

THE BIBLE STORY

VOLUME VII

**THE NEW TESTAMENT:
THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST**

Keith Hunt

PREFACE

Much thanks and appreciation goes to Roger Waite for the work of reading, correcting spelling, grammar, and the final editing of this manuscript.

Especially, of course, I give praise and thanks to the heavenly Father for answering my prayers for help and guidance. As a human being I realize this work may not be without errors. If errors can be proved, may they be found and corrected by those who come after me.

The main desire of this work is to lead people to Jesus as personal Savior, to make the Gospels a very readable story for children and youths as well as adults, and to bring out the fact that Jesus was BOTH human and divine, Immanuel, God in the flesh, and the sinless Savior, the perfect sacrifice to save all who will come to the Eternal God through Him.

Truly it is written: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16, KJV)

Dedicated to: All the children and youths who may read this story, and all the children of God and disciples of Jesus Christ everywhere.

Keith Hunt

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CHAPTER ONE

The History Between The Testaments

There was approximately 500 years between the last writings of the Old Testament and the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. The following outline is in part taken from a writing by Leon J. Davis in 1960.

The great Persian Empire was used by God to restore the chastened Jews to their home land and to help them re-establish their old way of life. The Jews were ruled by high priests, who acted under the Syrian governors who had annexed Palestine. These priests were both spiritual and civil heads of state. An assembly of leaders, called the Sanhedrin, advised the priests and checked his power.

In religious life, scribes replaced the prophets to guard and recopy the sacred Scriptures. It was while in captivity that the Jews started to assemble in small groups throughout the land on the Sabbath day, in order to keep alive their religious worship towards God. This was the start of the popular synagogue gathering custom that was firmly established as a part of the religious practice by the time of the birth of John the baptist and Jesus.

The Persian Empire under which the Jews were granted favor to re-establish themselves in the land of promise, reached the height of her power in about 500 B.C., but in time of her fifth emperor, Nehemiah's Artaxerxes I, she weakened. The seat of power gradually changed from Asia to Europe, and Greece became the world power.

In 334 B.C. Alexander the Great defeated the Persians. afterwards, he took possession of northern Africa and went on to conquer Jerusalem. He treated the Jews well and encouraged them to settle in new cities, particularly Alexandria, Egypt.

In 301 B.C., after Alexander's death and a time of civil strife, four generals began to divide the empire. Palestine went to a man named Ptolemy from Egypt, as did Libya and Arabia. Another one of the four generals was Seleucus, who obtained Syria and the Asian countries not given to Ptolemy. Hence, Selucid kings were kings from Asia, and Ptolemy kings were from Africa.

The Palestinian Jews had their own priests as they had under Persian domination, but now they had to pay tribute to the Egyptian government. Ptolemy had brought many thousands of Jews from Palestine to Egypt and gave them religious freedom and full citizenship rights. Greek culture prevailed there and Jews found it difficult to maintain their separation.

In about 280 B.C. a group of Jewish scholars began to translate the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, the common language of the day, for the Jews in Alexandria and other places were now speaking Greek. Seventy-two men did the translating; it was to many a holy and supernatural event; each translation produced the same words and phrases, which was seen by many to be a miracle from God's guiding hand. It took 150

years to complete the entire Old Testament and is called the Septuagint Version today (translation of the seventy).

During these centuries from the return of the Jews to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah and the Ptolemy kings there arose two distinct religious parties among the Jews. They were the Sadducees, who mainly came from the higher class intellectuals and sophisticated members of the Jewish people. Some claimed they were descendants of the priests of Moses' time. The Sadducees did for most of the time, right down to the days of Christ, govern the physical aspects of the Temple in Jerusalem.

The other part of religious leaders were called the Pharisees. They were religious leaders from mainly the common people. They were very orthodox and as time went on they added hundreds of laws to the basic laws of the Old Testament. By the time of Christ they taught that it was unholy and sin to break even all these hundreds of added laws. It was these religious leaders that governed the Sabbath services in the local synagogues throughout the land of Palestine.

The famous Jerusalem Sanhedrin (a governing body of men that set the announcement of the new month day, as well as other religious and none-religious matters for the Jews), by the time of Christ consisted of men from both the Sadducean and Pharisean parts, as well as elders (men who had gained local respect as older wise men of the community) from the Jewish population.

In 204 B.C. the last strong Ptolemy ruler died and their rival, the Selucid kings began to control Palestine. It was Antiochus the Great that took Palestine from a weak king of Egypt. His son, Antiochus I, wanted to make a great empire for himself. His goal was to destroy the Jewish religion and its teaching that they had the One true God and His true religion. In Palestine he replaced spiritual priests with unspiritual ones; he outlawed Judaism, desecrated the temple, abolished worship of the Jewish God, and set up pagan worship with its sacrilege and immorality. Further, in 168 B.C. he forced the Jews to sacrifice on heathen altars to heathen gods.

The Jews eventually rose up and prepared to oppose the decrees of this king. Mattathias, an aged priest objected and killed a Syrian officer. His son, Judas Maccabeus, became the Jewish military leader and organized people to oppose and fight what they considered an evil and satanic government. Thousands of Jews were killed in the ensuing conflict, including Judas himself. His two brothers, Jonathan and Simon led the fight to bring political and religious independence and freedom back to the Jews.

The Jews began to make alliance with Rome at this time, to help guarantee its independence. By December 25, 164 B.C., the Jews had cleansed and re-dedicated the Temple.

Civil war broke out in Palestine led by two opposing brothers. One brother, Aristobolus, who was in power in Jerusalem, was planning to lead a revolt against Rome. Pompey, a great Roman military leader, quickly besieged Jerusalem in 63 B.C. and took it over; 12,000 Jews were killed. Pompey made the other brother, Hyracanus, the governor of

Palestine and required him to pay annual tribute or taxes, a certain amount of money to him each year.

A man named Herod reigned from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. over Jerusalem and Palestine. It was this man that was responsible for the orders to kill the Bethlehem children, as he wanted Jesus the baby to die. All this and the reason why we shall see later as we go through the birth of Jesus Christ. In 20 B.C. this man Herod began to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, partly to please the Jews and partly for his own glory.

Announcement To Zacharias About The Birth Of John The Baptist

In the days of Herod, the king of Judea, one of the priests serving in the Temple at Jerusalem was a man called Zacharias and his wife was called Elizabeth. They were both very dedicated to the work of God and were righteous in the eyes of the Lord. They lived and walked in all the commandments of God blameless. This does not mean they never sinned or made mistakes in their life, for all human beings make mistakes at times. But their attitude of wanting to walk humbly with God and to keep His commandments meant that God forgave them their mistakes, remembered not their mistakes and so were in His eyes blameless.

This priest and his wife had no children, and now as they were getting very old, it certainly looked like they would never have any children. They had given up hope of ever expecting to have any children (Luke 1:5-7). But one day while he was doing his priestly work in the Temple, and the people were praying outside, an angel from the Lord appeared to him. He was very fearful and became troubled as to what this was all about.

The angel said to him, "Fear not Zacharias for your prayer has been heard by God, and your wife Elizabeth shall have a child, a male child, and you shall call him John. You both shall have joy and gladness, and many others will rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the eyes of the Lord. He shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from the time he is within his mother's stomach, before he is born. He shall help bring many of the children of Israel to walk in the ways of God, and shall speak as the prophet Elijah, with the same attitude of mind and power of life. At his preaching many people will be brought together to acknowledge what are the true values of life and family. Those many shall turn to the wisdom of the righteous and so a people will be prepared for the Lord to work with" (Luke 1:13-17).

The promise that this man John would come in the spirit and power of Elijah had been a promise and prophecy from the Lord hundreds of years before. The prophet Malachi (the last book of the Old Testament in most Bibles bears the name of this prophet Malachi) wrote about a man that would come in the likeness of the famous Elijah. Jesus Himself also reaffirmed that John fulfilled this Elijah prophecy in Matthew 17, which we shall come to later.

Zacharias wanted to believe what the angel had said. Oh, how his wife and he had wanted a son, so he really did want to believe the angel, yet Zacharias was a human man and he knew that both he and his wife were very old, and he knew his wife was

passed the years of being able to have a child. So he asked the angel how he might know that this miracle would take place.

"I am Gabriel, that stands in the very presence of God," said the angel, "and I have been sent to speak to you this truth and give you this good news. But if you need to have a sign, then this is what it shall be." The angel Gabriel continued to say, "You shall lose your voice and shall not be able to speak until the child is born, because you have doubted that which the Lord has promised to you and your wife" (Luke 1:18-20).

The appearance of the angel to Zacharias took some time, and so his stay inside the Temple was longer than usual, and the people outside knew that he was taking longer to fulfil his priestly duties. They marvelled at how long he was within the Temple. When he did come out they soon realized he could not speak to them, and by the look on his face and by his hand gestures they knew he had seen a miraculous vision of some sort in the Temple.

Zacharias continued to serve his allotted time in the Temple for that season of the year (the many priests took turns of a certain number of days to work in the Temple, what the Bible calls "order of his course" - Luke 1:8), and then returned home to his wife.

It was not long after he returned home that his wife Elizabeth got pregnant, and so was going to have a baby just as the angel from the Lord had announced to Zacharias.

Elizabeth was overjoyed, yet she stayed around home for five months, not telling anyone that she was going to have a child (Luke 1:23-25).

CHAPTER TWO

Announcement To Mary To Bear God's Son

God the Father had promised and prophesied many times in different ages under the Old Testament period that one day He would send a Messiah Savior to earth to not only live a holy sinless life, to show people the perfect ways of the Lord, but also to die for the sins of every person who has ever lived. This Savior would have to be more than just a human person as you and I are, in order to be able to take upon Himself the sins of every person. He would also have to be a God being in the family of God.

It was during the sixth month of Elizabeth carrying the baby John that God the Father would start to fulfil those many Old Testament prophecies concerning the one to come who would be a part of Himself, would be His very own Son, yet born of a physical woman, and in that way this Messiah would be both of the human family and the God family. It would all come about in such a manner that it would be a miracle never done before nor again after.

The angelic messenger Gabriel was sent to a town in the district of Galilee in Palestine, called Nazareth. He was to go to the cousin of Elizabeth, to a young lady called Mary, who was to be married to a man named Joseph. She had never been married, and had never slept with a man, so she was what we call a virgin.

Gabriel came to her and said, "Hello Mary. You are highly favored, and the Lord God is with you. You are very blessed among women."

When Mary saw the angel Gabriel she was troubled and perplexed. She wondered in her mind what these words from Gabriel meant. The angel could see that she was troubled by the words he spoke and went on to explain to her why God had favored her and what the blessing would be that she would receive.

"Fear not and be not upset Mary, for you have truly found favor with God. You shall become pregnant, have a baby growing inside of you, in your womb. The baby shall be a male child, and you shall call him Jesus (meaning Savior, someone who saves others). He shall be great, and shall also be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God shall give unto Him one day the throne of the ancient king David, whom you are descended from, and shall reign over the people of Jacob [Israel] for ever. And of His Kingdom there shall never be an end."

We have seen from the Bible Story of the Old Testament that Jacob was the father of 12 sons who became, through their descendants, the 12 tribes of Israel. David was later the second and most famous king of Israel. God had promised to him that his throne, his line of children, would always exist. And the most famous and by far the greatest of his line of children would be this promised Messiah Savior, whom today most of the world knows as Jesus Christ.

To this Jesus, God the Father had also promised Him the throne of king David and a Kingdom that would never end. There are many prophecies in the Old Testament that

confirm these two important promises to be given to Jesus one day. Those two promises were never realized or fulfilled in the physical lifetime of Jesus, but they still stand, yet to be given to Him sometime in the future.

Mary was now even more puzzled at all these words from Gabriel, telling him that she could not understand how this could come about, becoming pregnant with a child, for she was not married and had never slept with any man.

Gabriel answered her, and explained more, "The Holy Spirit, the very nature and power of God shall come upon you, work a miracle in your body, and you shall become pregnant with a holy child. This child shall not be from a physical man but a child from God, so He shall be called the Son of God."

