus"* by Jean-Pierre Isbouts



GROWING IN THE WORD



1) Begin your time together by listening to the hymn, "My Jesus I Love Thee" played by Bradley Jent, organist, located on the home page of [devotionalembersonline.com](http://devotionalembersonline.com) hymnal.

2) Passover Seder Plate



Each of the six items arranged on the plate has special significance to the retelling of the story of [the exodus](#) from [Egypt](#), which is the focus of this ritual meal. The seventh symbolic item used during the meal — a stack of three [matzos](#).

The six traditional items on the Seder Plate are as follows:

- Maror and chazeret — Bitter herbs, symbolizing the bitterness and harshness of the slavery the Hebrews endured in [Egypt](#). In Ashkenazi tradition, either horseradish or romaine lettuce may be eaten in the fulfillment of the mitzvah of eating bitter herbs during the Seder. Sephardic Jews often use curly parsley, green onion, or celery leaves.

- Haroset — A sweet, brown mixture representing the mortar used by the Hebrew slaves to build the storehouses or pyramids of [Egypt](#). In [Ashkenazi Jewish](#) homes, Charoset is traditionally made from chopped nuts, grated apples, cinnamon, and sweet red wine.



- Karpas — A vegetable other than bitter herbs, which is dipped into salt water at the beginning of the Seder. Parsley, celery or boiled potato is usually used. The dipping of a simple vegetable bounces into salt water (which represents tears) mirrors the pain felt by the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. Usually in a Shabbat or holiday meal, the first thing to be eaten after the kiddush over wine is bread. At the Seder table, however, the first thing to be eaten after the kiddush is a vegetable. This leads immediately to the recital of the famous question, *Ma Nishtana* — "Why is this night different from all other nights?" It also symbolizes the spring time, because Jews celebrate Passover in the spring.
- Z'roa — Also called Zeroah, it is special as it is the only element of meat on the Seder Plate. A roasted lamb or goat shankbone, chicken wing, or chicken neck; symbolizing the *korban Pesach* (Pesach sacrifice), which was a lamb that was offered in the Temple in Jerusalem, then roasted and eaten as part of the meal on Seder night. Since the destruction of the Temple, the *z'roa* serves as a visual reminder of the Pesach sacrifice; it is not eaten or handled during the Seder. Vegetarians often substitute a beet, quoting *Pesachim 114b* as justification; other vegetarians substitute a sweet potato, allowing a "Paschal yam" to represent the Paschal lamb.
- Beitzah — A roasted hard-boiled egg, symbolizing the *korban chagiqah* (festival sacrifice) that was offered in the Temple in Jerusalem and roasted and eaten as part of the meal on Seder night. Although both the Pesach sacrifice and the *chagiqah* were meat offerings, the *chagigah* is commemorated by an egg, a symbol of mourning (as eggs are the first thing served to mourners after a funeral), evoking the idea of mourning over the destruction of the Temple and our inability to offer any kind of sacrifices in honor of the Pesach holiday. Since the destruction of the Temple, the *beitzah* serves as a visual reminder of the *chagigah*; it is not used during the formal part of the seder, but some people eat a regular hard-boiled egg dipped in saltwater as the first course of the meal. (*Wikipedia*)

Using the Seder plate above and the descriptions below it locate each item and connect it directly to the Lord's Passover in the Old Testament.

3) For fun, you might desire to put together a plate and have your group members taste each item as you read about it.

4) Then, using the plate, review together the changes Jesus made when he turned it into The Lord's Supper.

5) If you are able, invite a qualified individual into your class and have communion.

#### CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for enlightening us by comparing the original Passover to your Last Supper as our Messiah. Please accept our gratitude for coming to dwell among us and drawing us back to you. It was so incredibly hard to hear your words when you described yourself as being the replacement for the bloody and un-bloody sacrifice; all so that we might have the opportunity of being forgiven of our sins and accepting the gift of eternal life. The composure and compassion you demonstrated as you prepared your disciples for the events yet to come were breath taking, indeed. Even though you had stored in your mind the visual image of the crucified lambs being sacrificed repeatedly at the Temple in Jerusalem, you still resolutely walked toward your destiny with the cross. We bow in humble adoration at your feet as the only way we have left to honor you. We feel so unworthy, yet, so loved. Amen!



## *Chapter 15*

# **HIS LAST WORDS**



*Face of Christ by Claude Mellan (1598-1688)*



## INTRODUCTION

Let us begin this chapter by quietly remaining in the presence of the Lord while he delivers his final words to his disciples in the dimly lit Upper Room. As the shadows of those assembled are cast upon the rough surface of the walls and ceiling of this sacred space, though eerily quiet, their silence is worthy to be heard. Through the study of these unsettled shapes, the unspoken words of those present become almost audible to the ear, causing all of us as onlookers to stand still and listen with open ears and bated breath. As the disciples try to comprehend the words of the Master, the dark silhouettes their bodies foster on the walls create a story of their own worth proclaiming to man; an unspoken account replete with emotions of fear, puzzlement, perplexity, and confusion. In conjunction with these shapes, the sounds of their breathing adds layers of even greater depth to the plot; as their lungs produce breathless, shallow, gasping noises; all reactions to their inability to comprehend the enormity of what the Jewish Messiah is proclaiming.

Then, when identifying our Lord's shadow on the same walls, are you able to draw a visual image of what message it portrays? How does the silhouette appear of one who is on a mission to prepare the loyal followers for his impending crucifixion, and lay a foundation consisting of only eleven stones solid enough to carry on the good news of the kingdom without him visibly at their side? Do you suppose the desperation and contemplation of his impending death quickened his speech pattern? Pause for a moment, allowing the shadow imagery to play itself out in your mind. Remember, we have the advantage of viewing it from a historical point of view simply by reading the Bible. The Holy Script we read was what they were creating as they gathered at this critical juncture with Jesus in the Upper Room.

*"Jesus in the Upper Room With His Disciples" by James Tissot*





## **HIS LAST WORDS**

In the previous chapter not only did Jesus share the Passover Meal with his followers, but also washed their feet; a poignant example of how all believers should be in service to one another. Although there are many other lessons the Lord taught his disciples while gathered in the Upper Room, the entire focus of the remainder of this chapter will be on what is called, “The High Priestly Prayer,” followed by the words he spoke at his arrest, trial, and death on the cross. The messages the Lord’s words delivered accompanied by beautiful paintings will take us through the crucifixion of our Savior in such a meaningful manner that it is the writer’s hope it will be fixed in our minds until we meet him face to face. Thus, until then, no matter what challenges in life we endure, the sacrifice he so unselfishly made will serve as a moral compass that is applicable in all situations, and above all, will always keep us on course.

As we learned in the last chapter, still following the religion of his people, Jesus called on his disciples to accept the fact that as their Messiah, through his death on the cross, he would now become both the bloody and unbloody sacrifice; thus instituting *The Passover of the Messiah*. Yet, in spite of knowing the terrible death by crucifixion he would face, he still was thinking of others as he prayed a beautiful prayer of intercession on behalf of his disciples and “*all his believers*”; titled in the Bible as “The High Priestly Prayer.” Yes, folks, the words, “*all his believers*”, mean we were included in this magnificent prayer; spoken at a time when his human and divine natures would be opposing one another in such a monstrous battle that it is impossible for any human being ever to comprehend it. By simply recalling all the crucified lambs Jesus had observed in the Temple at Passover will provide a reason why this internal war was taking place. In addition, since crucifixion was the chosen punishment at that time by the Roman Government, Jesus would have frequently witnessed members of his community suffering death on the cross.

Surprisingly, given the scope of the content and timing of “The High Priestly Prayer, one must wonder why it is not more frequently the focus of worship services worldwide. Ladies and gentlemen, it is so important to our future that it is worth writing our own name above the words where he includes us among those that are invited to enter into his kingdom.

As you read aloud this prayer, listen to the tone that shows the loving intimacy between the Son and his Father; one so rich that it will take your breath away. Note the plea Jesus makes to God on behalf of his disciples and for generations of people throughout time; words of intercession for mere human beings, meaning you and me. It demonstrates how precious we are to our Lord and Savior. Then to offer even more assurance that our Lord is interceding for us even now, read with joy, **Romans 8:34, “Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died---more than that, who was raised to life---is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”**



## **THE HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER**

***John 17*** *New International Version (NIV)*

### **Jesus Prays to Be Glorified**

**17** After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. <sup>2</sup>For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. <sup>3</sup>Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

### **Jesus Prays for His Disciples**

<sup>6</sup> “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. <sup>8</sup>For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup>I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. <sup>11</sup>I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. <sup>12</sup>While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

<sup>13</sup> “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. <sup>15</sup>My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

### **Jesus Prays for All Believers (That means us!)**

<sup>20</sup> “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup>that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—<sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.



**<sup>24</sup> “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.**

**<sup>25</sup> “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”**

**Oh, sweet child of God! Are you as moved as I with the words our Lord spoke just prior to walking his final steps to his demise? Please pause and think carefully about Christ’s thoughts, remarks, and actions! He was just moments away from being filled with agony in the Garden of Gethsemane; so much that sweat would pour like drops of blood from his body! Yet, he not only remembered his disciples that were close followers that he deeply loved, but was able to travel ahead in time and pray for all his future believers! He included us in the magnificent High Priestly Prayer! During our times of feeling insignificant on our journey in this chaotic life, let us stop and recall this powerful moment and realize without doubt exactly how much we matter to Jesus!**

**Then, upon completion of this prayer, without hesitation, he resolutely walked out into the night with the mission of becoming the blood sacrifice for our sins. The final chapter on his ministry of three years of teaching about the arrival of the kingdom of God had just closed. It was now time for him to finish the task with the knowledge that, not only would his faithful disciples abandon him, but his Father would also turn his face away as the nails were driven into the very soul of his One and Only Son! And...yet, for all of us, it was the beginning step for him to offer all creation ETERNAL LIFE as a gift of his grace; a decision we are free to accept or refuse. Halleluiah! What a Savior!**

**As the last word was penned above by the writer, the page had become an absolute blur due to the salty tears that streamed down a distorted face resulting from overflowing pools of emotion. Yet, in spite of being temporarily blinded, her feet determinedly followed in the footprints of the Lord as he quietly led his disciples out of the room. Perhaps you were walking along beside me allowing your hand to hold mine as a way of promoting courage for both of us. At the conclusion of this magnanimous prayer, were you aware of the silence that filled the space around the stunned disciples? Do you think the shadows their forms cast upon the dark walls and ceiling at this point in time were absolutely motionless due to suffering from such paralyzing internal distress? Even today, with the mystery disclosed through Scripture, the actions out of love being displayed by the Son and His Father are still overwhelming, to say the least. Which disciple do you suppose broke the silence? Peter? At this moment in time, were you quietly listening to the sound of the sandals worn by Jesus and his eleven disciples as they trudged toward the Garden of Gethsemane?**

**Dear child, let us continue walking with Jesus! He needs to know that we are willing to internalize the price he is getting ready to pay for our sins. If, at this point, you have not**



been sitting beside the disciples as the lessons our Savior unfolded in his prayers, parables and miracles as described in prior chapters of this collection, you are not too late to fall into step with us. As the unified body of Jesus, our hands are extended to you right this very moment! Let us soberly walk together behind the Jewish Messiah to the Garden of Gethsemane in a time of reverent prayer as we prepare to witness the unimaginable decision our Lord chose to make on our behalf!



*Christ and the Disciples Going out into the Garden of Gethsemane after the Last Supper - Nikolai Ge, 1889*

### Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

Matthew 26: 36-46

36Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, **"Sit here while I go over there and pray."** 37He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38Then he said to them, **"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."** 39Going a little farther, he fell with his face to



the ground and prayed, **"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."**



*Christ in Gethsemane - Vasily Perov - WikiArt.o*



In Luke 22: 43-44 of the Life Study Bible (NIV) Scripture reads, "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."

*Agony in the Garden by Frans Schwartz, 1898.jpg - Wikimedia*





40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. 41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (NIV) (Symbolic of 1<sup>st</sup> cup of wine at Passover Meal)

42 He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." 43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. (NIV) (Symbolic of 2<sup>nd</sup> cup of wine at Passover Meal)



Agony in the Garden by James Tissot







44So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. 45Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, **“Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 46Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”** (NIV)(Symbolic of 3<sup>rd</sup> cup of wine at Passover Meal)



Giovanni Bellini ca. 1430 – 1516

Let us now pause for a moment and think together about what has just transpired. One thing that can be pointed out is the troubled spirit of Jesus; the condition spoken about in the above section whose cause was due to Jesus being both human and divine. The Gospel of Luke is the only one that describes the Lord's sweat as coming forth as great drops of blood; seemingly a fit commentary due to his background as a physician.

Then when researching other recorded instances where human beings' sweat was secreted as drops of blood, several examples were available.