The angel wanted Mary to know that for God there was nothing He could not do, and so went on to say, "Your cousin Elizabeth is very old, passed the years of normally being able to have a child, yet she is also pregnant with a baby, and this is the sixth month of her pregnancy. So you see, with God there is nothing that is impossible for Him to do."

Mary being a godly and faithful woman, now had trust and assurance in her heart that what Gabriel had told her would indeed come to pass, and be fulfilled just as God had said. She was happy and delighted to be the one whom the Lord God had chosen to bear His Son. She told the angel this and Gabriel then departed from her (Luke 1:26-38).

What a blessing indeed this was for Mary. I'm sure she must have been stunned and speechless for a few days, as she meditated and thought about these words from the angel Gabriel. God the Father would need a woman of outstanding service, loyalty, and spiritual dedication, to be the mother of His Son. Someone who would care and protect and guide His son in every physical and spiritual way. What an honor indeed to be the woman chosen by God to undertake this service and duty.

The honor is even more when we consider the very possible age of Mary when she would become the mother of the Son of the Most High. The Jewish society back then was much different than most of our nations of the western world today. It was the general practice and custom of the Jews in those days to marry very young. In fact it was looked upon as a family disgrace if the son was not married by age eighteen. And the young girls, or ladies of the family were often only in their middle teenage years when they married. So it is very probable that Mary was not yet out of her teens when Gabriel came to her with the wonderful news that she was the woman chosen by God to bear His son Jesus.

Mary must have truly been a wonderfully serious and dedicated woman in the ways of the Lord, living and loving Him with all of her heart, all of her life, and all of her mind.

Mary Goes To Visit Elizabeth

After the wonderment of all this had finally sunk into the mind of Mary, she was all excited and quickly wanted to visit Elizabeth her cousin. With speed she headed for the hill country of Judea and entered the home of Zacharias and Elizabeth.

As Mary entered the home and called out the usual greetings of those times and culture of Jewish society, the baby John in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy and Elizabeth was filled even more with the Holy Spirit, being inspired to know that Mary was carrying in her womb the very Lord Messiah. With a loud and electrifying voice Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women Mary, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. What an honor to have the mother of my Lord come to visit me, for as soon as your voice was heard in this house, greeting us, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And what a blessing that you believed what was told you from the Lord God."

In passing we can note here that the reaction of baby John in Elizabeth's womb, to the entering of Mary into the house, and the baby Jesus in her womb, shows that babies not yet born but still inside the mother's stomach, are little persons, who can have feelings and reactions of their own, independent from the mother. They are small living persons not just a kind of nothing mass of bones, blood, and skin, that people can kill and tear out of their body at the pleasure of their own heart and mind, as if it is a bothersome sore or pimple to get rid of.

Mary was also inspired by all this, and burst out in praise to God with these words, "My life does praise the Lord, and my mind does rejoice in God my Savior. For he has looked down upon His handmaid, and all generations will know I am blessed. He that is mighty has done great things in my life and body. He is truly Holy, and His mercy and love is indeed upon them that respectfully fear Him, from generation to generation. He can put down those who are proud and mighty in their own eyes, and exalt and set on high those of humble attitude of mind. Those who are hungry for good righteous things He fills, and those who think they are rich in knowledge He gives none of His truths to. He has been faithful with the promises He gave to Israel, and remembers His mercy that He said He would give to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his descendants forever."

Here we see some of the mindset attitude of this young lady Mary. An attitude of humbleness and a willingness to be filled with the true ways, the good ways of the Lord God. She was even as a young woman, a fine example of what a servant and child of God should be. And Mary stayed in the home of Elizabeth for about three months and then returned to her own household (Luke 1:39-56).

The Birth And Childhood Of John

At last the nine month period of pregnancy for Elizabeth had come to an end and it was time to bring forth her boy into the world for all to see. All went well in her delivery and many of her neighbors and cousins rejoiced with her, knowing that God had performed great mercy towards her in her old age by giving her and Zacharias a son.

As was the law of God the parents came on the eighth day to circumcise the child. And as was also the common custom of the day, the child was going to be given the name of his father. He was going to be called Zacharias. But his mother protested and said, "No, he is not to be called Zacharias, but he is to be called John."

The people around were taken a back by this, for there was not one in the immediate descent of the family that was called by the name of John, and calling a child by a name

that none in the family was called was just not done in those days. The people looked at Zacharias, making signs to him with their hands, for as yet Zacharias could still not speak. They wanted to know what he had to say on this matter of the naming of the child.

Zacharias asked for a writing tablet which was brought to him. He wrote, "His name shall be called John." Everyone just marvelled at this whole thing. It was not the way it was usually done. As soon as Zacharias wrote those words God performed another miracle, as He immediately gave him his voice back, which he used right away to praise God.

You can imagine the scene. Many were there who were there when Zacharias came out of the Temple about nine months earlier not able to speak, and now when Zacharias officially named the baby with the name of John (according as Gabriel the angel had said he was to be named nine months earlier), his voice was restored to him and he could speak once again. A fear of God came upon all that stood there, and what had taken place was told to others all over the hill country of Judea.

People that heard all this began to wonder and think about what this child John would do in his lifetime. They knew something special was to become of this child. Indeed it was to be so, and the hand of the Lord was with John, for the Lord did have a special work for him to perform later in his life.

God inspired Zacharias at that time to speak forth that which was the overall teaching and promises of the Lord by the holy prophets from the Old Testament.

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has come to visit and to redeem His people, and has raised up salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as was spoken by His holy prophets from old time. That we should be saved from our enemies, and from those who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to us from the time of our ancient fathers, to remember His covenant and the oath which He swore to our father Abraham. To grant us deliverance from our enemies, so we could serve Him without fear. To serve Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life."

As we read these words spoken by Zacharias we could be puzzled by them somewhat. For, even today, two thousand years later, the Jews are not delivered from their enemies and from those who hate them. Over in the land of Palestine there is still much trouble, fighting, killing, and hate going on between the Jews, the Arabs, and the Palestinians.

Yes, God had given a promise, a covenant, and swore by an oath to people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (the great fathers of the Jews and people of Israel) that one day the children of Israel would be fully and completely delivered from their enemies to serve God in holiness and righteousness, without any fear of being persecuted or killed. Many of the prophets of the Old Testament have so written also. God will in His time bring all those promised to pass. The ancient prophets show that the literal fulfillment of those promises and of what Zacharias was saying, will not take place until Jesus the Messiah comes again in power and glory to set up the Kingdom of God on earth. Then

the people of Israel will be delivered from the fear of hate and killing that often comes from their enemies.

So how are we then to understand these words of Zacharias in the context of the birth of this man-child John?

We are to understand them in a "spiritual" sense, that the time had come for God to work a wonderful work of salvation in many of the lives of the Jews and people of Israel. Many were to be delivered from all the mental and emotional sorrow of the mind, from the inner fear of the heart. They would find deliverance from sin and guilt, so they could live with peace in their mind, to serve God in holiness and righteousness.

This understanding is clearly what Zacharias wanted to convey to the people there at that time and to us today, as we read the remaining words that he spoke.

"And you child (referring to John) shall be known as the prophet of the Most High; for you shall go before the Lord (Jesus the Messiah) to prepare His ways. To give the knowledge of salvation to His people, the forgiveness of their sins, through the loving mercies of our God. When the day them comes from on high to give light to those who are in darkness and in the shadow of death. To then guide our feet into the way of peace."

Ah yes, the wonderful promised time had arrived when God the Father was about to fulfil the sending of His Son to earth to take upon Himself the sins of the whole world, so His mercy could be given to all those who would be called to receive it. So many in Israel and in all other nations could find the forgiveness of their sins, and be guided into the way of salvation and peace of heart and mind.

In this plan of God, it had been decreed that a human man would go before the coming of the Messiah Savior, to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all who would listen. To prepare the hearts of some for the coming of the Son of God, and the true spiritual deliverance He would bring. This prophet of the Lord God to go before the Messiah Jesus, was to be this child called John.

And so it came about as we have just read. And this child John grew and became strong in his mind for the truths and the ways of the Almighty God. And he lived most of his life in the outdoors and the wilderness, until the day came to go forth to preach and teach the word of God to the people.

CHAPTER THREE

An Angel Comes To Joseph

Mary was engaged to be married to a man called Joseph, who was descended from the famous king David we can read about in the Old Testament. As we read the account in the Gospel of Matthew chapter one, it also says that Joseph was Mary's "husband" and Mary was his "wife" but also that Mary was engaged to Joseph, which means to us in the western world that she was not yet Joseph's wife, only engaged or promised to him as to be his wife one day. This all seems contradictory and hard to understand. The truth of the matter all comes clear when we understand the laws and customs of marriage in the Jewish society of Joseph's and Mary's day.

The marriage customs of those days in Jewish life were very different from our customs today. When a couple were engaged or promised in marriage to each other, unlike our custom, they were already looked upon as married (even though they had not yet had a wedding day ceremony and they were not living together in the same house or sleeping together in the same bed). Even if the man should die before they came together on the wedding day and started to live together after that day, then the woman was looked upon and even called a "widow."

The engagement of two people back in those days among the Jews was a lawful marriage. If the man for some reason wanted to break the engagement and not have a wedding day and not want to live with the woman, he was obliged to have to give her an official divorce, written on paper.

So, under Jewish law in those times, an engaged couple were also officially and legally looked upon as "husband" and "wife" to each other. It was often many months later that the actual wedding day occurred, which was often not just a day but a week (seven days in length) of celebrations.

Although they were legally husband and wife during the engagement period, the man and woman did not come together to sleep in the same bed and live in the same house, until the wedding day.

This may all seem very odd to us today, but that was the way couples were married back then in the Jewish society of those days. With that background we can now understand the words of Matthew when he wrote:

".....Mary had been betrothed (or engaged) to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child (pregnant, carrying a baby inside her) of the Holy Spirit (Joseph had no idea it was a miracle from God, but thought Mary had slept with another man, and was pregnant from him). And her husband Joseph, (being kind and merciful) a righteous man, was unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly (Matt. 1:18-19).

It was also within the laws of the Jews that if a woman was unfaithful to her husband, she could be publicly announced as breaking the 7th of the great Ten Commandments

of the Lord, as found in Exodus 20. Under the Old Covenant such a woman could be put to death by stoning. All of that would certainly have "put her to shame."

It was also a point of the old laws of Moses under the Old Testament, to be merciful at times. Many forgot that part of the writings of the Old Testament, but Joseph being a righteous and just man, a man who knew all the teachings of the Old Testament, had not forgotten those laws and precepts of showing kindness and mercy, and was determined to act with mercy towards Mary. He would divorce her with no public declaration and humiliating commotion or hullabaloo, but in a quiet and private way.

As Joseph was thinking Mary was pregnant from another man, and considering he would then divorce her, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said:

"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife and have your wedding day and live with her, for that which is conceived in her womb is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus (meaning, to save) for He will save many of His people from their sins. All this is in fulfillment of what God has spoken through the prophets of old: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called Immanuel (which means, God with us) ' (Matthew 1:20-23). This prophecy is found in the book of Isaiah, chapter seven and verse fourteen.

Joseph woke from his dream and knew that the Lord God had spoken the truth to him about the situation with Mary and her being with child, not from another human man but from God Himself. So with faith and confidence he did as the angel commanded and went ahead with the planned wedding day and living with Mary his wife. But until after the baby Jesus was born he did not sleep with Mary nor have sexual relations with her (Matt.1:24,25).

Jesus Is Born At Bethlehem

In those days when Mary was carrying the baby Jesus, the Jews were under the domain and governing authority of the mighty Roman Empire and the great Caesar Augustus. He was the Emperor or what today might be called the President (if living in such a country as the United States of America). His first name was Octavianus. He was nephew of the very famous Julius Caesar of Roman Empire history. He obtained the rulership of the Empire after Julius' death. He took the name Augustus (meaning honorable or mighty) as a compliment to his own greatness in his eyes. And it is from him that we get our month in the Roman calendar called August, which before him was called Sextilis. He thought he was so great that a month in the Roman calendar should be named after himself.

During the months Mary was pregnant, Caesar Augustus sent forth a commandment that all the Jews in Palestine should be enrolled. In some old translations of the English language of the New Testament, it is given as a commandment to be "taxed." To us today we think of "tax" as money given by the people of a nation to the government of that nation, so that government can use it to do certain things with, such as running the public school systems or paying the wages for the police or firemen. But in the original language of Greek that the New Testament was written in, that is not the meaning.

It means rather, to "enroll" or to take a list of the citizens with their employment, the amount of their property, etc., equivalent or the same as to what we mean today by taking a "census" which most nations do from time to time. As most adults know, in a "census taking" the nation will often ask many questions, some get so personal that many people are offended by it all, and think the government is getting too nose-y in people's lives and business affairs.

Well, whatever else this enrollment was all about, Caesar Augustus demanded the male heads of households go to their original home city of their family tree line. Joseph then had to travel to Bethlehem, near Jerusalem, because he was from the family line of king David, who was from Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16).

In talking about this enrollment, Luke, the author of the Gospel that bears his name, uses a phrase that we need to always keep and understand within its context. He says, "Caesar Augustus decreed that 'the whole world' should be enrolled."

The clear fact is, as proven from historical sources, that of course people living in China, North or South America, people on the African continent, or in India, as well as many other parts of the whole earth at the time, did not come to Palestine, to be "enrolled."

This was a decree and commandment for the Jews of Palestine only. Such a phrase as used by Luke, in a specific context use, really means "all the people of the land." The land being that of Palestine, or the Jews within the lands of the Roman empire. So all the male heads of household went to the town of their family descent to be counted and enrolled (Luke 2:1-4).

As we continue to read in the account by Luke, we see that Joseph took Mary with him from Nazareth in the area of Galilee, to Bethlehem near Jerusalem, not a short distance. Mary was in her ninth month of pregnancy, very close to giving birth to the child Jesus. There were no quick ways to travel in those days. No airplanes, no buses, or trains, or cars. Travel in those times on land, for people such as Joseph and Mary was either by foot or on donkey. Mary did not need to go with Joseph to be enrolled under Augustus' command. So why then did Joseph take Mary all that way to Bethlehem?

The answer probably lies, as many have seen, in two main areas. Firstly, the Jews came to Jerusalem to keep the feasts of God, and, second, there was the will of God and the prophecies that God had given in the Old Testament prophets about where the child Jesus would be born, in the town of Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2).

Going back to the first reason mentioned (Jewish religious festival practices), many Bible scholars and those who study Bible chronology (putting events into time frames of the year or years all events were within) have seen that Jesus was not born on December the twenty-fifth or even in the month of December. They have come to see that Jesus was born around the great Jewish feast of Tabernacles.

They have come to see that it was certainly during the fall Festival days of the seventh month on the Jewish calendar (from about the time of the Feast of Trumpets to the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, see Leviticus 23) that Jesus was most likely born in

Bethlehem. This would correspond to our September/October months on our Roman calendar we use in most of the western Christian world.

This being the case, as most Bible scholars now admit, then it becomes clearer as to why Mary also went with Joseph to Bethlehem near Jerusalem for this enrollment. Bethlehem was less than a days walking distance from Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary would also observe the great fall Festivals on the Jewish calendar at the same time as Joseph would enroll in Bethlehem as decreed by Caesar Augustus.

It was a long tiring journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem for both Joseph and Mary, but especially for Mary, yet they knew this was God's child Mary was carrying, and they had faith the Lord would protect and give them strength in this undertaking. Joseph was wanting to give Mary a nice restful room and bed in the local Inn or Hotel as we would call it today, with a soothing hot bath and some good food prepared and cooked by the Hotel staff. But, as it was the fall festival time, Jerusalem and the surrounding towns were overflowing with people from all parts of Palestine and even various far away places of the Roman empire where many Jews had settled, and who travelled to Jerusalem to observe the Feasts of the Lord.

There was no room for them in any of the Inns in Bethlehem. Desperate for any reasonable warm and dry place for Mary to rest, Joseph asked if there was anyone who could offer any place for them to stay.

"I'm sorry I have no room for you in my home," said one man, "My house is just jam packed with relatives, but.....well I'm kind of embarrassed to say it.....I do have a stable. I know a stable is a pretty poor substitute for a room in an Inn or home, especially when your wife is close to giving birth, yet, it is warm and dry. You are welcome to bed down there, if you cannot find a room in a house somewhere."

"Thank you kindly," replied Joseph, "yes, we will take your offer as it seems there is no room anywhere in any Inn or home in Bethlehem. And my wife needs to lie down and rest even if it is on a bed of straw. The warmth and dryness will be appreciated." So with smiles and thankful hearts Joseph and Mary made their way to the strangers stable of hospitality.

And while they were there the time came for Mary to give birth to the baby Jesus. This would be Mary's firstborn son as Luke recorded, for she and Joseph did have more children later on as they lived a normal life as husband and wife.

Among the lowly stable animals, no relatives or friends of Joseph and Mary being there with them, the Son of God came into this world as a human being. It was no fancy home, or large richly decorated and furnished palace that Jesus was born in and breathed His first breath of air. It was in an animal stable where He was born, maybe dry and warm but an animal stable nevertheless.

The Son of God, the King of kings, the one to rule and govern this whole earth one day, was born in a straw laden stable among a bunch of animals. Now that is a lesson in humbleness if there ever was one. And that is taking greatness and still being down to earth with it. Greatness does not have to be surrounded with pomp and material

splendor. Greatness is what you are with God and how you serve Him and your fellow mankind. And as we shall see the baby Jesus grew up to be the greatest of any human in both of those areas of life, setting us the perfect example.

There was no splendid hospital bed or crib for God's Son. Mary took Him and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, a blanket or whatever cloths she and Joseph had brought with them from Nazareth. And laid Him in a manger, the part of the stable where the hay and other foods for horses and donkeys are put for them to eat from.

But the God of heaven was not about to let the birth of His Son go completely without notice and praise from at least a few. Oh, it was not going to be announced on worldwide TV or make headlines in every newspaper in all nations of the world. He was not going to send millions of angels flying around the earth to announce the birth of His Son to all peoples on earth, which He could have done. Yet He would send an angel to let a few people know about this miracle birth.

An Angel Sent To Nearby Shepherds

Yes, sent to shepherds, not to some wealthy, famous, or powerful people at all, but to common everyday shepherds watching over their flocks out in the field, as Luke records.

They were still at this time of the year out in the fields, the flocks and the shepherds. This also proves the time of year was not December, for it is too cold in Palestine in December to still have the flocks of sheep out in the fields. The shepherds bring their flocks in from the fields before the month of December arrives.

"Look, what on earth is that up there in the sky?" shouted one shepherd with excitement in his voice.

"I see something also," exclaimed another shepherd, "but I must be going crazy. I have to be seeing things."

"Oh, it is something very terrible I think," added yet a third shepherd.

"We are all going to die," a fourth shepherd chimed in with trembling in his voice.

A magnificent and exceedingly bright light shone all around them. It was as if it was the sun shining in full strength on a cloudless day. Great fear came sweeping into their hearts as they all felt sure they had not long to live.

"Fear not," said the angel, "for, behold I bring you good news of wonderful joy, which shall be good for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ (meaning in the Greek language "anointed") the Lord. And this shall be a sign for you; You shall find the babe wrapped in everyday blankets, lying in a stable manger."

Suddenly, out of nowhere it seemed, the shepherds could see that there appeared with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is well pleased."

God the Father took note of the day of His Son's birth. To Him it was a very blessed day, for the potential that could arise from the life of Jesus was like nothing that the whole universe had ever experienced before. The potential of this one life, this Immanuel life, this God with us in the flesh life, would mean that many millions of others could one day reach the potential that they were created for, to become very sons and daughters in the family of God.

After the angels were gone from them back into heaven, the shepherds busily talked among themselves and they all decided they wanted to walk over to Bethlehem and to see for themselves that which the Lord had made known to them. They went as quickly as they could. We are not told how many stables, if more than one, that there was in Bethlehem, or how long it took them to find the correct stable, but we are told they did find it, where Joseph and Mary were, and indeed found the babe Jesus lying in a manger.

After seeing the factual truth of what the angels had said to them, the shepherds immediately began telling others in Bethlehem what the angels had told them about this new born child, and many who heard all this kept the words in their heart and mind, and wondered what it could all mean. Mary also was one who would never let anything slip out of her mind, but would ponder on them often over the following years to come.

The shepherds returned finally to their jobs of watching over sheep, but they returned glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them (Luke 2:8-20).

CHAPTER FOUR

Joseph And Mary Perform The Temple Rituals

As prescribed in the laws of Moses in the Old Testament when the eighth day arrived after the birth of the child Jesus, Joseph and Mary made sure He was circumcised, and at that time the babe was officially named "Jesus" (as we have seen, meaning, one who saves), as the angel from the Lord had said to them that He should be so named. Having a male child circumcised on the eighth day was in accordance to Leviticus 12:1-3.

The laws of Moses further prescribed that if a woman gave birth to a male child, she should continue in her body's blood cleansing, the healing and restoring of her body back to a more normal condition as when not carrying and giving birth to a baby, for another 33 days. During that time she was not to come into the Temple or Tabernacle to participate in the ritual religious practices of Israel as given by God from the days of Moses. This law is found in Leviticus 12:4.

Also in the laws of Moses for the people to observe was a law that if the first child that a woman gave birth to, was a male, then he was to be dedicated to the Lord. Originally he was to be given to serve the Lord in the physical work of God in the religious life of Israel, working in the Tabernacle. Then God decided to have one tribe of Israel, the tribe of Levi, to do all that work and be the priests to serve in the Temple. All this can be seen from Exodus 13:1-2,12-16; 22:29; Numbers 8:15-17.

The firstborn of males among the animals could not be redeemed or bought back, but were to be offered in sacrifice to the Lord (except for those born to unclean animals, as noted in Numbers 18:15). The firstborn of male children were to be redeemed, by using other offerings, so they did not automatically have to serve in the physical work of God.

The reason for all this is stated by God in Exodus 13:14-16. It may seem a little strange to us today, but under the circumstances as to how and what God did in order to bring the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage and slavery, to the Israelites back in the days of Moses and for other generations to come afterwards, it was a constant reminder of the miracle God performed in delivering them from Egyptian domain and slavery.

As we have said, God then decided to take the males of the tribe of Levi to serve in His physical work in the Tabernacle or Temple, as we find in passages such as Numbers 3:11-13, 41, 44, 45; 8:13-22; 18:6.

Joseph and Mary came then to the Temple in Jerusalem not only to have the baby Jesus circumcised on the eighth day after His birth, but came again to redeem and dedicate Him to the Lord, after another 33 days had gone by. With that dedication they offered a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons according as it is written in the laws of the Lord, for those who were not able to offer a lamb for whatever reasons. This was all allowed for in the law of Leviticus 12:8.

From this passage as written in the Gospel of Luke (chapter 2:21-24) we see that Joseph and Mary stayed in the area of Jerusalem for at least 40 days and maybe longer, before they left and returned to their own town of Nazareth in the region of Galilee (note verse 39).

The wise men from the East had not yet come to pay respects to the child Jesus. We shall see shortly that it was not till after Joseph and Mary with the new born Son of God, had returned to Nazareth, that the wise men arrived in search of the new child to pay homage and present their gifts.

In The Temple With Simeon

Joseph and Mary had entered the Temple enclosure to perform the ceremonial rites and sacrifices as ordained in the laws of Moses. Unknown to them there was also another man within the Temple grounds by the name of Simeon. He was a very devoutly religious man, righteously following the ways of the Lord God, and was looking for the comfort and salvation of Israel that God had promised in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Holy Spirit had been upon Simeon for a long time. In fact so close to God was he and so dedicated to serving Him that the Holy Spirit of the Lord had already revealed to him that he was not going to die until he had seen with his eyes the very man child that was the Son of God, the Lord's Christ or Messiah, the Anointed One (Luke 2:25-27).