*A commentary from biblehub.com indicated the following situations that were recorded throughout history as follows: “huanus (f), a very grave and credible historian, reports of a governor of a certain garrison, who being, by a stratagem, decoyed from thence, and taken captive, and threatened with an ignominious death, was so affected with it, that he sweat a “bloody sweat” all over his body. And the same author (g) relates of a young man of Florence, who being, by the order of Pope Sixtus the Fifth, condemned, as he was led along to be executed, through the vehemence of his grief discharged blood instead of sweat, all over his body; and Maldonate, upon this passage, reports, that he had heard it from some who saw, or knew it, that at Paris, a man, robust, and in good health, hearing that a*



*capital sentence was pronounced upon him, was, at once, all over in a bloody sweat: which instances show, that grief, surprise, and fear, have sometimes had such an effect on men...." (Wikipedia)*

Regardless of the motivation for this unusual occurrence at this time in the life of Christ, it certainly shows the deep cavernous travail of the soul brought on by unimaginable agony; a demonstration for all of us to forever retain when contemplating the price our Lord paid on the cross for our sin.

Since we have been following closely the reactions of the disciples, it is also worthwhile to center on their inability to stay awake during this time of anguish the Savior was enduring. One can make the argument that, given the fact they had so willingly dedicated their lives to follow Jesus for the past three years, this is certainly one time they would have desired to be there for him. Unfortunately, the words Jesus spoke as quoted above, "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak", fit their behavior like a glove.

In spite of their inability to comply, does not your heart go out to them? Don't their bodies appear exhausted? Given the "High Priestly Prayer" Jesus just delivered in the Upper Room, would you agree that they still lack understanding of what truly is about to happen? Regardless of the gravity of the situation, their mere human minds still could not comprehend the depth of the meaning. The eye lids of this poor rag-tag group of men that loved Jesus with all their hearts simply closed against all restraint and desire to remain vigilant. Have you ever been so exhausted that your body ached and you felt as if you could sleep standing up?

Last, did you notice the wine goblets beside the words that described Jesus returning to find his devoted disciples asleep? In order to explain the reason for doing this, a referral must be made to Brant Pitre's remarks from his book "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist" when he connected the number of times Jesus found his disciples asleep directly to the four cups of wine consumed in the Upper Room at the "Passover of the Messiah". Do you recall the Savior refusing to drink the fourth cup? The reason the fourth cup is missing will be answered after Jesus died on the cross.

Isn't this an interesting connection Pitre draws? I am not surprised by this author's commentary because of the silver thread God draws from beginning to end in the Bible. Sometimes, the thread he weaves is so intricate and subtle we overlook the connection between the happenings in the Old and New Testaments as being a continuation of the same story.

Finally, let us pay close attention to the number of times Jesus prayed to his Father, not only in what has transpired thus far, but throughout the remainder of this chapter. Folks, our Lord never ceased to stay in connection with the Father; symbolic that he was One with the Father and the Father was One with him.

#### **Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus (NIV) Matthew 26: 47-56**

<sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. <sup>48</sup> Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." <sup>49</sup> And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him. <sup>50</sup> Jesus said to him, "**Friend, do what you came to do.**"<sup>[5]</sup> Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.





*The Kiss of Judas by James Tissot , Brooklyn Museum , between 1886*

<sup>51</sup> And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant<sup>[d]</sup> of the high priest and cut off his ear. <sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to him, **“Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. <sup>53</sup> Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? <sup>54</sup> But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”** <sup>55</sup> At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, **“Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. <sup>56</sup> But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”** **Then all the disciples left him and fled.**

Luke 22: 49-51 offers added information by stating: When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, Lord, should we strike with our swords?” And one of them (thought to be Peter) struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, **“No more of this!”** And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.



Ladies and gentlemen, please note the highlighted sentence above that lets us know that Jesus was now totally alone. Although his divinity would have made him aware of this in advance, do you think the human part of him would have ever been ready for this situation? What would you have done?



*"Jesus Heals The Soldiers Ear" by James Tissot*

Were you surprised the religious leaders arrested Jesus in the dark of night rather than in the Temple where everyone could witness their deeds? It is thought the reason for this was to prevent a riot; action that would have brought the Roman soldiers into the situation immediately. Thus, if this happened, one thing the leaders were assured would have been their loss of power.

At this point in time, are you picturing the disciples escaping through the garden in every direction? Given Peter's bravado in exclaiming to Jesus that he would follow him to his death, plus the fact that he would be identified as the one to have drawn his sword, what would he be thinking and feeling? Perhaps the disciples are in such a state of panic that processing is not a part of their brain's power right now. Instead, they are running for their lives.



Do you feel they still believe Jesus to be their Messiah; given the fact that he now appears powerless with his very life resting in the hands of his enemies? Certainly, it would seem to all of us mere humans that Satan, who tempted our Lord so unmercifully in the desert, was now totally in charge of the outcome. Since nothing is impossible for God, however, can you picture the sights and sounds coming from heaven as this point in time?

### Trial of Jesus

During an earlier discourse between Jesus and his disciples, one familiar happening that occurred was when exuberant Peter proclaimed he would be willing to go all the way with Jesus; meaning to the point of death. However, our Lord, being fully aware of what was to come and Peter's human frailties, let him know by the time the cock crowed this particular disciple would have disowned him three times. Thus, upon the Lord being seized and led away to the house of the high priest that prediction regarding Peter immediately came true; thus causing this well meaning disciple to weep bitterly. It was also at this particular time, the men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him while demanding he prophesy who had hit him. However, our Lord spoke not a word!

*"Peter's Denial" by Carl Bloch*





Please study the painting above and imagine how both Jesus and Peter felt at this moment in time. Then, be sure to place yourself in Peter's shoes and recall the number of times your behavior has disappointed the Lord. Since we are all dreadful sinners, the shoes of the disciple are exactly our size. Our good intentions simply don't hold up! **Without the grace of our Lord, where would we be?**

Then, according to Luke 22: 66 (NIV), "At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. If you are the Christ, they said, "Tell us." Jesus answered, **"If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."** They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied, **"You are right in saying I am."** Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips." *(Life Application Study Bible NIV)*

Again, let us pause a moment and reflect on the attitude of the council of elders' words when they asked, "Why do we need any more testimony?" Since they did not believe Jesus was the Son of God, according to their religious doctrine, he had just committed blasphemy; meaning claiming to be God. Once again, Jesus who was a devout Jew that loved his people had been slapped directly in the face with the hand called "rejection".

Also, it is important to note the response from Jesus using the words, "I am." Since another title for God in the Old Testament was the "Great I Am", he was connecting himself directly to the Father in heaven.





Then, moving on, Luke 23: 1-5 (NIV) describes where Jesus was taken next by stating:

1 Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate.

2 And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.”

3 So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” **“You have said so,”** Jesus replied.

4 Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”

5 But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

Thus, realizing he was in a tight spot and possibly in danger of being removed from his post by the Roman government if a formal complaint was made against his administration, Pilate immediately passed Jesus off to Herod. Although Herod, having heard about the miracles Jesus had performed, was desirous to meet him, the chief priests and teachers of the law were standing close by vehemently accusing him. During this time, our Savior spoke not a mumbling word.

Therefore, after plying Jesus with many questions, Herod sent him back to Pilate with a “not guilty” verdict.

*Jesus at Herod's Court, by Duccio, c. 1310.*





## Jesus Before Pilate

### **Matthew 27: 11-27 (NIV)**

11 Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and was asked by him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "You have said so," Jesus replied. 12 When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. 13 Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" 14 But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor. 15 Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. 16 At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. 17 So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" 18 For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him. 19 While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." 20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. 21 "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered. 22 "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!" 23 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" 24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" 25 All the people answered, "His blood is on us and on our children!" 26 Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

### The Soldiers Mock Jesus

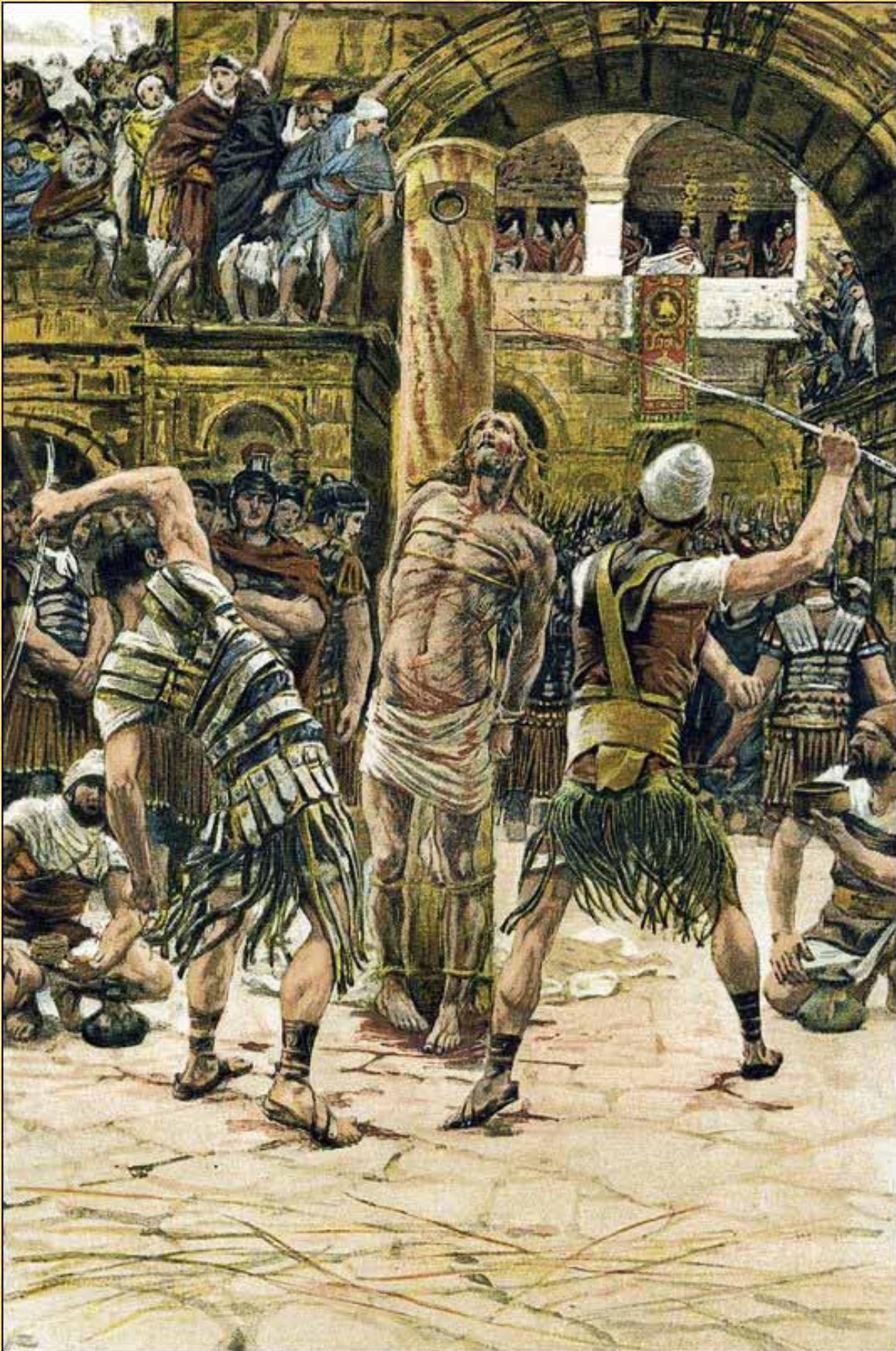
27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. "

Ladies and gentlemen, it is important at this point to allow the Scripture you just read above to permeate your entire being in order to truly internalize the suffering the One and Only Son of God has just endured on your behalf. When comparing the technique used on the lambs that were crucified at Passover in the Temple, the suffering they felt in comparison to that of our Savior paled. Though totally innocent, his body and soul were brutalized by members of the human race to which we all belong. It is hard to imagine mankind being able to inflict this type of torture on anyone, isn't it? Are you as ashamed as I am right now?

Proceed to the next page and view the painting by Tissot to gather a visual image in your mind as to how intense the punishment was for Jesus; all because he was rejected for being the Son of God!