Simeon saw Joseph and Mary with the little babe Jesus and through the revelation of the Holy Spirit guiding him, he knew immediately that this baby was the Lord's Anointed One, the Messiah.

His heart started to pound inside his chest, great joy and excitement overwhelmed his mind, walking over to Joseph he politely asked if he could hold the baby in his arms, and Joseph replied that he could.

Simeon, taking the baby Jesus in his arms, and looking up to heaven with praise, said, "Lord, now I am ready to die in peace. You have fulfilled your promise towards me. I have seen the Savior that you have brought into this world for salvation to all people. He is the light to the nations, and is the glory of your people Israel. "

Both Joseph and Mary, although they had seen and been told many things by the angels sent to them, were still in some amazement on hearing the words of Simeon.

Then under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Simeon blessed them both. Afterwards he turned and looking more at Mary than Joseph, said, "This child will be rejected by many in Israel, and so it will be their undoing and loss. But He will be the greatest joy to many others. The deepest thoughts and attitudes of minds will be revealed. A sword of mental pain will pierce your very life."

Mary would have seen how true and how drastically that prophecy of Simeon came to pass as she later would have to suffer the mental and emotional pain of seeing her firstborn, the Son of God, put to death in a most horrible manner. But before trying to

relate that event in human words, there is much to recall and expound to you about the life and the teachings of God's Messiah. We shall come to how He died much later.

Anna The Prophetess

The Lord, in doing His work and proclaiming His truths, would sometimes give a special spiritual gift to some women. Those women could often see ahead of time, certain events that were to happen. Sometimes God would give them a special message that they were to tell His people about or pass on to other leaders of His people. Then on the other hand the Eternal God would just inspire them to preach His truths to others in a dynamic way. These women are called "prophetesses" as a group, or "prophetess" as a single person, in the pages of the Bible.

Such a prophetess there was in Jerusalem when Joseph and Mary came to the Temple with the baby Jesus.

Her name was Anna. She came from the tribe of Asher, one of 10 northern tribes of Israel, known as the House of Israel in the books of Kings and Chronicles and in the prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi. She descended from the few who escaped the captivity under the Assyrian armies that progressively took the northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity from around 745 to 718 B.C.

Some of the northern people of the House of Israel fled to the south and became a part of the Kingdom of Judah. The descendants of Anna were some of those who came to live in Judea. She was the daughter of Phanuel, but nothing is recorded about him in the New Testament, except he was of the tribe of Asher.

Anna, it is recorded was of "great age." She had been married to a husband for seven years from the time of her virginity, which is another way of saying from the day of her wedding and marriage. Somehow she lost her husband, but we are not told under what circumstances she lost him and became a widow. The word "widow" is given to a lady who was married but lost her husband in some way.

As we have seen, most young women in the Jewish society of that time, were married in their teenage years, often in their middle teens. If this was the case with Anna, then she may have been around the age of twenty-two or twenty-four when she lost her husband.

The Greek in Luke 2:37 can be understood as saying she had been a widow for eighty-four years, or, being a widow she was now eighty-four years old. If the first understanding be the correct one then Anna could have been over one hundred years old. This is not out of the question, for an increasing number of people today in North America are living to be over a hundred years of age. If the second understanding is the correct one, we can still see that the age of eighty-four could be termed "great age" especially to younger people and children who have not yet even become adults.

It is stated by Luke that at this old aged Anna did not depart from the Temple, probably meaning that it was her daily way of life to be in the Temple each day. She was in constant worship to the Lord with fastings and prayers night and day, which is again a

way of saying that she had dedicated her life to doing lots of fasting (missing meals during the week) and spending much of her day and evenings in prayer

She must have been in fine physical strength to live this kind of lifestyle, most of us feel pretty weak in the knees after missing just one meal now and again. Well, I'm sure she was given strength from the Almighty to dedicate herself in this manner as she served Him as one of His prophetesses.

Anna, coming into the Temple when Joseph and Mary were there with Jesus, instantly knew that this baby was God's Anointed One, the promised Messiah. She immediately started to praise the Lord God. And Luke also records another very important job that Anna then performed. She went out and shared the good news of the man child that would bring saving redemption and salvation to the people of Jerusalem and others from around the world.

Luke records that Anna, "spoke of Him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." This tells us a few things we need to take note of. Anna did not necessarily go up and down the streets of Jerusalem knocking on every door of every house, to preach God's truth to them. She spoke of this Jesus the Messiah to all that were of the mind of God and who were looking for the redeeming Savior that God had promised was to come. She was speaking in a personal way to people who were spiritually minded about the things of God.

And this example also shows us that if there are times when God works with us in a special way, in clearly revealing His will and way and promises to us, then we should get excited and enthusiastic, and share it with other members of the Church of God, or those looking for and desiring to know the word of the Lord.

When Joseph and Mary had performed all the laws of Moses, which were the laws of God given under the leadership of Moses, it is said that they returned into Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. We have seen this was at least 40 days after the birth of Jesus. Up to this time the wise men from the East had not yet arrived in Jerusalem. Indeed they would come from the East to inquire of Herod the king where this Christ child was, but not till after Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had returned to Nazareth. They did not find the infant that was born to be King of kings and Lord of lords in a stable as did the shepherds. All this we shall see in chapter five.

Luke finished this part of his Gospel by telling us that Jesus, while in Nazareth growing up, grew in physical health and strength, that He was filled with wisdom, and the favor and grace of God was upon Him (Luke 2:36-40).

CHAPTER FIVE

Eastern Wise Men Come To Jerusalem

It was Matthew (who was the author of the Gospel that bears his name) who was inspired to record for us the coming of the wise men from the East to Jerusalem to inquire about the one born to be king of the Jews.

We do not know from where they came in the East, some have speculated from which nations or nation they may have come from, but there is nothing in the Bible or secular history that shows in any certain manner where in the East these wise men made their homes.

Nor do we know how many wise men there were. Just because three gifts are mentioned that they finally present to Joseph and Mary and Jesus, does not prove that it was three wise men only, it may have been more.

They arrived in Jerusalem asking where this child, that they understood to be born to be a king, was to be found. They had come to worship him they said, and they told people they had seen this King's star in the East.

We now have a question as to what was this "star" that they saw. A few have written technical studies trying to show at that time in history there was a great physical "star" phenomenon in the heavenly sky over the East and over Palestine. It may be hard to understand how a physical star in the heavens could eventually come and rest over the dwelling place where Jesus lived, as Matthew records. But it may be possible if you are skilled in the movements of the stars in the heavens and if God had sent a special meteor type star to guide them to the Christ child.

On the other hand the first chapters of the book of Revelation use the word "star" to represent "angels" of the Lord.

Could it have been that God sent an angel, which to the wise men looked like a star in the sky, to guide them to the very place where Jesus was now living? Yes, it could be possible that is how the Lord God did it.

Either way, we know God's guiding hand was in all of this, to bring the wise men from the East to worship this new born king that was named Jesus. And further, the wise men must have had some earlier knowledge from some source that a special king was to be born in the region of Jerusalem, in Palestine. It may have been possible that they had copies of the Hebrew Old Testament as we call it today.

The Jews had been in captivity in Babylon and many did not return to Palestine with Ezra and Nehemiah about five hundred years earlier, but chose to live in other parts of the known world. Some may have gone further east and taken their Holy Scriptures with them. Hence, others coming into contact with those Jews could have had access to God's known word of that time. They could have read and understood the prophecies

concerning the human birth of the Messiah and the area of the world He was to be born in.

Part of why they were called "wise men" by Matthew may have been because they were wise in the understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Well, these men from the East arrived in Jerusalem asking about this child born to be king, and when the one who was ruling as king over Judea, Herod the king as he was called, heard this questioning from these men, he was naturally very troubled, upset, and not a little disconcerted. He thought his power and might and authority was going to be challenged and ripped away from him, by someone who was to grow up and lead the Jews in revolt against himself.

All Jerusalem, Matthew states, was also troubled by the questions from these men of the East. So troubled was Herod that he called for the Jewish chief priests and scribes (kind of lawyers of the day) to inquire of them where their Scriptures said this Christ was to be born. They told him that the town of Bethlehem was the place that the prophets of old had said He was to be born or to come from. This was foretold by the prophet Micah. We can see that prophecy in the book that is called after him, chapter five and verse two. The prophecy reads:

"And you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel; whose going forth and living have been from old, from everlasting (or as the Hebrew can read, the days of eternity)."

This also shows us why Isaiah said the Jesus child would also be Immanuel, which word means "God with us." For He existed as God, a member of the Godhead or family of God before His human birth. He truly was from the days of eternity. The first chapter of the Gospel of John also bears witness to this truth, that the one we know as Jesus existed as God yet with God (the one we now call the Father) before He came to earth to be born of a woman called Mary (Matthew 2:1-6).

Maybe you, or your parents reading this to you, would like to stop here for a moment, and read the first part of the first chapter of the Gospel of John.

Herod Secretly Talks To The Wise Men

Herod was a cunning and crafty king, he sent for the wise men by secret and brought them to himself without anyone in Jerusalem knowing. He wanted to ascertain from them what time in the past they saw the star. Oh, how nice and sweet he talked to them, just as sweet as honey. He made out that he was on their side, telling them, "You go to Bethlehem, for I am told he should be there, search diligently for the child, and then when you have found him, bring me word of where he is there, so I can come also and worship him."

King Herod had no intention at all in wanting to worship the child Jesus. He had much darker and more evil plans as to what he would do to Jesus if he could find where He was.

The wise men departed from Herod, and no sooner were they getting ready to leave Jerusalem, when the star once more appeared to them. They could see it was moving and leading them further and further away from the city of Jerusalem. Finally it came to stop over the very place where Jesus was dwelling.

Matthew records, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy, and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother and they bowed down and worshipped Him."

We have already seen that Luke recorded that after the Temple rituals had been performed for the birth of a firstborn man child, Joseph and Mary returned to their home town of Nazareth, way north of Jerusalem, in the region of Galilee. The baby Jesus is now called a "child" and the wise men go into a "house" not a stable. All this (and something else that we shall note shortly) bears evidence that the wise men did not come from the East until sometime later, when Jesus was no longer a baby but thought of as a child, and was living in the home or house of Joseph and Mary in Nazareth.

Well, the wise men had finally found the one they had come looking for, the one born to be king of the Jews.

They had brought treasures with them, and opening their containers they offered and gave three gifts, the first being that of "gold." Now, pure gold is one of the most incorruptible substances on the earth. It can rest in water for hundreds, even thousands of years and never rust or decay.

The life of this Christ child would be pure gold so to speak. He would never do any wrong in actions, in thoughts, or in words. He would be always purely incorruptible, what the New Testament calls sinless. It is written that Jesus never sinned, no not once.

The wise men gave the gift of "frankincense." The Hebrew word is "lebona" and is a whitish, greasy, sticky, gum resin substance from a bush type plant that especially grows in Persia, east of Palestine, It was one of the constituents of the sacred incense that was burnt on the altar in the Temple. By itself it has a pungent odor and taste, but which, when mixed with fragrant substances, has the effect of increasing the odor and keeping the then fragrant smell lasting longer.

Jesus was to endure forever as the first begotten and first born Son of God the Father. His life on the sacrificial altar was to be an everlasting sweet smelling odor to God.

The third gift that the wise men gave was that of "myrrh." The Hebrew is "mor" which means distilling. The Greek is "smyrna" which we translate as "myrrh." It is a well-known gum resin extracted from the Arabian "Balsamoderndron Myrrha." It was used as a perfume for embalming, and as an ingredient of the holy anointing oil.

This was to represent the lovely smell to God the Father that the death (embalming was done to the body of the dead to help preserve it for a while and to see that the body decayed in a nice smelling way) of Jesus would bring for His plan of the salvation of mankind to His glory.

The plan of the Almighty could be carried out in no other way than that a God type person should come as a human to live a perfect life, to take the sins of mankind upon Himself and to sacrifice Himself in death for those sins. We shall talk a lot more about all this when we near the end of the Gospels which record the facts and the reasons of the death of Jesus.