*"Flaggation of Jesus" by James Tissot*





## The Crucifixion of Jesus

Luke 23: 26-31 (NIV)

<sup>26</sup> As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. <sup>27</sup> A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. <sup>28</sup> Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>29</sup> For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' <sup>30</sup> Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'" <sup>31</sup> For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

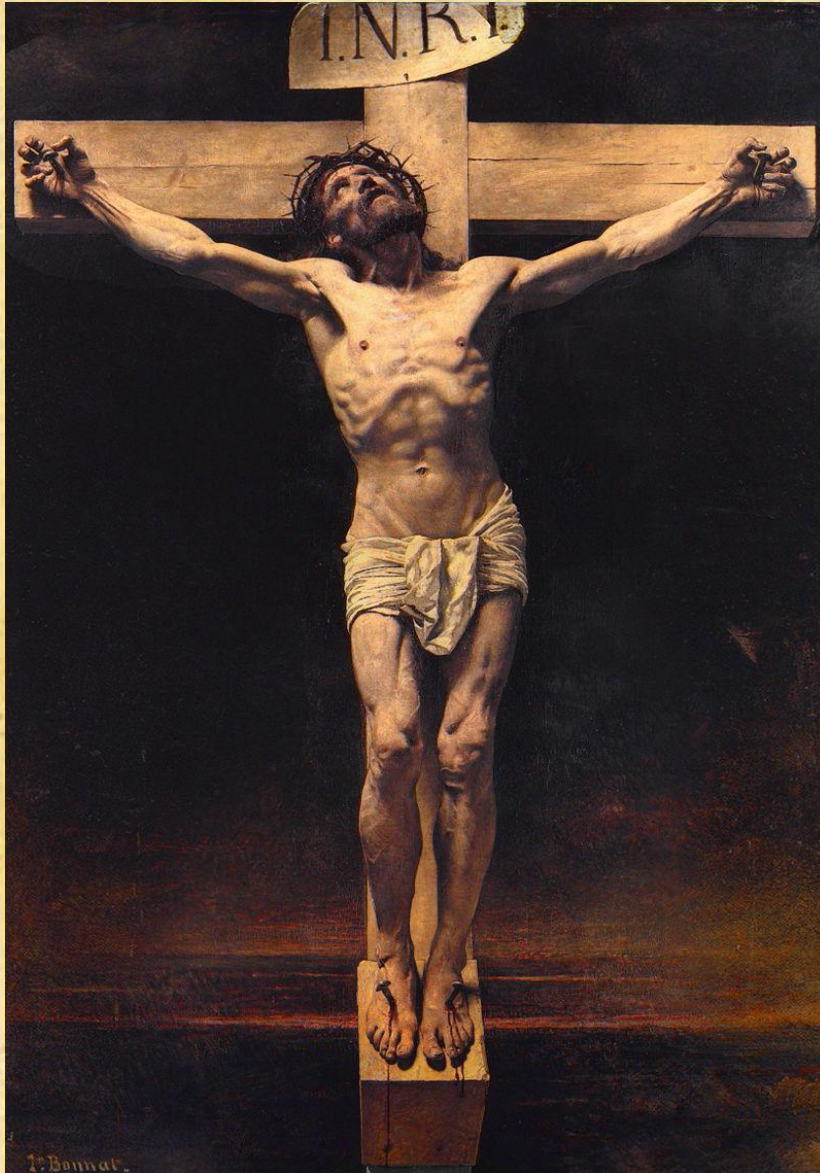
*(The Jewish Writings (Targumist) paraphrases Ezekiel 17: 24 in a way that will clarify the last sentence Jesus spoke above as follows: "I have humbled the kingdom of the nations, which was as strong as a green tree, and I have strengthened the kingdom of the house of Israel, which was weak as a dry tree.")*

*"Jesus Falls" by James Tissot*





<sup>38</sup>Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>39</sup>Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup>and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and



build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!”

<sup>41</sup>In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him.

<sup>42</sup>“He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.” <sup>43</sup>He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ <sup>44</sup>In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.” (NIV)

The attack upon our Lord is relentless and brutal beyond measure; all because he loved us so much that he chose to die for our sins. It is even more understandable why his spirit was so troubled in the Garden of Gethsemane, isn’t it? Being both human and divine, Jesus was identifying with this moment in his final journey.

*(Jesus of Nazareth by Leon Bonnat)*

As the writer searched for paintings that depicted truly how the body of Jesus would have appeared on the cross, it was difficult to locate one that matched Scripture’s description. Perhaps the ugliness and brutality was too much emotionally for a painter to portray. In order for us to internalize how disfigured our Savior’s body truly appeared, let us refer to Isaiah 52: 14: *Life Study Bible; NIV*

“Just as there were many who were appalled at him---his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness.”



John 19: 23-24 tells us that Jesus was stripped of his clothing and the soldiers cast lots to see how they were to be divided. "23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24 "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment." So this is what the soldiers did." (Although the Roman soldiers would have simply wanted to preserve the seamless garment for value only, the fact that Jesus was wearing it, according to Jewish customs, offers a deeper understanding of who Jesus was in the eyes of his people. In the book, "Jesus the Bridegroom" by Brant Pitre the following quote from Josephus, Antiquities 3.161 is used regarding the seamless garment Jesus wore by stating: "This vesture of the high priest was not composed of two pieces, nor was it sewed together upon the shoulders and the sides, but it was one long vestment so wove as to have an aperture for the neck".) This lets us clearly know that even though our Messiah had been rejected by the Jewish leaders, he was still considered a high priest.

### Seven Final Statements From The Cross

First: ***"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."***

Luke 23: 34 (NIV)

After having been rejected and beaten by a mob beyond recognition, can you imagine how shocking this statement sounded to the ears of those who heard his voice? In fact, scholars have reported that it was so unbelievable that early Christians dropped it from the record of Jesus' words. It simply cannot be found in the Codex Vaticanus and numerous other earlier writings. Think about our Lord having being oppressed by a brutal Roman Empire that caused suffering to his people! Then recall how poorly treated he was by the Jewish rulers of his day; the High Priest, the Sanhedrin, and the Pharisees! Let us not leave ourselves out of this equation, either. How many times per day does this statement apply to us? Thinking NOT about how much suffering and pain he was experiencing, but about our lives, he asked his Father to forgive mankind! Yes, we were there when they crucified our Lord!

Second: ***"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."***

Gospel of Luke 23:43

As Jesus hung on the cross between two criminals, one of them hurled insults at him, while the other rebuked him out of fear of God. His comment, "We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong", shows an inner wisdom. Thus, knowing he was in need of forgiveness and recognizing Christ's eternal authority, his request was, "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom." Thus, the second remark from Jesus above in red. It was through faith, not deeds that he was saved. Jesus' words will be the same to **anyone** wise enough to ask him for forgiveness. However, it is better to repent now than wait until it is too late. I have known people in the



nursing home that put off asking for forgiveness until the very last moment; a chance I would rather not take in my life. In the case of some residents, the loss of mental faculties occurred before they had repented of their sin.

Third: *"Jesus said to his mother: 'Woman, this is your son.' Then he said to the disciple: 'This is your mother.'"*

*Gospel of John 19:26-27*

At the foot of the cross were three women named Mary; one being his mother, as well as an aunt and Mary Magdalene. Having been the eldest son, and Scripture stating that Joseph was deceased, Jesus would have provided for his mother as long as needed; thus beginning his ministry at age 33. In keeping with the respect he had for his earthly mother, he was making sure a trusted close friend named John would not only provide a home for her, but also be available to offer strength during her time of deep sorrow. After all, it was this close friend John that stayed with him at the cross until he took his last earthly breath. What a wonderful example for all of us to follow in sharing one another's sorrows.

Fourth: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

*Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34*

These words recorded in Psalm 22 would have been committed to memory by Jesus when only a little child; along with other Scriptures taught in the synagogue. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a vivid example of our crucified Savior realizing the horror of what is happening and the excruciating suffering he is enduring for the sake of mankind. Remember Jesus' words at the time of his arrest from Luke 22: 53 when he said to the temple guards: "But this is your hour---when darkness reigns?" Our Lord calls out in agony to his Father as he carries the burden of all the sins of humanity; at a time when he is totally engulfed in the raging sea of darkness. Let us also recall that both Matthew and Mark describe this time during the crucifixion as being in the ninth hour; occurring after 3 hours of darkness which would be three o'clock in Judea.

(Di Matthias Grünewald - The Yorck Project: wikipedia)

Now, think back to the time the priests would slay the sacrifices for the Jewish people in the Temple





as discussed in the last chapter regarding Passover; that being from the ninth hour (about 3 p.m.) to the eleventh (about 5 p.m.). As Brant Pitre stated in his book "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist": "Jesus acted as the host of the Messianic Passover, because he saw himself as the Messiah. He offered himself as a sacrifice, because he saw himself as the Passover Lamb." Yet, even though Jesus the Christ had taught that the kingdom of earth had arrived through beautiful parables and marvelous miracles far and wide, he now faced the cross as a rejected Messiah by the Jewish leaders of his own people. The signs were all around. Yet they had been blind to the vivid images, and deaf to his magnificent words.

Fifth:

***"I thirst."***

*Gospel of John 19:28*

Scholars have approached the words of Jesus, "I thirst" from both a physical and emotional perspective. We do know that it has been eighteen hours since his last meal with the disciples, and that the punishment that preceded this point has been brutal and relentless. In addition, others have connected it directly to many spiritual meanings recorded in Scripture.



However, Brant Pitre, in the book, "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist" refers us right back to the Upper Room when Jesus shared the wine as a part of the Passover meal with his disciples. The author's belief is that at this point when Jesus called for a drink; it represented the 4<sup>th</sup> cup of wine he said he would not consume until he came into his Father's kingdom. Thus, when one of the bystanders took a sponge, (referred to as a Holy Sponge) soaked in sour wine, that was attached to a reed, and offered it to Jesus, our Lord had consumed the final cup. In Pitre's words, "Jesus not only accepted the wine of his execution; he explicitly requested a drink at the moment before his death." Mission accomplished! (Vinegar, meaning sour wine, was thought to most likely be posca, a favorite beverage of the Roman soldiers.) In addition, Jewish custom of offering wine to those condemned to die, according to the Talmud is rooted in a biblical command from Proverbs 31: 6 "Alcohol is for the dying and wine for those in bitter distress."

Sixth:

***"It is finished;"***

*Gospel of John 19:29-30*

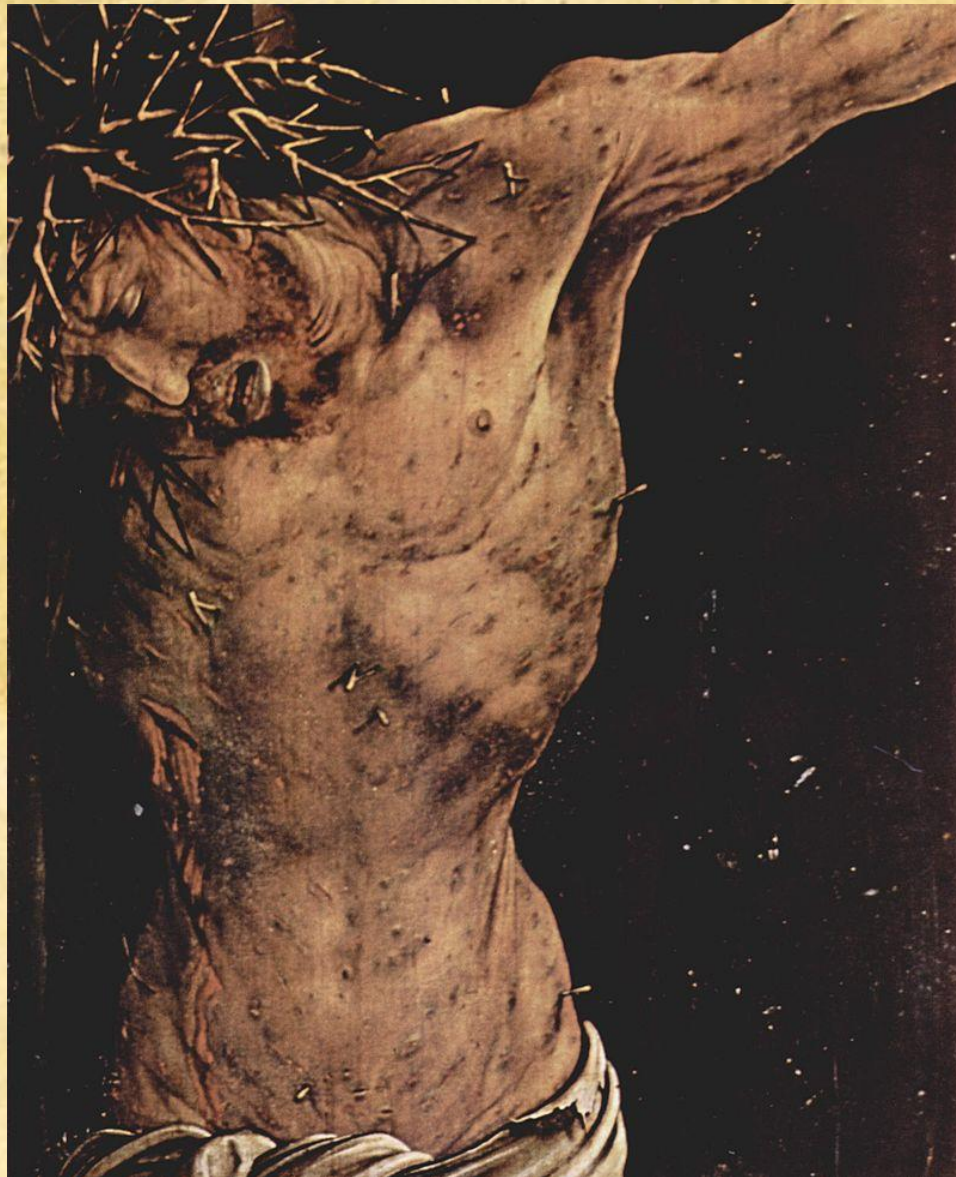
These words came immediately after Jesus was given the sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop. John indicated he bowed his head and handed over his spirit. God's Son had given his life as a sacrifice for our sin in order to draw us back to him. Although we deserved to die, he had taken our place as both the bloody and unbloody sacrifice; truly the perfect Lamb without blemish! His thirty-three years had come to an end! His blood had been shed! His body had been broken for us.



Seventh: ***"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."***

*Gospel of Luke 23:46*

The final words Jesus loudly cried out served as a dramatic example of the beauty and simplicity of his faith in God. He showed absolutely no fear as he faced what some label as "the unknown." In the heart and mind of the Savior, there was no such thing as an "unknown." Everything that mattered was left to God!