The wise men, being deceived by the cunning king Herod, would have returned to him to inform him of the location of this child Jesus, but an angel from the Lord came to them in a dream to warn them of the real intent of Herod (the intent being to kill the child).

So once that was explained to them they departed for their homeland another way, and never saw or spoke to king Herod again (Matthew 2:7-12).

Herod Kills The Children Two Years Old And Under

Back at Herod's palace, the king is walking the floor with more and more agitation as the days pass by in which the wise men do not return to him with information as to the whereabouts of the boy born to be king of the Jews.

"I am King Herod, look what I've done for these Jews. I've built them a great and magnificent Temple here in Jerusalem, as well as other fine buildings around Palestine. And what do I find? They claim their Scriptures say a child is to be born to them in Bethlehem who is to be king of the Jews. I am their king, they will have no other."

More days passed by and still the wise men did not return. Finally Herod knew he had been tricked and that they would not return with the information he so desperately wanted.

"I will show these Jews," he shouted as his face grew red with anger, "I will show them who has the power and who will be their only king," he continued in his now furious rage. With his hands trembling in fuming hateful thoughts, and the veins of his neck protruding in stark enlargement, Herod shouted out that the chiefs of his army should come to him immediately. On entering his presence they heard these chilling words from his mouth.

"The men from the East said they saw a star of this child king about two years ago. You will take some of our soldiers and go to the city of Bethlehem and the region round about, and they will kill all the male children that are two years old and under."

Even those hardened men of war were taken aback and stunned by this command they had to carry out, but they knew it was either carry out his demand or they would lose their own heads by the sword. They felt they had no choice but to comply and do as Herod commanded.

So it was done. All the male children from the age of two and under in the region of Bethlehem were put to death by the order of king Herod, in his hope that one of the dead children would be this child the Jews claimed was born to be their king.

It is hard to imagine the weeping and anguish of mothers and entire families where all male children under two years old were put to death. It had been foretold by the prophet Jeremiah. God had known beforehand it would happen, and the great prophet Jeremiah under inspiration from the Lord had spoken of it when he had said:

"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud sorrow. Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they were no more alive."

But Herod could not fight against the Almighty God, who knew the intentions of his evil heart. After the wise men from the East had departed, God had sent an angel to tell Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt because Herod was planning and hoping to kill the child (Matthew 2:13-14). All this was also fulfilling the prophecy of Hosea 11:1 that had said, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." God knew that Herod would have then killed babies in Nazareth after the ones he killed in Bethlehem when he eventually found out that was where the wise men went to.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were now safe in the land of Egypt, when king Herod killed the children of two years and under. It was not that many months later when the king suddenly died. Probably the hand of the Lord was in that untimely death of his. Well, upon it happening, an angel from the Lord once more appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, "Pack up your things Joseph, and take the child and His mother back to the land of Israel, for those who wanted to kill the child are dead."

Joseph was pleased to hear this news and quickly did as the angel instructed. He was thinking it would be nice to settle in the area of Judea, somewhat near Jerusalem, but on hearing that Archelaus, the son of Herod, was now reigning in Judea in place of his father, he decided it was better to live outside of the region of Judea. Joseph decided his old stomping ground of the city of Nazareth would be the best place to raise this child of God.

No doubt the Lord God was inspiring him to make this decision for it had been prophesied by the old prophets that Jesus was to be called a Nazarene, meaning one who was from the city or town of Nazareth (Judges 13:5).

As we look at this prophecy in the book of Judges, it is hard to relate it to the time of Jesus, but the nature of some prophecies can have a number of different applications down through the centuries. Obviously this one in Judges is a case in point (Matthew 2:13-23).

Jesus At The Passover At Age Twelve

We are told nothing about the life of Jesus or Joseph and Mary, from the time they returned to the land of Palestine from Egypt, until they all as a family, went to Jerusalem to observe the Passover when Jesus was twelve years old. This account is recorded for us in Luke 2:41-50.

We can be assured that Mary would have raised the child Jesus in the very best Jewish manner, as to schooling and religious education. I think we can correctly assume that

Jesus' childhood life was without any great noticeable declaration. He was probably like many other Jewish boys of His time, enjoying His education both in secular and religious studies, as well as the fun of the great outdoors. We are not told that He did any miracles or tried to manifest any super-natural power as a child and young adult, hence it is likely He did not. Yet, as the Son of God, who was sinless all His life, His thoughts, words, and actions, as a child would have been noticed by adults, I'm sure. Most people will take note of a child that is outstandingly mannerly, polite, kind, thoughtful, respectful of adults, and self-controlled in actions and words.

Joseph and Mary made it a custom to attend and celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem each year in the spring time, when the Passover feast is celebrated. This is one of the 7 great festivals of the Lord as outlined and described in Leviticus 23.

This time when they were leaving to return to Nazareth, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. For the first day of the journey they did not miss Him. We might wonder why this was. When we read in Luke that they sought for Him among their kinsfolk and friends, we are perhaps given the answer. There were many of Joseph's and Mary's family relatives as well as close friends with them on this journey.

The Jewish people tend even today, to be a very close knit group of people. It is natural for them, especially blood related family members, to mingle with each other, as one large family. Joseph and Mary simply thought Jesus was somewhere within the larger family of their relations and friends, and so did not get concerned until after the first day had gone by. Jesus not returning to be with them for the night (without asking) was something He obviously did not do before in His life as a child, so then they missed Him and went looking for Him.

Jesus could not be found among any of their relatives or friends. There was only one other place they could think of where He might be. That place was the city of Jerusalem. So, back they went to Jerusalem and started their search for Him up and down the streets, in every place where they thought a twelve year old could or would go. For three days they searched for Him but He was nowhere to be found.

Whether it was some people in Jerusalem or God putting the thought in their minds, whichever it was, they finally decided the only place left to look for Him was in the great huge Temple of Jerusalem. And sure enough, there He was, sitting among the Jewish Temple teachers, listen to them and also asking them questions, and obviously answering some, for all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

Joseph and Mary, bless their hearts, still could not see the clear picture of the life of this child from God that they had been given to raise and care for. They were very upset at what Jesus had done and all the trouble they thought it had caused them over the last four days. Mary said to Him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously."

Jesus, relying to her said, "Why have you sought me anxiously? Do you not understand after twelve years that I must be in my Father's house."

Joseph and Mary did not understand what Jesus was meaning by this answer to them. They had been visited by angels twelve years earlier, had seen miracles happen, had seen how Jesus had grown from a baby into a child and up to this age of twelve. Seen how He had grown without ever committing one sin. They knew there was something very special about this person, but just could not at this period in His life put the picture in clear focus.

Jesus was now at age twelve, to really get into first gear so to speak, in a spiritual way, heading for third and fourth gear and full speed ahead, to do the work of His real Father in heaven.

Many of us today in the Western world would think Jesus was at age twelve, being very disrespectful and high handed towards Joseph and Mary in His actions at this particular Passover season as recorded by Luke. But when we understand that in that time of Jewish culture, the age of twelve was when you were deemed an adult, to take on an adult mindset, and adult responsibilities, then we see that was just what Jesus was doing. He was taking a serious adult mindset towards His Father in heaven and the spiritual work He must now really focus on as He moved from childhood to adulthood. Not that He had not done so in the past, but now as a young adult it took on even more importance.

Jesus Grows In A Four Fold Way

Luke records in very simple and short sentences the growing life of the now young adult Jesus, until He was made manifest with might and power to the masses of the people of Israel. Luke says, "And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man " (Luke 2:51-52).

Jesus, as the very Son of the Most High, was not handed it all on a silver platter, just having the perfection of God as if falling off a log, having it so easy that it was just a "shoe in" as we often say.

Jesus was also born of a woman, of Mary, and so was also very human as we are. He had to learn, to study, to think and to meditate, as we also have to do. As we should do, Jesus increased in wisdom and in mental stature, and in favor with God and man.

CHAPTER SIX

John Begins His Ministry

We must not forget about John, the child born to the priest Zachariah and Elizabeth his wife, also in a miraculous way. Many years have now passed, a dozen or more, since the account of Jesus at the Passover when at the age of twelve. It was now the appointed time from God for John to fulfil his ministry, for which he was especially born.

It was in the days when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great (whom was the Herod in our previous chapters) was ruler over Galilee, that John did his preaching and teaching in the wilderness of Judea. He went into the region about Jordan and so fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, "Behold, I send my messenger before your (the Messiah's) face, who shall prepare your way."

John preached a baptism of repentance, and so became known as John the baptist.

Luke says, "As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God' " (Isaiah 40:3-5).

Many prophecies have a dual meaning and fulfilment. As we look at this prophecy in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, as we note the whole context before and after, it becomes evident that this is one of those dual prophecies. It was to have a fulfilment at the first coming of the Messiah, but it is to have a fulfilment also at His coming with power and glory, with a strong hand and when He is to rule and do much work during the time the book of Revelation calls the 1,000 years (see Isaiah 40:10-11 with Rev. 20:1-4).

The things to be made straight, the hills to be brought low, the rough to be made smooth, and the salvation to be seen, in the first fulfilment at the time of John and into Jesus' ministry, was an analogy and typology of spiritual and repentance matters, being humbled and finding the straight and smooth truths of the salvation of God.

Matthew records that John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist, and that a good part of his diet was wild honey and locusts (Matthew 3:4).

There are strong indications from what the angel said about John when announcing his birth to Zachariah and Elizabeth (which we saw in earlier chapters), that John may have been under a Nazarite vow (mentioned in Numbers 6) from birth. If so, then his hair would have never been cut. By the time he started to preach in the wilderness of Judea, his hair would have been extremely long, probably reaching half way down his back or even more.

From what Matthew records we may want to jump to the thought that John looked something like a wild cave-man type person we often see in school books on the history of mankind.

This thought could be very wrong. Garments of camel's hair could be spun and made to look quite attractive. It would also be very warm for him as he faced the cold nights that could come in the desert of Judea. We today do not think twice about wearing leather belts around our waist, so a leather band around John's waist should not cause us to think of him as a wild cave-man type.

Tens of thousands today eat wild honey in many different countries around the world as part of their regular diet, so nothing unusual about that per se. As John was preaching in the wilderness, his honey eating would have been from the wild bees, as opposed to those in towns and villages who had bee hives, and so what we would call "domestic" bees.

To our Western ear the strangest thing might be the fact that John ate locusts. But, that is mainly because in our Western nations we have never practiced eating locusts. We do not even import them to eat as food. God, in giving Israel His food laws as found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, gave the laws regarding what insects were fit to eat and which ones were not. It was all a matter of how He had created them in the "cell" and "atom" construction to jive with our cell and atom construction. Some, for health purposes we could eat and some God has never wanted us to eat.

The locust was within the "good" food laws as given in the books of Moses. Maybe most of the city dwellers in Palestine, were not in the habit of eating locusts, hence Matthew records that John ate locusts. Different maybe, but certainly not outside of the food laws of the Lord God.

John preached and taught with such power and conviction the Gospels say that most people from Jerusalem and all Judea with the region about Jordan, went out to hear him, and most of them were baptized by him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. This was indeed a time of great spiritual revival and humble repentance before God. John was preparing many hearts for the coming of the work of the Messiah Jesus.

John was indeed different from most of the religious preachers of his day. He did not mingle with the established popular religious leaders of the two main theological groups or "denominations" as we would call them, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. John lived in the desert and was certainly known as an independent preacher of the word of God.

He also knew that much of the teaching and practicing traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees were way off base from the truth of God's word. He knew that a great deal of their theology was founded upon wrong ideas and interpretations of the Scriptures, as well as man-made customs and traditions that had crept into their religions over the centuries.

He especially had insight into the heart and mind of most of the teachers of those two religious parties. He knew they did not want to know the pure truths of the Lord, that they were quite content to maintain their religious positions with its "status quo" - keep it as it had been for centuries. He knew they were not of a humble, teachable, repentant

mindset, willing to be corrected and to change when shown and proven to be wrong in their teachings, beliefs, and practices.

John had become very popular with the masses of the people, they thronged to go out and hear him speak the word of God. All this of course was noticed by the religious leaders of the two dominant denominations.

One day many of them as a group looked at each other and said, "This man John is causing quite a commotion of sorts. The people are flocking to hear him. Many are being baptized by him. We as a group of theological leaders need to go and see this man in action, so we can first-hand get a better plan as to how to combat him and safeguard our positions that we have held with the people for so long a time."

So, off they went into the desert by the river Jordan to hear John preach, but it sure was not because they wanted to repent of their wrong teachings and practices. Some were even willing to be baptized by him in order to try and gain his respect for them, and to fool the people into believing they were really humble repentant fellows.

Matthew records that John knew some of them were willing to go as far as being baptized by him, but he knowing their hearts, seeing them come, looked upon them with righteous anger, and lifting up his voice with power and clarity, said to them in front of all the crowds around about, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee God's coming judgment? Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God. Don't just say, 'We're safe - we're the descendants of Abraham.' That proves absolutely nothing of and by itself. God can change the stones here into children of Abraham. Being physical flesh of anyone, even Abraham, does not automatically mean you are the children of God in the spiritual sense."

Looking upon them with further discontent, John went on to say, "Even now the axe of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever your roots. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire."

Most of the crowd hearing these words were sincerely struck in the heart and wanted to know from John, in specific ways, what they needed to do to be on the Lord's side and to have His love and mercy and favor.

John answered them by saying, "If you have two coats, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry."

John was telling them that real true godliness, wanting to walk with the Lord and to do His will and way of life, contained a very practical aspect. You had to not only be religious in beliefs and attending church, reading the Bible, praying, fasting at times, but you had to serve others in a down-to-earth manner. It meant giving to people in tangible ways, some of the physical blessings that God had given you. A willingness to share with others less fortunate than yourself, some of the physical goods you possessed.

Some of the corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized of John, asking him what they needed to do to get their lives in order with God. John told them, "Be honest, show your

honesty in how you collect taxes for the Roman government. Do not collect more taxes than is required by the Roman authorities."

Some you see, collected more taxes than required, so they could line their own pockets with extra money, above that which the Roman government paid them for collecting taxes.

Even soldiers employed by Rome, came to John asking what they should do to be in favor with God. His reply to them was, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation."

It would have been relatively easy with the authority and the physical skills and weapons they had as soldiers, to rob people in a forceful and violent manner, as well as by false accusation of alleged wrongs (people fearing what would happen to them, and so paying the soldiers money) they could bring to higher government leaders, which could have led to imprisonment and even death. This would be termed "bribery" today. The soldiers would say to people that they would report them as having done this or that evil (when not having done so) unless the person gave them a certain amount of money.

John also told the soldiers to be content with their wages. It is probably very easy when employed by the National Government in work that is dangerous and could cost you your life, such as those employed as soldiers and police and firemen, to moan and groan and complain that you should be paid a wage twice or three times more than what you are receiving. While people with dangerous jobs should be well paid, it is just a fact of economic life that governments just do not have a never ending wealth of money to pay astronomical wages to such persons in dangerous government occupations. Hence John told them there comes a time when such people must learn to be content with their wages.

Luke in his third chapter records that many people were in expectation of the coming of the promised Messiah. They knew the time was near from what God had written in the prophets of old, that the Messiah would appear. Some were questioning in their minds if this promised Messiah was not in fact having its fulfillment in this very unusual man who was preaching and teaching the word of God with such power and conviction, in the desert. Many were thinking that John was indeed the Christ, the anointed one to come.

John himself answered them by saying, "I baptize with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am - so much greater that I am not worthy to untie His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is ready to separate the chaff from the grain with His winnowing fork. Then He will clean up the threshing area, storing the grain into His barn but burning up the chaff with fire that cannot be put out."

It is said that John used many such warnings and analogies as he prepared the way for the Messiah to come.

In the analogy above John was saying what the twentieth chapter of Revelation and other passages of Scripture (such as Malachi 4; Psalm 37; 2 Peter 3) tell us. Namely, that God will in His plan give everyone a chance to know the truth, to repent, to accept

Jesus as the saving Messiah, and to enter the Kingdom of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit. All that will refuse shall be destroyed in a worldwide fire that shall burn them and this earth up, that cannot be put out by humans hands, at the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. Then shall come the new heavens and new earth and all that is foretold in Revelation 21 and 22.

Luke also tells us that John was bold enough to publicly criticize and denounce Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, for taking Herodias, his brother's wife, and for many other wrongs he had done. Herod finally put John in prison, but had no intention of executing him, for he feared the people would rise up in armed revolt against himself, as they held John with such admiration. It was through some trickery that Herod gave command to execute John. How that came about we shall see later.

As to the story behind John's denouncing Herod Antipas for his taking of his brother's wife, it goes like this.

Herod's brother was called Philip, and his wife was named Herodias. They had a daughter called Salome. Josephus the Jewish historian of the first century, says that this marriage of Herod Antipas with Herodias took place while he was on a journey to Rome. He stopped at his brother's; fell in love with his wife; agreed to put away his own wife, and Herodias agreed to leave her own husband, and live with him.

There was no Roman or Biblical law from God that allowed them to do such a thing. This was pure lusting after another man's wife, which in the first century A.D. even Roman law frowned upon men taking another man's wife through covertness.

Then adding to all this, Herodias was grand-daughter of Herod the Great, who was the father of Herod Antipas. This relationship would have been classified as "incest" and not allowed under God's law. Close relatives were not permitted to marry under the laws of the Lord. As Herod was governor of a part of Palestine, and so was also upholding Jewish laws, allowing them freedom of religious faith and proclamation of it, John would have felt quite at liberty to denounce Herod for this and other wrong conduct in his life.

Jesus Is Baptized By John

Going back again to the time John was living and preaching in the wilderness by the river Jordan, one day Jesus came to him to be baptized. John was shocked at such a request from Christ the Messiah, and with amazement said to Him, "It is I that need to be baptized by you. Why on earth do you request to be baptized by me? No, this should not be Lord. I do not understand why you request this."

Jesus, with a soft tone of voice and an understanding heart as to why John would think this way, replied, "Let it be as I request, for it is right and proper for me to fulfil all that is the righteousness of God."

John then understood when Jesus put it this way. For baptism was something that John knew God had ordained for the New Covenant age, as a part of the very perfection and righteousness of Himself. John knew that Jesus wanted to set the full and perfect example of doing all that was the will and the plan and the righteousness of God.

Although Jesus had never sinned, had nothing to repent of, and so had no need to be baptized for the remission of sins, John now knew Jesus wanted to set the perfect example of doing God's will, and so consented to baptize Him in the river Jordan.

Jesus, after being baptized, went up out of the river Jordan, and the heavens were opened, and John saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove upon Him. Three of the Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) relate that a voice came from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus had continued to grow in favor and in grace with the Father in heaven during all of His life. His Father in heaven, the one who can be our heavenly Father, was well pleased with all that Jesus put His hand to do, especially as He now prepared Himself to fulfil the reason as to why He had been born as a human being.

The time had come for the Christ Messiah to fight one more final battle against Satan the Devil, and then to march on into His ministry of proclaiming salvation and the Kingdom of God to those living in Palestine.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Jesus' Three Temptations From Satan

Many of the servants and prophets of God before the time Jesus was to enter His teaching ministry, had fasted (going without food and water) for a certain number of days, in order to really draw close to God, and put their mind on the task that lay before them. Moses and the prophet Elijah were two that it is said and written of them, that they fasted for 40 days. Moses did it twice, so it is written in the book of Exodus.

Jesus was certainly no less than those two great men. He was in fact greater than them. So it should be no surprise for us that Matthew and Luke both mention, "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, He was very hungry" (Luke 4:1-2).

Jesus needed to prepare Himself for the job ahead of Him. He needed to draw very close to the Father, and Satan the Devil knew he had one last big chance to do battle with Jesus and to try and defeat Him before He even got started.

At the end of the forty days Jesus was very hungry indeed. Oh, the Devil may have tried tempting Him all along during all those forty days, as His body began to weaken. Mark implies that was the case, as he records that angels came to serve Him, probably giving Him protection from evil demons trying to hurt Him in some way. But at the end of those forty days, when Jesus was really physically weak and so very hungry, Satan himself, personally, came to Jesus to tempt Him to do wrong, to sin, and to sign up for his team against the God in heaven.

The Devil with sarcasm in his voice, said to Jesus, "Now IF you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread."

Actually, the Devil knew very well that Jesus was the Son of God, so it was with a sarcastic voice he said those words, trying to needle Jesus into getting upset at his seeming doubt that He really was God's Son.

Satan hoped Jesus would slip up and angrily abuse His power and authority, and do exactly as the Devil wanted Him to do - make bread to eat, from stones. If He had, it would have all been from the wrong motive under this seductive temptation from the Devil.

Jesus did not fall for this trick from Satan. He knew His Bible, and replied to the Devil by quoting it. He said, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

Satan then took Jesus to Jerusalem and up onto the top of the Temple. As He looked out over the land before Him, Satan once more and said to Him, "IF you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge over you' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.' "

Not only was the Devil still being sarcastic and acting by trying to put doubt into the mind of Jesus by saying, "If you be the Son of God" but he was now even quoting Scripture to tempt Jesus to abuse and play with His power and also the Father's will that there should be no harm or death to His Son before the time appointed.

Jesus knew that no Scripture stood as an island unto itself, but must always be understood in the light of all other Scriptures written through the inspiration of God. So, Jesus, knowing all the other Scriptures, was able to answer the Devil by saying, "Again, it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' "

It is very true that God can protect us from harm such as falling from a high place, or if in a car accident, but because we know that God can send angels to protect us from physical harm, does not mean we deliberately jump from a ten story building, or stand in front of an oncoming train, to say to God that we want Him to prove He will protect us.

Satan then took Jesus to the top of one of the high mountains around Jerusalem. He could see far off into the distance. His mind knew many kingdoms of different nations and empires were out there in the world, including the great Roman Empire, that ruled much of the known world at that time.

"Ah, see all these mighty kingdoms," said the Devil to Jesus, "Do you see in your mind all the glory they have. Well, if you will come on my side, worship me, and do my will, I will give you control of all the world. You can in this physical life be the greatest world ruler this earth has ever seen."

Now, at this temptation, Jesus got righteously angry with Satan. "Get out of here, be gone, Satan," was Jesus' reply to him. "For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve' " (Matt. 4:3-11).

With those final words from Jesus, the Devil left Him. For the time being he left Him, for Luke recorded in his Gospel account that Satan departed from Him until an opportune time came once more (Luke 4:13).

We are not told in any of the Gospels that the Devil ever had another opportunity like that, to tempt Jesus to sin, as when He fasted for forty days.

There are sections of the Gospel of John that are very hard, if not impossible, to put into chronological order in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. There is no specific indication as to when exactly they may have taken place during His ministry and years of teaching and preaching, leading up to His death.

Some, who have tried to compile a "harmony" of the Gospels, trying to put it all in chronological order, have placed these sections of John at the very beginning and very early on in the public ministry of Jesus.

We also will do the same. Some from their very nature of events are indeed at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, but some others are not so clear that they were.

Jesus' First Disciples

It was the next day after John the baptist had baptized Jesus in the river Jordan. The sun had risen over the desert hills of Judea, the air was clean, the birds were singing their merry songs. John was getting ready to once more proclaim the salvation and the Kingdom of God to the people coming out to hear him speak the words of God. He was reflecting on the preceding day, how he had known somewhat of this one called Jesus, that through the years he had borne witness to how perfect and sinless this man was. He had known there was something special about Him, but yet, not having any direct revelation from God during those years, he was not sure if this Jesus was the Messiah Christ to come.

Then the Lord God had spoken to him and told him that the one whom he would baptize and the one whom he would see the Spirit of God descending like a dove and remaining upon Him, that someone would be the very Son of God, the very promised Messiah.