*Di Matthias Grünewald - The Yorck Project: 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei. DVD-ROM, 2002. ISBN 3936122202.*

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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=152340>



Dear Reader, thanks for being at the foot of the cross with me. This writer believes with all her heart that Jesus looked down, just like Tissot shows in this painting below, and saw all future believers that day. He knew we were there! Let us now depart in a time of silent contemplation and follow the nail scarred body of our Lord as it is carried to his tomb. Rest assured that, no matter how ugly life appears, God is still, and will always be in charge!



Crucifixion as seen from the cross by Tissot

Sources:

1) *New International Version (NIV)*

2) *Life Application Study Bible (NIV)*

4) *"Jesus the Bridegroom" by Brant Pitre*

5) *In the Footsteps of Jesus by Jean-Pierre Isbouts*



3) *"Jesus and the Jewish roots of the Eucharist"* by Brant Pitre 6) Biblehubcom

7) *"His Finest Week"* by James Roy Smith



### GROWING IN THE WORD



- 1) Go to the [www.devotionalembbers.com](http://www.devotionalembbers.com) home page and open the hymnal for the suggested song, "The Old Rugged Cross" and play it for the group with the goal of bringing them into the present.
- 2) High Priestly Prayer: Read this prayer together as a group and spend time discussing the importance of it for Christians.
- 3) As the disciples listened to the last words of Jesus in the Upper Room, why do you feel their understanding of the Lord's message was so challenging for them? After all, it is stated many times by people today that at least Jesus' followers could visibly see and touch the Lord, while Christians now must believe based on faith. Discuss the pros and cons of this statement.
- 4) Go to the Garden with Jesus and the disciples. Were you able to internalize both the human and divine aspects of Jesus?
- 5) How did you feel about author Pitre's writing on connecting the number of times Jesus approached the disciples and found them sleeping to the 4 cups of wine? Discuss the author's feelings about when Jesus drank the 4<sup>th</sup> cup. Do you agree?
- 6) In order to take the crucifixion to application level, use the poem below as your final prayer

### PRAYER

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me---words we sometimes cry

When enveloped in clouds of darkness---under a thick black ebony sky

Once basking in rays of sunshine---now distressed, and utterly alone

Rigid hands now wildly groping --- wearing a heart as cold as stone.

The brightness of the Father's smile---now eclipsed by a curtain of fear

Abandoned in shadows of grief---without hope the Lord will appear

Poor distressed frightened child---miserably suffering from unbelief

God promised He'd never leave thee---so fully trust and find relief.



When we feel a slight withdrawal---of our Heavenly Father's love  
Harkin back to the woes of the Savior---as it appeared from up above  
How deep the agony of Jesus---as God, from His Son, turned away  
He entered the abyss of cruel suffering---its depth impossible to say.

The departure of His Father's presence---prompted our Lord to cry in pain  
Utterly deserted, forsaken and abandoned--- from His feelings He did not refrain  
All connection to His Abba now severed---into the midnight of horror He fell  
'Twas for you He endured the cross---so with Him you could choose to dwell.

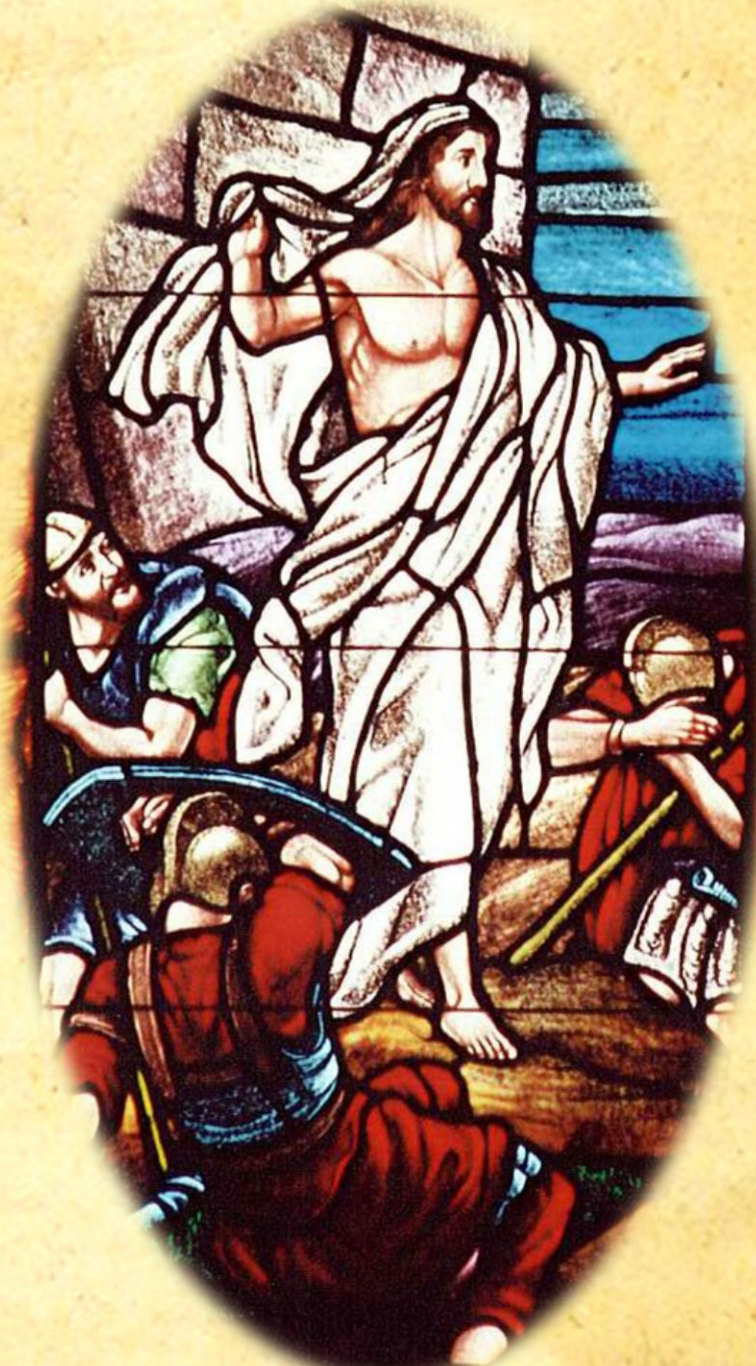
Amen!





## *Chapter 16*

# **RESURRECTION**



"RESURRECTION" compliments of Austin Avenue United Methodist Church, Waco, TX



## INTRODUCTION

All of us have experienced times in our lives that we desperately wish to forget; when every aspect of our existence seemed to be filled with the superfluous, rather than simple beautiful acts of kindness; when a considerable portion of daylight was spent witnessing mean, trivial, and narrow acts of hurtfulness inflicted on the downtrodden in society, or perhaps to us personally. Yet, it is safe to say that nothing can be compared, or ever come close to what the Savior endured on the cross for mankind; all for the purpose of drawing us back to God the Father. It certainly provides new meaning to the Scripture from **John 15: 13 (NIV), "Greater love has no one than this; to lay down one's life for one's friends"**, doesn't it?

Even though the soldiers pierced the Lord's side making sure he was dead, thus, causing us to be assured beyond doubt that his pain was over, the distorted sights and excruciating sounds of his suffering have been printed with indelible ink on our brains; causing them to play like a mournful song from a broken record without pause. If only we could partake of a draught called "Relief" that would serve as a thoroughwort, or boneset to the soul; a medicinal potion designed to erase the cruelty of the price our Jewish Messiah paid for our sin through no guilt of his own. Yet, having not the capacity to erase his torment, we must commit to memory his words to the Father, "Thy will be done"; a statement indicating his willingness, out of love, to become the Sacrificial Lamb of God; a gift of grace for all of us.

## JESUS REMOVED FROM THE CROSS

All who knew Jesus, including the women that had faithfully followed him every step of the way to the cross, witnessed the reaction of the crowd gathered around the crucifixion site as they internalized the entire event. Upon departing as an act of public bewailing, some individuals beat their breasts and released a blood curdling sound which was a familiar sign of mourning during Bible times. However, one of the most poignant reactions came from a centurion's response when he stated, **"Surely this was a righteous man."** (Luke 23: 47) (NIV)

Then, in order to follow the rules of the Law regarding the beginning of Sabbath, it was well known that the body of the crucified Lord must be promptly removed and buried. *(Jesus died at 3pm and was buried on the preparation day (the day before the Sabbath) before sunset, which would begin the Sabbath day.)*

Therefore, Scripture reads from John 19:38-42: (NIV) **"38Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away."**



*("Descent from the Cross" by James Tissot)*



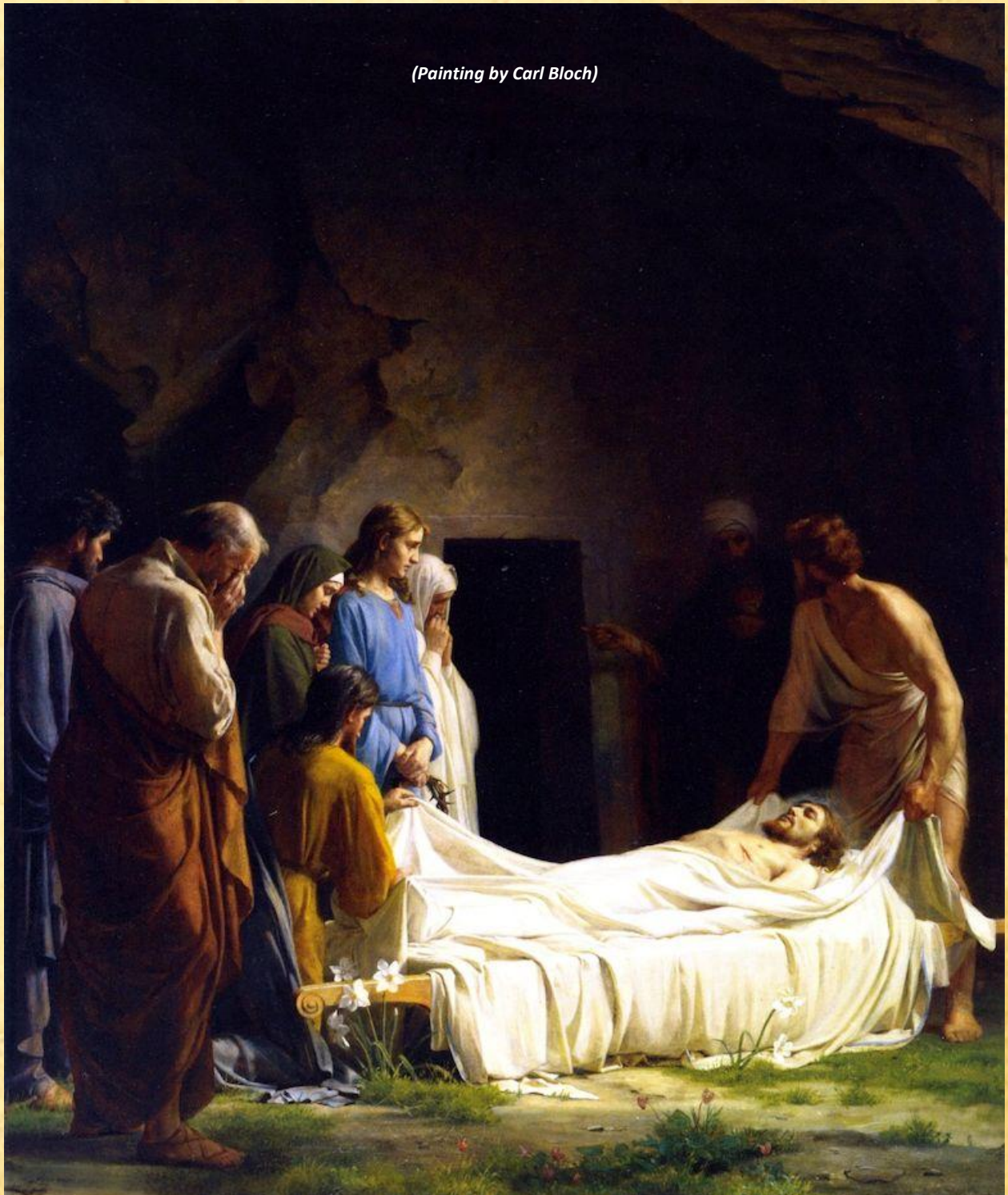


### LAI IN A TOMB

John 19: 39-42 (NIV) goes on to read:

39He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. 40Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 41At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there."