Oh, John surely knew now who the Anointed One was. And as he was standing and talking to and teaching a few of his disciples, who should walk by but Jesus once again. John noticed Jesus the Christ and said to those within ear distance of him, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

Two of John's disciples heard what he had said, and immediately started to follow Jesus. John had taught them that one greater than he was to come, who would be the promised Messiah. The two disciples knew this was the man for John had now clearly pointed Him out to them.

Jesus knew two men were following Him. He turned and said to them, "What do you seek?"

They answering said, "Rabbi (which means Teacher), where are you staying?" To which Jesus replied, "Well, why don't you come with me and see."

They needed no more invitation than that, and so went with Jesus and stayed with Him, as it was about 4 p.m. by the time they arrived where He was lodging for the evening and the night.

One of the two men was called Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, and this Peter is well known by those who have read the four Gospels, being an outspoken and forceful man, who became one of the inner twelve disciples chosen by the Lord Jesus, a little later in His ministry.

Andrew was very excited at finding this Christ (which word meant Messiah to them). So excited was he that he just had to run off and find his brother Simon Peter, and not only tell him the good news of their find, but to bring Peter back with him to meet Jesus.

When Jesus sees Simon He knows his basic human character and personality, and says to him, "So you are Simon the son of Jona. You we shall call Cephas (in English we say Peter, and which means, a stone or boulder)."

I'm sure they had lots to talk about with each other that evening. The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He wanted to find a man called Philip and He did find him. And Jesus told him to follow along and be one of His disciples. Philip happened to also be from the same town as Andrew and Peter, the town of Bethsaida (which word means, house or place of fishing), and is situated on the north-east coast of the sea of Galilee. You may want to look it up on a map which some Bibles contain.

Well, Philip ran off to find a friend called Nathaniel, and said to him in an excited joyous voice, "Oh friend, we have found the man whom Moses and the prophets have written about, He is called Jesus, comes from the town of Nazareth, and is the son of the man called Joseph."

Nathaniel, with a slight grin, more like a smirk on his face, answered by saying, "Oh, tell me another one. Can anything good possibly come out of a pip-squeak town like Nazareth?"

"Well, you come and see for yourself then, if you think you have the answers to this whole expectation we are looking for," Philip answered back to him.

Nathaniel was up to that challenge, and so off he went with Philip to see for himself this man called Jesus the Christ.

Jesus sees him coming from a little way down the road. He looks intensely at him as he got closer and closer. When within ear shot, Jesus raised His voice and said to Nathaniel, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, and one in whom there is no deceit, an honest man."

"How do you know about me," Nathaniel asked Jesus.

"Oh, I could see you under the fig tree, before Philip came to you," replied Jesus, just astounding Nathaniel even more, for he was very sure that neither of them had ever met or seen each other before this moment.

With wonder and joy in his voice, Nathaniel exclaimed, "Teacher, you are the Son of God - the King of Israel!"

At this faithful statement, Jesus said, "Do you believe all this, believe that I am the Son of God, because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? This is really nothing as to the things you will see. For you will see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down upon the Son of Man."

Jesus was pleasantly surprised that Nathaniel could so quickly come to recognize that He was the Messiah, the Son of the Most High, and related to him the greater wonders he would yet see one day. He would see the angels serving the Son of Man.

That is all that is ever said about what Nathaniel would one day see. When it took place, if it was for Nathaniel's lifetime in the flesh, or for when he shall be in the Kingdom of God, we are not told (John 1:35-51).

Jesus Attends A Wedding And Performs A Miracle

A few days later (according to the continued reading in the Gospel by the apostle John), there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee. Jesus, His mother and His disciples were all invited. And they all went.

A Jewish marriage back in those days could be a very large, festive occasion, often celebrated for a number of days, even up to a week in length. Good wine for all the guests was the common drink, as people came and went, offering their congratulations and best wishes for the bridegroom and his bride.

So many people came to this wedding that all the wine was used up, or as we would say today, "they ran out of wine."

Jesus' mother, knowing of course that He was from God, and had special powers, came quietly to Him and said, "They have no wine." The way she looked at Him and the way she said those words, Jesus knew instantly what His mother was requesting Him to do. Miraculously make more wine.

Jesus Himself was not intending to do a public miracle, or make some kind of a big show, at this wedding. He answered His mother by saying, "O woman, this does not concern you and me. My time has not yet come." Meaning He did not yet want to go public with His miracle working power.

But, His mother (as mothers often have an inner sense for things) knew He would supply the needed wine. And so she told the servants to do whatever Jesus instructed them to do.

There were six stone water-pots in the area, used for the Jewish ceremonial purposes, and held about twenty to thirty gallons each. Jesus told the servants, "Fill those jars with water." And when they had been filled to the brim, He told them to dip some out and take it to the master of the wedding feast. And the servants did exactly as Jesus told them to do.

When the master of the wedding feast tasted the water (which had been made into wine), not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over saying to him, "Usually a host serves the best wine first, then when everyone is full and has enjoyed the best wine, he brings out the less expensive wines. But you have kept the best until now!"

Jesus not only did an instant water into wine miracle, but "aged" it, as it is called in the wine making trade. The very best wine must age for a long period of time. Some wines that have been bottled for a hundred or so years, are classified as the best, and are expensive to buy.

This, John says, was Jesus' first open display of His miraculous power. The servants knew who did this miracle and would have soon whispered it to others, until everyone there would have known it was Jesus who had turned water into the best of wine.

With this miracle, the knowledge that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, was deeper imbedded into the minds of Jesus' disciples.

After the wedding the apostle John tells us that Jesus went to Capernaum for a few days, with His mother, His brothers, and His disciples.

It is more than just interesting, that John puts Jesus' "brothers" and His "disciples" into two distinct and separate groups.

We have evidence from the other Gospel writers also, that Joseph and Mary had biological children, as most married couples hope for when they marry. Jesus had brothers, well they would have been what we term as "half brothers" - all having the same mother (Mary) but not the same father. Joseph was not the father of Jesus, as we have seen, God was His father (John 2:1-12).

CHAPTER EIGHT

Jesus Clears Out The Merchants From The Temple

The apostle John early records a Passover that Jesus attended in Jerusalem during His ministry. The Temple in Jerusalem did not only consist of the sanctuary of the "holy place" and "most holy place" (the Temple, as the original Tabernacle in the time of Moses, was divided into two sections), but also had different court-yards around it. It was a very elaborate building indeed. You may want to take time to read about it all in a good Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia.

It was in one of those court-yards of the Temple that Jesus found those who were selling oxen, sheep, pigeons, and such animals and birds used by the people to fulfil the sacrifices that were prescribed by the laws of Moses (see the first chapters of the book of Leviticus) under the Old Covenant.

There were also the money-changers who exchanged Roman money for Jewish money, charging extra for their own profit. People who came from different parts of the Roman Empire needed to exchange Roman money into Jewish money so they could offer money to the Temple priests for the service and upkeep of the Temple.

The mindset and character of those selling and exchanging money Jesus knew was far from pure and honorable. They were out to line their own pockets, to rob the people, to cheat them, to simply do a business and take advantage of the pure hearts of the people coming to worship God at the Temple and fulfil the laws of God as given to Israel through Moses.

This is a good illustration that shows God accepted the enlarged Temple structure, because the people as a whole accepted it in their minds, as being and belonging to God and as an extension of the holy Sanctuary proper. This shows that there is a "spirit" of the law that goes beyond the "letter" of the law, which God honors, sometimes even under the Old Covenant.

The original Sanctuary and Temple under Moses and Solomon, only needed to be a tent or building of one structure divided into two parts, a "holy place" and a "most holy place" inside just one fenced area or court-yard. By the time of Christ, the Jews had extended this building to include a number of court-yards. The outer court-yard was where the merchants had set up their market place. To them, and so to God, this was part of the overall Temple of the Lord.

Jesus could see that those merchants were making the very House of God into something it was never intended to become - a merchant market place for profit. His anger grew more and more as He saw what was going on. The Bible says, "Be angry, but sin not." There is a time to become righteously angry. Many passages show that God can and does get righteously angry at times. Yet, it is always righteous anger, without any sin. There are times we must get very upset at sin and wrong doing. This was one of those times for Jesus.

He made a long whip from string cords that came from boxes and packages that were sent to those merchants or that were used to tie up the animals they were selling. Jesus whirling the whip around His head, much like an American cowboy whirls his lariat over his head when roping a steer, drove the animals out of the temple, and threw over the tables of the money-exchangers, the coins rolling all over the place.

As He was doing all this, He raised His voice and exclaimed to those thieving and wrong minded merchants, "Take these things away! You shall not make my Father's house into a house of merchandise and business trade."

The disciples of Jesus, many of them knowing much of what was written in the word of God, remembered the verse where it was written, "Zeal for Your house will consume me" (Ps. 69:9).

But, most of the Jews and merchants there, were not so perceptive and so spiritually in tune with who the Messiah was or what were the true ways of the Lord. They just looked at Jesus and declared, "Who gave you this authority to do this thing, drive out the merchants from the Temple? What sign will you give us to demonstrate and prove what you have done has the authority of God Himself behind it?"

Jesus answered them by saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Once more the Jews had no idea what He was really speaking about, and thought He was talking about the physical stone building of the Temple they were all standing within. They, laughing at Jesus said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you say that if it was destroyed you could build it back again in only three days. You must be out of your head, vain and mad, by saying such words."

Jesus was not speaking about the physical Temple in Jerusalem, but was speaking about the temple of His body. The Holy Spirit dwelling in Jesus made His body as like a temple of holiness to God the Father. So it is with anyone who had God dwelling within them (see 2 Cor. 6:16-18).

Jesus was indeed giving them a sign of His power and authority from God. He was foretelling them that one day though the Jews would kill Him, He would rise from the dead after three days. He was foretelling them of His resurrection to life and glory.

His disciples at the time, did not understand fully what Jesus was referring to either. It was only after His resurrection that they remembered those words of His, and clearly understood then what He had told the Jews. All of this of course, after Jesus' resurrection, helped the disciples to believe in no uncertain way, all the Scriptures and all the words that Jesus had spoken during His ministry.

Because of the miraculous signs He did in Jerusalem at this Passover celebration, many people were convinced that He was indeed the Messiah. Well, in an outward kind of manner they were convinced. But Jesus didn't trust them. He could see their deep inner heart and He knew what people were really like, who were not truly connected with God through humble repentance (John 2:13-25).

No one for sure, needed to tell Him about human nature, what it could do and think on the outside surface, but not be that way in the depth of heart, especially when people would get offended by what He would say and teach, and the way He would live. And that is exactly what happened to many, even some of His disciples, later on. They got offended in Him, upset, bewildered, and confused, by things He said, and they walked away from Him.

Though many believed on Him at that Passover, they did not continue to believe on and in Him later on, as we shall see.

Nicodemus Comes To Jesus In The Night

There was a man by the name of Nicodemus, one of the leaders in the Jewish Sanhedrin (a court of the Jews that decided certain civil and religious matters, made up of leaders from the Pharisee and Sadducee denominations, and respected Elders among the Jewish people), and of the Pharisee religious party. He came to Jesus secretly, by night, and confessed, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him. "

You will notice, Nicodemus did not say that they, leaders of the Jews and leaders from his religious party, knew and admitted that Jesus was the very Son of God. What he said was that they knew He was a true teacher of the word of the Lord, that God was with Him.

Yes, secretly, many of the Jewish leaders admitted this among themselves, but would not openly declare it, for they feared losing their followers, who would then follow Jesus, who like John the baptist, made it clear to them that He would not become a member of one of their sects. They knew He was very independent, hence a threat and to them a competition for the support of the people.

Nicodemus at this point in his life, would not come openly, in the day time, to admit this to Jesus, no doubt fearing what the other leaders of the Jews would try to do to him, certainly in a spiritual position way, and maybe even in a physical way. So he came at night, but did admit to Jesus that they knew God was with Him.

Jesus got right down to the foundation and goal of why mankind was put on this earth, and what it would involve for Nicodemus to attain it.

"I assure you, unless you are born again, you can never see the Kingdom of God."