*(Painting by Carl Bloch)*





The act of anointing a body was done out of love and respect for the deceased. Also, at this point, it is important to refer back in Scripture to an event that happened to Jesus, prompting him to look ahead to the time of his own anointing, as well as the significance of it. John 12:1-8 New International Version (NIV) states: **12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. <sup>3</sup> Then Mary took about a pint<sup>[a]</sup> of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.<sup>4</sup> But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, <sup>5</sup> "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.<sup>[b]</sup>" <sup>6</sup> He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. <sup>7</sup> "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup> You will always have the poor among you,<sup>[c]</sup> but you will not always have me."**

When one combines the Jewish customs regarding anointing of oil and spices with the above Scripture, great significance can be placed upon this happening that occurred at the residence of Mary and Martha; especially given the fact that it was just prior to Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Poor people simply did not have the financial means to own such costly oils and spices, and would have become acquainted with them only by either attending services in the Temple or watching royalty enter a village. These expensive oils and spices were used to consecrate religious objects or to anoint priests or kings only. However, the verse that indicated the entire house was filled with the fragrance after Mary anointed the feet of Jesus, serves as an example of the strength of their scent. Thus, it was well known that local village people knew when important officials were arriving due to the expensive fragrance that filled the air. Thus, although Mary anointed the feet of the Master through an enormous act of love, the words of Jesus added depth to the meaning. It was the very next day that he would ride on the back of a donkey into the city. Do you think the fragrance from his anointing still could be smelled by those present? I imagine so.

Did you also note Nicodemus, who had a previous interaction with Jesus, was named as the individual that brought the 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes? That was purposely mentioned because only a rich man would have the means to offer this mixture; as well as anointing Jesus as King of Kings.

Folks, it is important at this point to pause and focus on the actions of the women and their impact during and after the crucifixion of Christ. Although they did not possess the ability (due to society's views toward women) to speak in front of the legal council on his behalf, they never failed to be at his side; as shown in the painting above. However, according to the Jewish Law, everyone had to be at home by sunset due to the beginning of Sabbath; thus, causing them to depart in a state of deep sadness.

Since sunset was drawing near, are you able to picture in your mind the departure of those who loved the Lord as they embarked for home? How does one describe the impact of this horrific day on the human heart? Their souls must have been bruised beyond description! Have you ever been in such a state of shock that it was not possible to even react?

*The NIV Application Study Bible brings to light that four people were changed in the process of the crucifixion: (The criminal that died beside Jesus, a Roman centurion who proclaimed that truly Jesus was the Son of God, and Joseph and Nicodemus, members of the Jewish council who were secret followers of the Lord, had come out of hiding) Do you suppose there were others? Scripture states that*



*when Jesus died, the curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom; which meant mankind now had access directly to God without assistance from a priest. Although I had already accepted Christ as my Savior prior to writing this chapter, by focusing deeply into the event, the impact upon my heart was immeasurable. Then, when contemplating the meaning of the torn curtain in the Temple, a sense of freedom and self worth surged through every fiber of my being. It is a vivid example of the equality of each individual in the eyes of the Father, and shows how desirous he is to hear from us. His creation had now been restored back to him through his Son; the Sacrificial Lamb. The Second Covenant was undoubtedly in place.*

Now that the Jewish Sabbath has begun, leaving just us, dear readers, as the only people remaining at the tomb, it seems eerily silent, doesn't it? Visualize in your mind the three empty crosses that resemble ugly scars now standing like dark silhouettes in a silent lost world. Can you imagine the one in the middle still dripping with the blood of an innocent man that had been brutalized beyond recognition? In the moonlight, it is probably even possible to see the tracks of all those who attended either out of love or curiosity. My footprints are among them! Are yours?

Thus, at this moment in our chapter, as non Jews, let us find a quiet olive grove and use the Jewish Sabbath as a time of solitude and reflection. Since we have the advantage of knowing how things turn out, let us stay united in a time of prayer and remembrance, abiding by Jesus' request in the Upper Room.



***"REMEMBER ME!"***



*Because there is one loaf,  
we, though we be many, are one body,  
for we all partake of the one loaf.  
The bread which we break,  
it is a means of sharing in the body of Christ!*

*And the cup over which we give thanks, it  
is a means of sharing in the outpoured  
blood of Christ!*

***(Or use your own words)***



## RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

*Jerusalem's shadows, dark and lingering, with everyone fast asleep  
Not breaking the city's lazy slumber, God had promises to keep  
Just the morning star shone above His tomb, on this His resurrection day  
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done; had unfolded without delay.*

(Painting by James Tissot)

*The gloriously ethereal angel is standing (floating?) in the antechamber of the tomb. This angel is clothed in classical draperies, and has a double set of quite realistic wings. Behind the angel is a large flat shape which must be the stone, now rolled away from the entrance. Inside the tomb itself two (four wing tips on the far left of the picture) other angels sit, waiting on Jesus.*

After searching repeatedly for a painting of the Resurrection, this beautiful ethereal rendering by James Tissot struck a chord; especially after researching many writings of scholars on this particular subject. I found some authors trying to approach it from a historical point of view with absolutely no success, while others went to great length at writing possible scenarios that reached the point of being ridiculous. Therefore, at this juncture in "My Jewish Messiah", the writer will lean totally on the





Holy Spirit the rest of the way home. During the process of determining the best path to follow in writing about the Resurrection, words my earthly father, a country preacher for over 60 years, wrote in the margin of his dog-eared Bible came immediately to mind. He said, "Anyone who thinks he can prove the existence of God historically will be sorely disappointed. It simply is not possible. Mankind must either believe or not believe! Faith is the only answer!"

Thus, when I studied the painting above, it spoke volumes to me about the wisdom of his statement. The painting allows the Resurrection to be God's business. If he had wanted us to see him at work in the tomb, it would have been available in great detail within the Bible. My earthly father loved the Lord with such great depth that when delivering a sermon or listening to the hymn, "Amazing Grace", he would close his eyes and lift his glowing face skyward in a state of total bliss. He could then be heard softly giggling with joy; a demonstration of faith at its best!

Do you recall reading John 2:19 (NIV) after our Lord had cleared the Temple and the Jewish leaders were questioning his authority to do this act? His answer let them know that he was greater than the Temple by stating, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days;" a statement his disciples did not understand at the moment, but would in just a short while. Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus was referring to his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.

## John 20:1-9 New International Version (NIV)

### The Empty Tomb

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

<sup>2</sup> So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

<sup>3</sup> So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) *The large print will allow you to read this verse slowly, aloud, permitting it to sink into your mind.*



Due to the fact that the accounts of what occurred during Bible times were compiled into written documents much later than when they transpired, the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John may differ in some aspects. One example that demonstrates this is Mary Magdalene discovering the empty tomb verses the three women named Mary finding it when bringing spices for anointing the body of Christ at the conclusion of Sabbath; or who provided the spices. Although some individuals use this as a reason to doubt God's Word, I do not! Since John's Gospel is written with the purpose of proving that Jesus is the Son of God, it was chosen for the above reading of the empty tomb.

As you read the description of the reactions of both Peter and John after receiving the declaration from Mary that the Lord's tomb was empty, did you find yourself present in the moment with them? Were you able to visualize them in a total state of grief and despair, slumped in dejected wilted lumps? Then, interpreting the words as she excitedly delivered the miracle of all miracles, did you enjoy their reaction as much as the writer? If I asked you who could run faster, would it be Peter or John? And.....run they did! THESE TWO DISCIPLES RAN LIKE THE WIND TOWARD THE RESURRECTION! The painting by Eugène Burnand from the 1800's allows you to thoroughly internalize the joy they felt and the love they had for the Lord.



**OH THAT WE ALL RUN TOWARD OUR RESURRECTED JEWISH MESSIAH WITH THIS EXURBANCE.**

As you read aloud the Scripture from John above, were you able to picture the folded strips of linen so neatly arranged? This certainly indicates everything was purposely done, sending the message that God was totally in charge, without the interference or help from mankind.



Also, it is important to note the last line in the Scripture above that stated the disciples did not realize that Jesus was to be raised from the dead. It is hard to believe that after spending considerable time in the presence of the Lord that they still did not get it, isn't it? Or, is it? Ladies and gentlemen, even though they had witnessed Lazarus being raised from the dead after three days by the Master himself, they still did not get it! Yet, let us stop and internalize how difficult the concepts of Jesus were for mere human minds to master. So much was unfolding around them, plus the abstractness of the spiritual messages Jesus was teaching had to be an astronomical amount of information for that rag-tag group of 12 to comprehend. Yet, in spite of their reactions of wonder and puzzlement, isn't it truly a marvelous thing to read how they preached the Lord's message of the kingdom later on; to the extent that they all met their demise except for John?

Let us now continue the story by reading the words from John 20: 10-18 (NIV):

**"10Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. 11Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). 17Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' " 18Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her. "**

Did you note above the different reactions to the news? Any thoughts as to why the disciples went back to where they were staying? What would you have done next? However, when you stop and realize how significantly Jesus had changed the life of Mary Magdalene, it is understandable that she would continue to search for him, isn't it? When we allow Jesus to change our lives to this extent, the news of the kingdom is just too good to keep to ourselves. Additionally, isn't it wonderful that Jesus still demonstrates that both men and women have an equal place in his heart by making sure Mary is the first to see him in his resurrected body? Then, read carefully Mary's response of her mission to locate the Lord. Her loyalty is truly overwhelming! This woman's life was so changed that she would go to every length possible to make sure his body was buried properly. She was lost and found by the hand of Christ! Now, her Lord's earthly body was lost and she wanted to be sure it was found!

*"Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!*

*I once was lost, but now I'm found! Was blind, but now I see."*



*By Alexander Andreyevich Ivanov (1806 - 1858)*



### EYE WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTED CHRIST

Let us begin this section on eye witnesses of the Resurrected Christ with a quote from the footnotes as found in the Life Application Study Bible (NIV).

“Since the resurrection of Christ is the center of the Christian faith. Because Christ rose from the dead as he promised, we know that what he said is true---he is God. Because he rose, we have certainty that our sins are forgiven. Because he rose, he lives and represents us to God. Because he rose and defeated death, we know we will also be raised.”

Apostle Paul, when giving instruction concerning the Resurrected Christ stated the following regarding the appearances of our Lord after he had been raised from the dead:



### 1 Corinthians 15: 3-8

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5and that He appeared to Cephas<sup>a</sup> and then to the Twelve. 6After that, He appeared to more than **five hundred brothers at once**, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8And last of all He appeared to me also, as to one of **untimely birth.**" (Unfortunate that Paul didn't include women in this listing, too!)

Furthermore, Paul when writing to the Corinthians 15: 14-18 (NIV) gets even more explicit regarding the importance of the resurrection to Christians by stating: "<sup>14</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. <sup>15</sup>More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost."

Therefore, since the resurrection is the centerfold for us as Believers, let us now take a look at some of the appearances of the Resurrected Jesus:

**(Believers on the Road to Emmaus)** Supper at Emmaus by Matthias Stom, c 1633–1639. Note the "breaking of bread" as the precise moment of the disciples' recognition.





On the same day the tomb was found empty, two disciples of Jesus were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, talking about what had transpired when Jesus fell into step beside and inquired about their discussion. Asking them to explain it to him, with dejected faces, they shared their disappointment by stating the things that had happened as follows: Luke 24:19-27 New International Version (NIV)<sup>19</sup> *“What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.* And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup> In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

<sup>25</sup> *He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

Note the underlined portion of Scripture that is also highlighted above? Due to the Jewish teachings for generations regarding the belief that Israel would be redeemed (New Exodus), Jesus had repeatedly run into this roadblock during the entire three years of his ministry. People could not understand the concept of a spiritual, rather than an earthly, kingdom.

Also, did you note the response of the Risen Savior? After all the suffering he had just endured, can you sympathize with the Lord? Yet, our patient Jewish Messiah explains it all again to them.

After having been invited to stay with them, Luke 24: 30-31 (NIV) takes us to the very heart of the matter with the following words: *“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.”* (Note the breaking of bread; meaning his body broken for them?) Look again at the painting above and allow this moment to penetrate deeply.

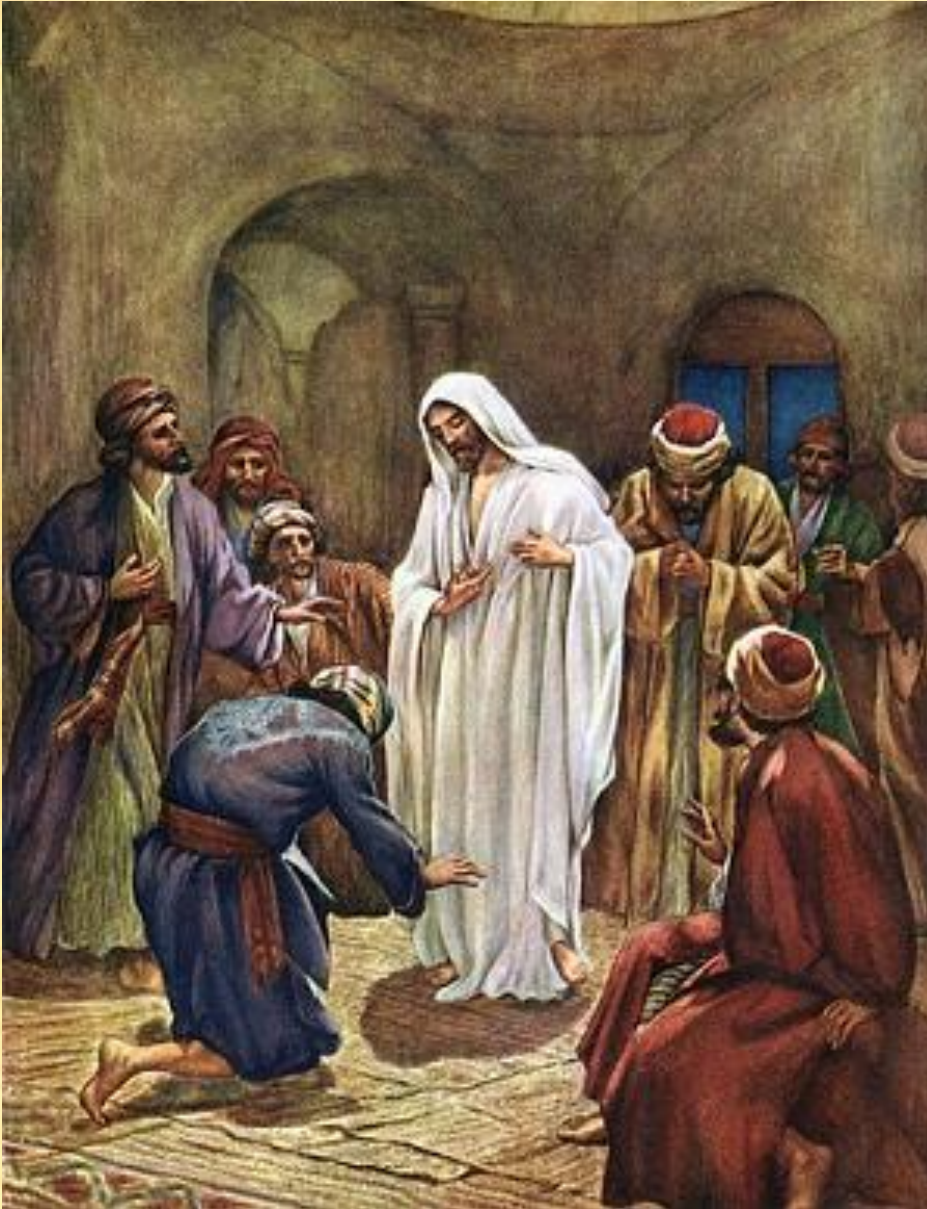
Luke goes on to share the reaction of the men upon witnessing the Resurrected Savior by letting us know that, wasting no time, they went back to Jerusalem, found the 11 disciples, and told them the good news.

#### *Jesus Appears to the Disciples Behind Locked Doors*

Then, while the two disciples were telling the other disciples about their encounter with the Lord, Jesus himself suddenly stood among them and said, *“Peace be with you.”* (Luke 24: 36) NIV Scripture goes on to state that the disciples, thinking they had seen a ghost, were startled and frightened! Luke 24:37-43 New International Version (NIV) offers a vivid description of the happening by stating:



<sup>37</sup> They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."<sup>40</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate it in their presence.



*By William Brassey Hole – "Resurrected Jesus Appears To His Disciples"*

Did you note as you read the Scripture the reaction of the disciples? Then, Jesus who understands us better than we know ourselves was so familiar with the minds of his beloved followers that he allowed time for the shock of seeing him in his resurrected body to sink in. Pause for a moment and contemplate how the transcendence (*being able to go in and out of rooms by not passing through a door*) of Jesus alone must have impacted them. In spite of their joy and amazement, they still needed additional proof and observed him eating a piece of broiled fish. John 20: 21-23 adds even more information to this event by stating: "Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that he

breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Let us all stop and internalize how patient and understanding the Lord is of his creation. Isn't it a wonderful thing to know he understands our doubts and fears we experience on our journey?



Since Jesus recognized that Thomas was not only absent, but had expressed doubts about his appearance to the other disciples, at just the right time, he appears. Enjoy John 20:24-31 New International Version (NIV) as Thomas' eyes are opened and his doubt washed away!

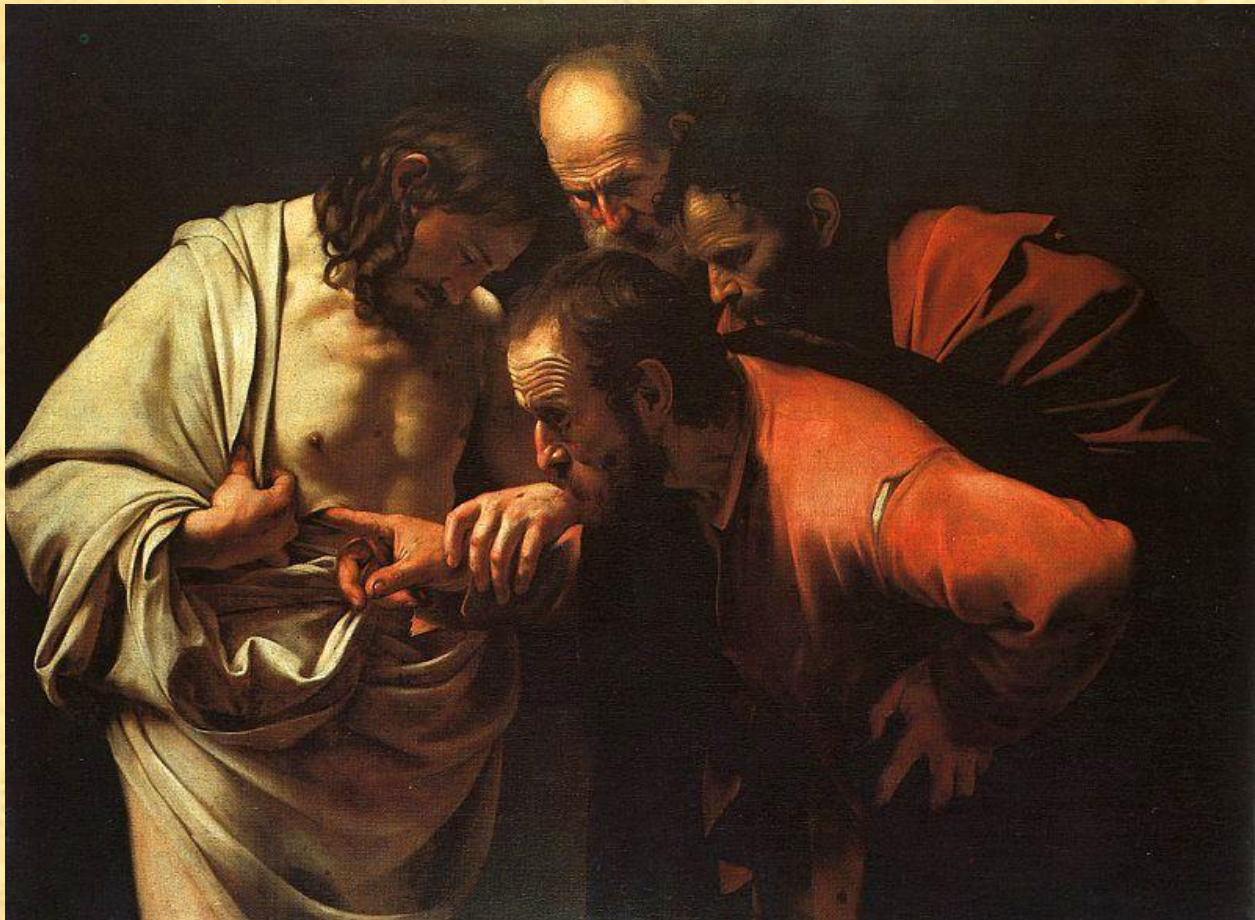
### Jesus Appears to Thomas

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus<sup>[a]</sup>), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; ***blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.***" (That means us!)

### The Purpose of John's Gospel

<sup>30</sup> ***Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.*** <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe<sup>[b]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. "

*The Incredulity of Saint Thomas by Caravaggio*





Let us now compare the reactions of the disciples to the message and teachings of Jesus while in the Upper Room to the post resurrection era. Do you recall when eating the Passover meal with the Lord, how anxious, and filled with perplexity the disciples were when trying to understand the spiritual concepts discussed? Words that would probably fit their emotions now would be: jubilation, amazement, wonder, exultation, ecstasy, rapture, and merriment. (Can you add to this list?) Also, think about the approach Jesus used as compared to the one in the Upper Room.

Ladies and gentlemen, when John wrote that Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, it gives an indication of the level of instruction and the preparation for delivering the good news of the kingdom after his ascent received by this group of disciples. This intense training along with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, offer logic to the expertise, tenacity, and courage displayed as they carried the news of the kingdom far and wide; no longer as disciples, but as apostles of the Savior.

### *(Jesus Appears to the Disciples While Fishing)*

John 21:4-14 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>4</sup>Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.<sup>5</sup> He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered.<sup>6</sup> He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.<sup>7</sup> Then the disciple whom

by James Tissot



Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.<sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>9</sup>When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.”<sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.<sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.<sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.<sup>14</sup> This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.”



*"Jesus Eats Breakfast With His Disciples" by James Tissot*



Don't you absolutely love Peter's reaction when he sees Jesus? He seems to always be running **toward** the Lord, doesn't he? How Jesus must have loved him! Did you also notice the fact that all the disciples knew who he was this time?

### Restoration of Peter

John 21:15-17 New International Version (NIV)

### **Jesus Reinstates Peter**

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."<sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."<sup>17</sup> The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.





*Christ's Charge to Peter, 1515. By Raphael*

At this point, Peter, being like all of us, must be walking under a very dark cloud called “guilt” because of having denied knowing Jesus earlier. Due to our own numerous mistakes, isn’t it wonderful to read the conversation that occurred between the Lord and Peter? Also, did you catch the fact that Jesus asked him three times; a number that matched exactly Peter’s earlier denials. Then, each time, Jesus would give him the same directions. “Feed my lambs.” Although there are only three words in this command, they are so powerful that we are included in them. This is exactly what Christians are required to do as Disciples of Christ. In no uncertain terms, Jesus was asking for a commitment from Peter; a request that transformed Peter from a fisherman into an evangelist.

#### Ascension of Jesus

Acts 1:3-11 NIV **3** After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. **4** On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” **6** Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” **7** He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” **9** After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. **10** They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. **11** “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”





*Ascension Of Jesus Rembrandt...*



Study the painting by Rembrandt above, noting the reactions of those watching Jesus ascend back to the Father. Do you see the dove at the top? Does it remind you of the description we have been given of God's words when his Son was baptized, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased?" Think about how anxious God the Father is to have his Son back at his side; his right side, that is!

Did you notice the question the disciples still asked him about restoring the kingdom to Israel? Conditioned responses are terribly hard to change. Generation after generation, the Jewish people had been teaching their children that God would restore the kingdom to Israel, just like it was during the time of King David. Man was thinking only in earthly terms rather than the Spiritual kingdom that Jesus proclaimed. Even after they had seen the Resurrected Savior, this question emerged from the lips of his disciples.

Then, let us try and wear the sandals of the disciples! Oh, my! Have these men been on an emotional roller coaster or what? What are they thinking now? I must believe the time Jesus spent with them after his resurrection totally prepared them for the journey ahead. It is stated many times in sermons that whatever transpired before the ascension of Jesus, along with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, transformed these ordinary men into extraordinary evangelists. They were on fire for Jesus!

#### The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

Our Great Promise Keeper, Jesus/God, instructed his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit arrived; a direct connection to the Trinity. (God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit) Not only did Jesus need to leave in order to prepare a place for all his Believers, but also to remove his physical presence so the message of the kingdom could spread throughout the world. After Christ was taken up into heaven, through the Holy Spirit, he would be present everywhere. The Holy Spirit is the power of our Christian lives; our counselor that refreshes and guides us in developing a closer relationship with Jesus; so much that we become a reflection of him. Power from the Holy Spirit transforms us beyond the ordinary into the realm of the unimaginable, unprecedented, and remarkably bizarre.

Thus, in good and perfect time, the Holy Spirit arrived 50 days after Passover, Pentecost was also called the Feast of Weeks; a major annual festival of thanksgiving for the harvested crops. Jesus was crucified at Passover time and he ascended 40 days after his resurrection. The Holy Spirit came 50 days after the resurrection, ten days after the ascension. (NIV Study Application Bible)

**THEREFORE, LET US SUCINCTLY STATE IN A LOUD AND CLEAR VOICE THAT JESUS DID NOT LEAVE US ALONE. HE IS EVER PRESENT IN OUR LIVES. OUR JEWISH MESSIAH SAID HE WOULD NEVER LEAVE US ALONE.....AND HE FULFILLED THAT PROMISE THROUGH THE ARRIVAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT!**







Acts 2:1-13 New International Version (NIV)

### The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues<sup>[a]</sup> as the Spirit enabled them. <sup>5</sup> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. <sup>7</sup> Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup> Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome <sup>11</sup> (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" <sup>12</sup> Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup> Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

"The Pentecost" by El Greco



*Peter Addresses The Crowd*



Remember the last words Jesus said to Peter were, “FEED MY LAMBS”? Ladies and gentlemen, do you also recall Peter being, the disciple, the rough around the edge fisherman from Galilee; the one that denied knowing Jesus three times; the exuberant individual that always ran to the Lord like a large fun loving puppy? This same man that had appeared so unstable during the ministry of Jesus delivered the most powerful, Spirit-filled message ever heard; one that deeply moved many of the Jews attending the Festival of Thanksgiving. He reached back to Psalms and even quoted from the exodus to explain that Jesus was truly the Son of God; the

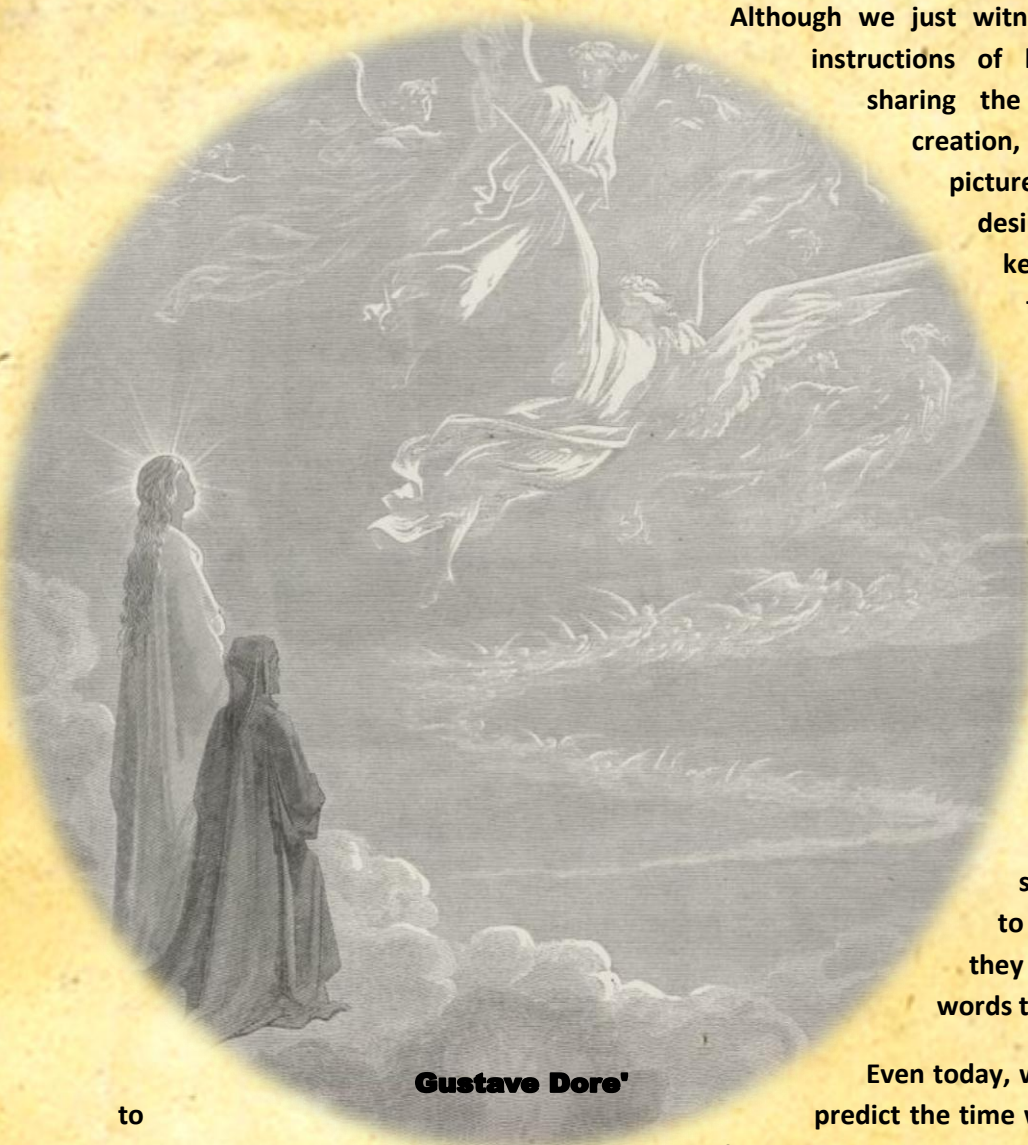
long awaited Messiah. As you read the Scripture from Acts 2: 14-40 on your own, you will see that Peter had been transformed into a dynamic speaker. When our Lord observed Peter, he did not see what man visualized, but looked at the very heart of this sweet man; the rock, the very foundation on which the church would be built.

*Preaching at Pentecost” by Benjamin West “Peter Preaching at Pentecost” by Benjamin West*



## RETURN OF CHRIST

Although we just witnessed Peter following the instructions of his Lord and Master by sharing the good news with God's creation, have you been able to picture in your mind how desirous the disciples were to keep him by their side forever? Also, we have learned how difficult it was for the twelve faithful followers of Jesus to internalize the fact that the Lord was talking about a Spiritual kingdom, rather than the teachings that had been handed down through generation after generation by their Jewish ancestors. Thus, it seemed when Jesus spoke to them about his return, they immediately connected his words to the restoration of Israel.



**Gustave Doré'**

to  
by designing  
Even today, we often hear people trying  
predict the time when our Savior will return  
formulations or trying to use world events. Yet,  
Jesus was very clear in Mark 13:26-27 New International Version (NIV) when he stated:<sup>26</sup> **"At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens."** Then, he continued to explain this even more clearly to his disciples by saying, **"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,<sup>f</sup> but only the Father."**  
**Matthew 24: 36 (NIV)** Ladies and gentlemen, this message is not only for the disciples, but also for us!

Then, in order to remove any worry from their minds as to their future security, he assured not only the twelve, but also all future Believers with these magnificent words from John 14: 1-4 **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and**



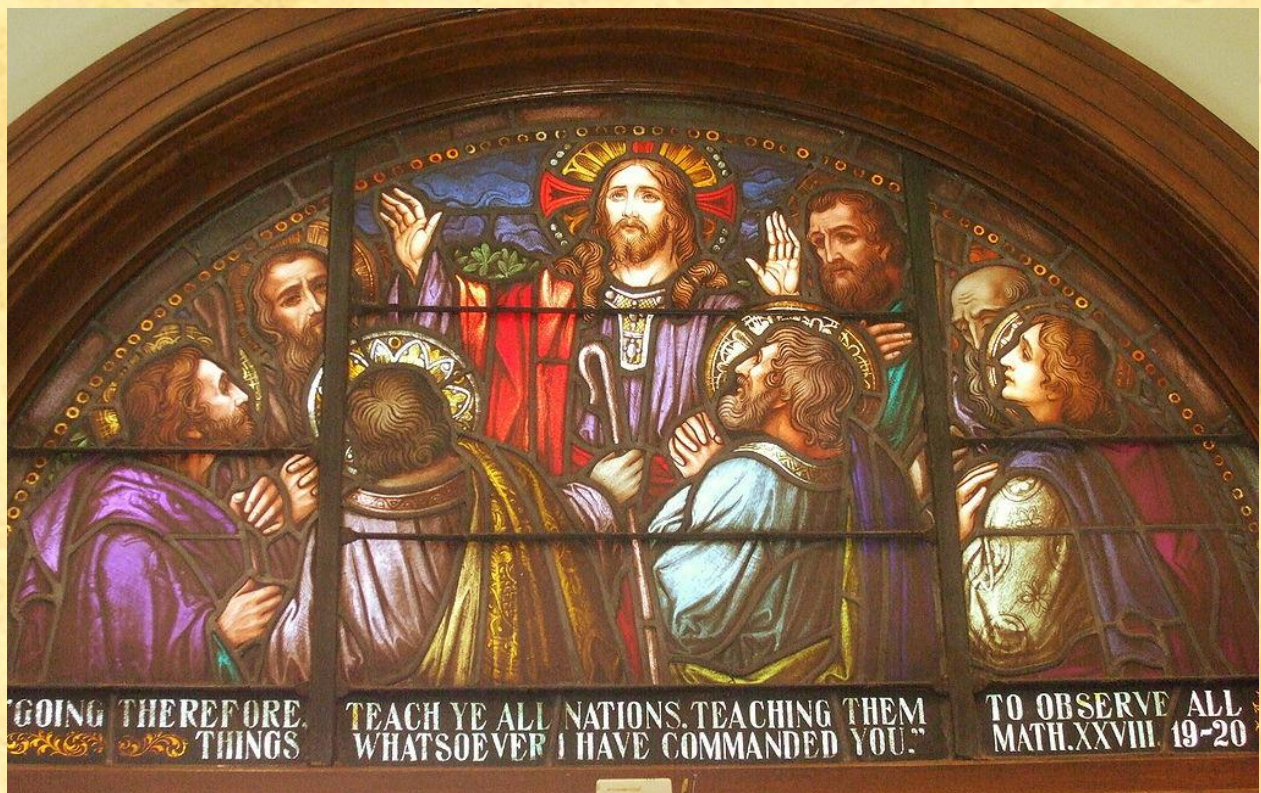
prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

### MISSION OF BELIEVERS

Do you recall from earlier Scripture when the angels asked the disciples why they continued to stand looking up at the sky after the ascension of Christ? In short, they were asking, "Don't you remember the command from your Savior called "THE GREAT COMMISSION" from Matthew 28: 16-20 (NIV)?

#### **The Great Commission**

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."



*The Great Commission, stained glass window, Cathedral Parish of Saint Patrick in El Paso, Texas.*

As followers of the Resurrected Jesus, we, too, are directed to not only be disciples of his, but to follow the same commanded : "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the



name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Consequently, that does not mean we spend our time looking at the clouds just waiting for the return of Christ. Nor, does it imply that our hours be devoted to developing formulations in an effort to calculate the time and date of the event, either. Ladies and gentlemen, as Christians, we are to strap on the sandals of Jesus and walk along the highways and byways, not only delivering the message of the kingdom, but also touching the lepers we encounter; meaning ministering to the downtrodden in society; individuals that have a precious place in the heart of our Lord. When Jesus teaches his disciples about GENEROUS GRACE in Matthew 20: 16, they are told clearly that God showers his blessings down as he desires. Just because an individual has worked longer as a Disciple, or dresses better, and resides in a higher economic strata as viewed by society's standards, these same principles do not apply to the Almighty's rules. The Great Commission is totally about service to our fellowmen. After all, not one individual can earn, or deserves, eternal life; meaning we are all equal in the eyes of God. As Paul Enns states in the "Moody Handbook of Theology": "Grace may be defined as the unmerited or undeserving favor of God to those who are under condemnation."



Heiligenkreuz abbey ( Lower Austria ). Cloisters - Statue of Christ washing the feet of saint Peter ( 18th century ), by Giovanni Giuliani.

# GO YE!



Sources:

*Life Application Study Bible (NIV)*

*Guidance of the Holy Spirit through Prayer*



**GROWING IN THE WORD**



**1) Begin and/or end your time together by singing or saying: It Is Well With My Soul (Lyrics below)**

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blessed assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul.

It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

**2) Spend some time discussing your feelings on the different versions of the happenings in Scripture. Do you allow it to cause doubt? How can you explain it to others; especially new Believers?**

**3) Discuss the reason/s for the disciples having difficulty dealing with the mission of Jesus as a Messiah being that of restoring Israel verses establishing a Spiritual Kingdom as promised by God. Does this challenge still exist today?**

**4) Discuss the difference between the manner in which Jesus instructed his disciples before his resurrection and after?**

**5) Peter kept running toward Jesus. How can we practice the same pattern in our Christian journey?**

**6) Which eye witness account touched your heart the most? Why?**



7) What is the visual image you have in your mind of Jesus? Why do you feel there are so many different artistic renderings of our Lord? Join us in the next chapter as we bring this to light.

### CLOSING PRAYER

Let us use the chorus from the beautiful hymn, "Because He Lives" as our closing prayer.

*Because he lives  
I can face tomorrow  
Because he lives  
All fear is gone  
Because I know  
He holds the future  
And life is worth the living  
Just because he lives  
AMEN!*





## *Chapter 17*

# **REFLECTION OF JESUS**



**"REFLECTION OF CHRIST"** Compliments of United Methodist Church, Mountain Grove, MO.



## **INTRODUCTION:**

As the words are penned in this the last chapter of "My Jewish Messiah", methinks the reflections of his glory are never purer or more distinct than at this moment. Having followed the dusty footprints of his sandals on the highways and byways in his three years of ministry on earth, the compassion, love, and mercy he patiently showered down on others, will undoubtedly, linger in your senses like an exquisite sweet-scented perfume; one that will anoint your being forever.

In addition, the visual image of his gentle hands healing and caressing the sick and downtrodden in society will pluck at your heart strings eternally. Thus, the forcefulness and intensity witnessed in his eyes when turning over the tables in the Temple in anger because of their treatment, as well as a demonstration of his zeal for the House of God, will always serve as model of fairness and justice.

Then, after listening to his melodious, yet powerful, voice when delivering the Sermon on the Mount, you learned quickly that the beauty and music you were on a quest to find within yourself were only possible if originating from the Father; thus brought about by mirroring the beatitudes of the kingdom of God. Then, during the process of internalizing the teachings of the Master, you rapidly realized that your soul's disquieted longing that felt like a bottomless empty cavern could only be filled by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; the very breath of the living God. The water of life that flowed directly to you from the pierced side of our Savior on the cross was the only way to quench your thirst; a source of moisture that would never go dry; keeping your spirit refreshed and supple for all eternity.

Then, at the Passover of the Messiah held in the Upper Room, when you leaned your head upon the Savior's bosom accepting his invitation to come and dine; and thus partaking of his flesh and drinking of his blood, the fellowship felt more precious than the rarest of jewels. The Lord's invitation to enjoy this type of union with him surpassed mankind's ability to fathom; a concept of nearness that is without definition; especially when internalized while standing at the foot of the cross and hearing his words, "Forgive them. They know not what they do."

Finally, when hearing the accounts of the numerous eye witnesses that discovered the empty tomb and then communed with the RESSURECTED SAVIOR, assurance was offered that the Jewish Messiah arose and, indeed, had conquered death for all time. Thus, when the sun sets on your earthly life and the damask curtains are closed, his angels will immediately carry you on the wings of glory to your heavenly home where you will be with him forever. To know your Jewish Messiah is to love him!



## BECOMING HIS DISCIPLES

Let us now focus on the three words, "Feed my sheep," that Jesus spoke to Peter after he asked him if he loved him. Folks, this command from our Savior applies to every follower; meaning all of us. Another way to state this directive from our Lord is to quote again the words he spoke to his disciples, **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

Thus, simply standing motionless waiting for his return is not even a possibility. Instead, we are to strap on the Messiah's well worn sandals and go out into the world in service to others. Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg get right to the issue with this wonderful definition of discipleship in their book "Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus" by stating: "This approach involves not just information, but transformation. God's goal isn't simply to fill the world with people who believe the right things. It is to fill the world with people who shine with the brilliance of Christ." They go on to say, "As followers of Jesus, we are still called to live out the adventure of discipleship, becoming like Jesus through the power of his Spirit at work within us."

## IMAGES OF DISCIPLESHIP



As the writer searched for images of Jesus painted by individuals from past generations, it was very interesting to note how different each one appeared. The renderings completed by the artists were fascinatingly dependent upon both race and geographical location. Study the mural to the left containing pictures of Christ and note the differences.

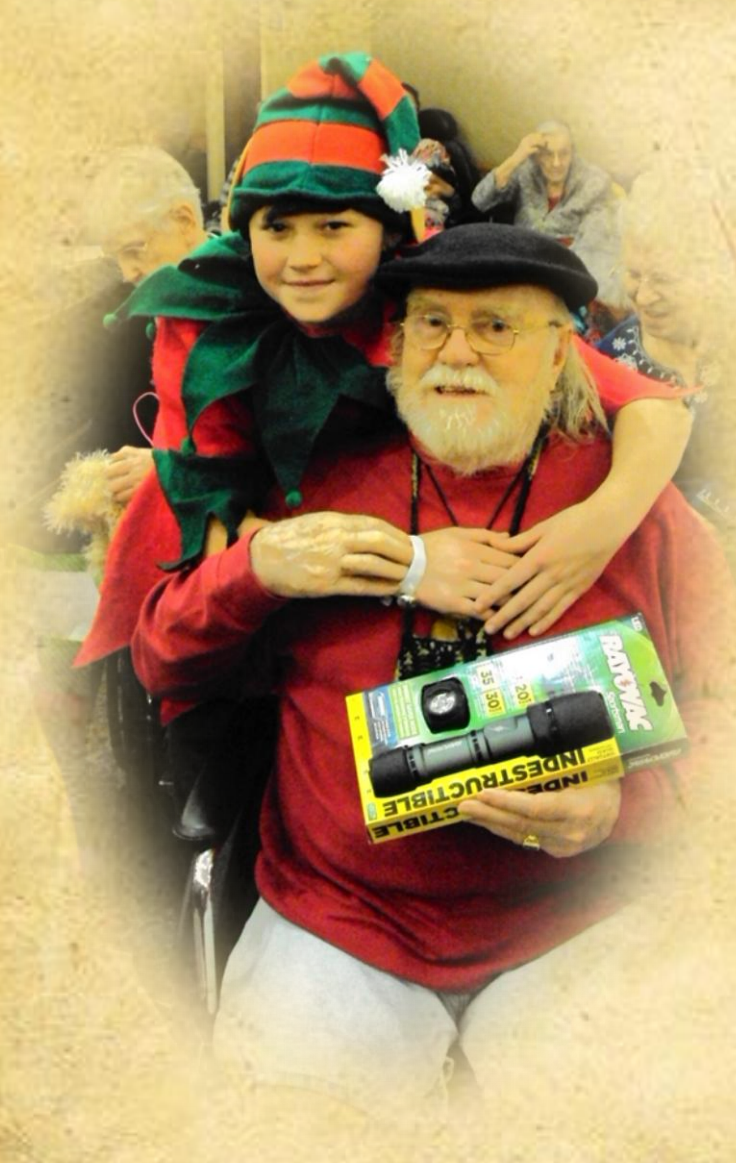
Do you think, perhaps, we are all supposed to see him in our own way? One thing I have witnessed when sitting at the bedside of a departing saint is their ability to recognize the Lord. A smile and look of recognition will cross the resident's wrinkled face accompanied by the words, "Jesus!" Jesus!" To know him is to love him...and they do!

*Oh, Sweet Jesus, do let me say, I am but one last breath away, from seeing Your heavenly, radiant face and feeling the warmth of Your embrace.*



Consequently, just as these images above show great variances in the appearance of Jesus, the same is true of discipleship. Not one member of God's creation is the same! We have been uniquely molded by the hands of the Great Potter as special and blessed with our own way of serving. **"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them."** (1Corinthians 12: 4 NIV). It takes all of us to make up the body of Believers. Each one has a special roll in discipleship. Just because you observe an individual talented in something, does not indicate that you are lacking or inferior to that person. Without your service, the body is not complete.

Given this clarification of the Spirit's gifts, let us now put this principle into action. If we are to be a reflection of Jesus how does this look? Observe the following photographs of discipleship and you will see Jesus up close and personal! To know him is to love him!



A 12 year old child named Payton wearing an elf costume touches the life of a resident at Christmas time. The child chose to serve as a volunteer and would read to Garry after school. The bond that was established crossed all generations and nourished the hearts of both the young and old.

**FIND JESUS AT WORK HERE!**





Seven year old Preston reads to a bedridden resident at a nursing home. He chose his favorite shirt, hat, jeans, and his grandfather's tie just for the occasion. The interaction that went on between them was more priceless than gold. **WHAT DOES JESUS LOOK LIKE IN THIS? DO YOU SEE HIS REFLECTION IN THE PICTURE?**



Connie (left) is comforting Carol who is getting ready to be held in the arms of Jesus. **DO YOU SEE HIS REFLECTION IN THIS PICTURE?**




A volunteer (on the left) is reading a devotional to the resident of a nursing home. **SAY OUT LOUD HOW THE REFLECTION OF JESUS APPEARS IN THIS SETTING!**



Two nursing home residents (holding hands) are delivering peanut butter and jelly to an elementary school for children in need. The residents in their facility voted to give up a party so the funds could be used for this purpose.

**DO YOU SEE THE REFLECTION OF JESUS IN THEIR SMILES?**





Pearl, age 95, wearing yellow, worked by herself in her sewing room and made 595 quilts (Example in photograph to right as modeled by Betty) for abused children that had been pulled from their homes with just the clothing on their backs. **CAN YOU SPOT THE THREADS OF CHRIST'S LOVE IN THIS PICTURE?**



Heather, art teacher at Hillcrest High School and student Chaylen work together preparing illustrations for a book called "Gramme's Engaged" to be used for the elderly. **(OH, SWEET JESUS! WE SEE YOUR REFLECTION!)**



## GO YE!

Friends, when we go forth as disciples delivering the good news of God's kingdom, let us model the following words from Charles Haddon Spurgeon in his book, "Morning by Morning" when he stated: *"We are here taught the great lesson, that to get, we must give; that to accumulate, we must scatter; that to make ourselves happy, we must make others happy; and that in order to become spiritually vigorous, we must seek the spiritual good of others."* Spurgeon goes on to say, *"Our efforts to be useful bring out our powers for usefulness."* In other words, when humbly submitting to the will of the Spirit, we then allow God the Father to change our commonness into that of being extraordinary servants. As we venture forth as disciples of Christ, we will consider it an honor to tenderly dry the tears of those in grief, soothe the children that are without parental guidance, offer forgiveness to those who have made mistakes, and help the less fortunate plant their feet on higher ground. Yes folks, by humbly bowing at the feet of God's children, we will be enormously blessed in return. Endeavoring to cheer the lonely, our spirits will be lifted in the process. Then, when teaching the Scriptures, we will have deepened our own understanding of God's Word because of putting into practice the commandment, *"<sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.<sup>a]</sup> <sup>31</sup> The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>b]</sup> There is no commandment greater than these."* Mark 12: 30-31 (NIV)

## CONCLUSION

Ladies and gentlemen, when receiving the repeated urging from the Holy Spirit to take on the complex subject of, "My Jewish Messiah", the writer approached the task with feelings of humility and weakness; internalizing fully the necessity of allowing the Lord to lead every step of the journey. Thus, it was only after realizing that although Christians may differ on a variety of points but still have the desire to fulfill God's commandments, that the writer began the project. Even though individuals/denominations may approach many teachings in their own way, it is common knowledge that the Word on which Believers dine is the bread of life sent down from heaven.

Also, at this point, the writer would like to express gratitude to all those responsible for showing support along the way. It was due to your kindness that, what appeared at times as a mountain too steep to climb was truly an obtainable goal. The end result of this journey was that of falling more deeply in love with the Lord than ever imagined. His presence is now felt more acutely when listening to his Word, hearing the beautiful musical strains sung by the choir, praising him through prayer, and simply noting the sweet faces of those standing unified as one body in Christ. Then, when taking communion in front of the cross, the depth of his sacrifice and gift of grace penetrate to the very core of the heart. Given these personal reactions, the writer would like to end with an invitation to those that do not know Christ, to bow at the foot of the cross, repent and ask him into your life. My friends and I have saved room just for you with the assurance that someday soon; we will forever worship at the feet of the Jewish Messiah together in heaven. Please come and fill the space waiting for you in the picture below! Feed on the love and grace of our Savior! Halleluiah! Amen!



# AT THE

# CROSS

THERE'S ROOM FOR YOU, TOO!

YOU



## SOURCES

1) *"Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus"* Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg

2) *Life Application Study Bible (NIV)*

3) *"Morning by Morning"* by Charles Spurgeon



## GROWING IN THE WORD



- 1) Suggested Hymn: 'Nearer My God To Thee"—Found on home page of [devotionalembbers.com](http://devotionalembbers.com)
- 2) "To Know the Jewish Messiah is to love him! In what ways did you grow to love Jesus more dearly as you read this collection? Discuss as a group.
- 3) After looking at the photograph of different paintings of Jesus in this chapter, which was your favorite? Out of all the paintings of Jesus you have ever seen, which one stood out? Why?
- 4) Why is it important for each individual to have his/her own image of Jesus in mind? Is it necessary for Jesus to appear the same to all people?
- 5) Gifts of the Spirit are critical to your work as a disciple of Christ. Have you identified your gift/s yet? Have they always been the same or did they change as you went through the seasons of your life?
- 6) Was it difficult to discern your gift? What are things you might do to discern your gift? How can you make sure it is your gift verses your own desires of self?
- 7) How does discipleship look for you personally? Are you satisfied with your progress? Two words were described in this chapter regarding your work as a disciple (Information and transformation). Discuss the difference between the two meanings.
- 8) Think for a moment about your own work and that of your church. Is a transformation taking place through your work as a disciple? If so, describe it. If not, what can be done to go in this direction?
- 9) As the final prayer is read, the writer suggests you join hands with the individual/s in your group as a symbol of one body united in Christ.



**PERSONAL TIME OF REFLECTION**



**Study the painting of My Jewish Messiah above one last time and reflect on the ways you have grown to love him more dearly. Make a list if you desire or say a prayer telling him what you love about him. It will not only touch your heart but also make that smile you see above even broader. TO SEE OUR LORD MORE CLEARLY IS TO LOVE HIM MORE DEARLY!**



## PRAYER

Dear Kind Father,

We close this study with hearts filled to overflowing in enormous gratitude and love for you. As you led us through these seventeen chapters, it was obvious your Spirit occupied every space of our being. At times we felt you so close that it was as if our hair was moving through the breath blowing from your precious lips. How sweet the fragrance was that emanated from your acts of grace and truth. When you touched the downtrodden in society, your gentle hands were soothing our wounds at the same time.

As we go forward, we ask that you transform our ordinary acts into extraordinary miracles; all for your glory. When we spread the news of your kingdom to others, help us speak the truth as you would have it be told with not only words, but also through actions of compassion and grace. As we wear your sandals, guide us on the straight and narrow path leaving footsteps for others to find. Above all, teach us to reach out to both the great and the small moving in one united body as we climb the mountain of life hand in hand.

Father, as the writer of this collection, I now request your blessing on all the hearts that have been touched by the words penned through your guidance. May each person always realize that you are the Alpha and Omega; the Jewish Messiah that paid the price on the cross and arose as our Resurrected Savior conquering death once and for all. No matter the trials and tribulations my readers face, please give them the strength and assurance that all Believers are praying for them. Lord, I ask that you hold each individual safely in your arms until we meet in our heavenly home where, as your children, we will be forever in your presence.

All these things are prayed in your precious name and for your sake. Amen!

Dear Readers, I am praying for you. Please pray for me! *"May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."* (Numbers 6: 24-26) NIV

Suggestion: Play the hymn, "God  
devotionalsembers.com

Will Take Care of You" from  
before departing.