Nicodemus was taken a back by what Jesus said, "What do you mean? How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again? "

You will notice that Nicodemus clearly understood that Jesus was talking about a "birth" - thinking Jesus was meaning that to enter and see the Kingdom of God, a grown person somehow had to re-enter the womb of his mother and be literally born once more.

Jesus was not talking about that kind of physical birth, but it was a birth that He was talking about.

He went on to explain with a physical comparison, exactly what you must become like in order to see and be in the Kingdom of God.

"The truth is, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans give birth to that which is physical but the Spirit gives birth to that which is spirit. Do not get all wide eyed and amazed and try to make what I'm telling you into some theological doctrine of the heart. For being born again is like this: The wind blows and does things, you can see the effect it may have, even hear it at times as it works among physical objects, but you cannot see the wind, it is invisible to the human eye. So then likewise is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The words of Jesus are pretty plain and quite simple. Jesus was telling Nicodemus that to enter the Kingdom of God, you do have to be born in this physical world as a physical flesh and blood person. You have to be conceived and grow in a sack of water in your mother's womb, and after being nourished and growing to a certain physical stage, then the water in the sack breaks and you are born into the world of air breathing flesh and blood creatures. That which is flesh is flesh. Everyone must first be flesh before they can be later born of the Spirit and become like the wind, invisible to the human eye.

Jesus said that which is born of the Spirit IS spirit, and He likened this Spirit to the wind - invisible but having evidence that humans can relate to as indeed having effects on the physical world around us.

In John 4:24 Jesus said that God IS Spirit. Many passages in the Bible show that God does have form and shape, that He does have a "body." The last chapters of the book of Revelation tell us that one day God's children will actually see His "face." His body is made of Spirit, not physical flesh, blood, and bone. God lives in a different world, a world of a different dimension. He lives in a "spirit" world that is, unless He chooses to reveal it to the human eye, an invisible world to our vision of our physical eyes.

We know the Bible teaches there are good spirit creatures called "angels" and there are bad and evil spirit creatures called "demons." A few of the chief angels are mentioned by name in the pages of God's word, such as Gabriel, whom we have seen come to Mary to tell her she had been chosen to bear God's Son. Then the chief fallen and sinful spirit creature is mentioned by name also. We know him as being mainly called Satan, or the Devil. We cannot see these spirit creatures unless they either manifest themselves to us as if looking like humans, or if God works a miracle with our eye sight, enabling us to see them, which was granted to a few in the Old Testament (read 2 Kings 6 to see this truth).

The book of Daniel is an interesting book in places. It tells us a little about this basically unseen spirit world that lies all around us. It mentions a few specifics as to what is happening among the "good" spirit creatures and the "bad" spirit creatures that oppose each other.

God is composed of Spirit in His invisible glory form. And those who are to be His literal children, born of Him, who will enter the Kingdom of God, will also be spirit, for as the apostle Paul was inspired to write, "...Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God...." (1 Cor. 15:50). A large part of Paul's fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, is devoted to explaining the "change" that is to come, that must come, to those in whom God dwells (His sons and daughters, see 2 Cor. 6:16) in order to inherit, see and enter the Kingdom of God, at the resurrection when the last trumpet sounds (see Matthew 24:30-31).

Jesus was saying the same thing to Nicodemus but in a shorter, nut-shell way. Of course being born of God, born of THE Spirit, means He must come and beget you first, making you in this lifetime His child through the indwelling of His nature, or Holy Spirit as the New Testament often calls it. All this means you are converted to His mind and way of thinking and wanting to live by His every word, as Jesus said we should (Matt. 4:4). It means you remain His child to the end of your life. It means no matter what the trials, tests, hardships, problems, no matter what difficulties physically, mentally, or emotionally, that life may bring, you endure and remain His child, loving Him and doing His will to the end, until death.

Then just as a child in its mother's womb has endured, been nourished, grown, and is finally born, so it will be for the child of God. He/she will one day be born of God, born of THE God Spirit, and enter His Kingdom.

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that that was the very purpose as to why mankind was created upon this earth, to be born of the Spirit, to become part of the invisible Spirit world. This is far greater than anything that science-fiction movies have ever thought up.

But old Nicodemus was befuddled by what Christ was telling him. He just could not comprehend it and exclaimed in bewilderment, "How can these things be at all possible?"

"Are you a teacher in Israel?" Jesus answered him, "Is it not your job to read the Scriptures of the Lord, and to come to understand what it says, and you know not these things that I speak about?"

Jesus was telling him that by reading and understanding and believing the Scriptures, he should have already known what He was expounding. Furthermore, Jesus told him, "But if you don't even believe me when I tell you about earthly things such as the wind and what I represented by it, then how can you possibly believe the things going on in heaven? For I know what heaven is truly like, as only I, the Son of Man, have come from heaven to earth, and will return to heaven again."

This last part of Jesus' statement here is very revealing if we will but believe it for what it says. The King James translation of the Bible of 1611 puts it this way: "No man has ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man."

Jesus, of all human beings to ever live and walk this earth, is the only one to have been in heaven. The reality that death is a sleep, and that we do not continue to think and act after death, either in a heaven or a hell, is vividly brought out in a later chapter of the

Gospel of John, when we see how Jesus raised a man called Lazarus back to life after being dead for four days.

Jesus continued to tell Nicodemus, "And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake (Num. 21:9) on a pole in the wilderness, so I, the Son of Man, must be lifted up on a pole, so that everyone who believes in me can have eternal life in the Kingdom of God. "

Here Jesus is telling Nicodemus and all who read this, that He, the Son of Man, was the Messiah, the Anointed One from God, the one who would come from God, live a perfect life, never do any wrong, take all sins of mankind upon Himself, die on a cross, thus forgiving the sins of all those who would believe and accept Him as the Saving Messiah. And in so doing they could have eternal life.

Jesus added yet more, to show and to amplify, the one main purpose that God the Father had when He decided to create the physical human kind:

"For God so loved the world (the people in it) that He gave His only Son, so that all who believe in Him do not have to perish but can have eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it, to give people a chance for eternal life. There is no condemning those who trust and have faith in Him. But those who do not have trust in Him are condemning themselves for not believing in the only Son of God.

"Their condemnation is based on this fact: That light from heaven came into the world, but they loved the darkness of sin and wrong-doing more than the light of righteousness, for their actions were evil. They do not like the light because they desire to sin in the darkness. They stay away from the light because they fear that the light will expose their sins, and then they would have to make a choice to either live in the light or to live in darkness. But, those who want to do what is right come to the light gladly, so all people can see that they are doing the will of God" (John 3:1-21).

Nicodemus, a religious leader of the Jews, came to Jesus by night, secretly, and to be unseen. He admitted to Jesus that he and others like him, knew He was from God, that God was with Him, but stopped short of saying He was the Son of God, and the saving Messiah to come.

Jesus, got right down to business, hit the nail on the head, pulled no punches, and not only told Nicodemus that He was the Son of God, sent to save and give eternal life to those who would believe on Him, but told him that the main purpose of God, because He had so much love, was to save people to eternal life, not to condemn them to death. Jesus said it was the purpose of God to have people born of Him, born of the Spirit, and so be like Himself, to live in a dimension that was mighty and powerful like the wind was at times, and also invisible to the human eye, as also was the wind.

Jesus told Nicodemus that to be born of the Spirit, would mean you were willing to come to the light of truth and righteousness, to be willing to have your wrongs and sins clearly revealed to you by the light, and to walk in the ways of the Lord God. Such people would then acknowledge that He Jesus, the Christ, was the very Son of God, and would gladly come to the light, so the light could lead and guide them into doing the will of God.

Jesus was teaching Nicodemus the purpose for human existence, and the true and only way to salvation or eternal life.

This was also a kind but corrective rebuke to Nicodemus as he had at this point in his life not yet come to acknowledge that Jesus was the very Son of God, and so was still not yet in the mindset of loving all the light.

It is a lesson everyone of us need to take to our heart and mind. To walk in the light as He (God) is light. Then one day we can be born of the Spirit, and see the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER NINE

John Exalts Jesus

Jesus and His disciples were once more in the land of Judea, and John was near Salim, also baptizing many people who came to him. He had not yet been put in prison, as later he was (John 3:22-24).

John's followers got into a discussion with a Jew about the rites of some of the purification laws. It must have triggered something in their minds, because they came to John saying, "Teacher, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you gave witness, He is not far away, also baptizing, and many are going to Him. We are confused about where you stand with God and what ministry is left for you to do."

John looked at them in patient understanding at the puzzlement showing on their faces, and explained to them: "No one can do anything that is truly of God unless it comes from and is given to him to do from God. You yourselves heard me say openly to all that I am not the Christ, but that I was sent by God to make and prepare a way before Him. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom, and his friend, who stands besides him to hear him, rejoices greatly to hear him. So it is that I joy in hearing the voice of the Christ. I am full of joy, so I want you also to be. The Christ must increase in popularity and ministry, while I must decrease.

"He who comes from above, who once lived in heaven with God, is above all, much greater than I. For he who is of the earth and not from heaven, as I am, belongs to the earth, speaks as an earthling. He who comes from heaven is then above all earthly persons. He truly bears witness to that which He has both seen and heard, as He once lived in heaven. Yet few will receive His testimony. But for those who do, they will have set the seal to attest to everyone that God is indeed true to His word and promises.

"The very special one that God has sent utters the pure words of that God. For to Him the Spirit is given not my measure, in bits and pieces, but in its entire fullness. The Father God loves the Son, and all things are committed into His hands. So he who believes in the Son will have eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see eternal life, but will face the wrath and punishment of God " (John 3:25-36).

John The Baptist Put Into Prison

John the Baptist had already told his disciples that the time was very near when he, John, must decrease in his work for God, and the one called Jesus, the Messiah, must increase in His work for the Lord. That time had now come.

John was a very outspoken prophet and minister of the Eternal God. He often called a spade a spade, laid it on the line, put the cards on the table as they say. He was this way with other religious leaders as we have seen. He was this way with even some of the secular rulers of the Government of Rome. He was not afraid to call sin what it was, sin. So disturbed did a few Roman governors get that finally they could stand it no longer, and John was thrown into prison.

Jesus, on hearing this news decided to travel north to Galilee (Matt. 4:12). Jesus had also heard via the grape-vine, that the Pharisee religious party had heard that Jesus was baptizing and getting more popular among the people than John. Jesus Himself did not do the literal baptizing, but He had His disciples doing that for Him, yet it was all under His authority. All this was going to cause much problems for Jesus, way sooner than He wanted or wished. So He decided to leave the area of Judea and go back up north to Galilee. Now, to go from Judea to Galilee you had to pass through an area of land called Samaria.

Jesus Teaches The Samaritan Woman At The Well

The Samaria of Jesus' day was only a relatively small area of Palestine compared to the Samaria in the time of the kings of Israel. You may want to look at the maps in the back of many Bible to compare the Samaria of Jesus' day with that of the time of the kings of Israel and Judah under what we call the Old Testament of the Bible. There is a huge difference.

For Jesus to go north and get back to Galilee He had to walk through this small land area called Samaria (John 4:1-4). In Samaria lived a people known as Samaritans who were looked upon by the Jews. Jewish scholar Hayyim Schauss in his book "The Jewish Festivals" has this to say about the Samaritans:

"Modern historical research has proved that the Samaritans are not descendants of the heathen colonists settled in the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the conquerors of Samaria, as was once assumed. Not are they to be identified with Nehemiah's opponents of the Persian period.

"Actually, the Samaritans of today are a small and poor remnant of an old and great Jewish sect that appeared in Palestine about the beginning of the Greek period. They form the oldest Jewish sect in existence.

"They were always strongly religious Jews who believed in one God and strictly observed the Law of Moses....they never recognized the books beyond Joshua as holy. Moreover, they denied the sanctity of Jerusalem. They believed that Shechem, the present Nablus, was the holy city and that the holy mountain was not Zion, but Mount Gerizim. They built a temple on top of that mountain.....the Samaritans and the Jews became blood-enemies who hated and despised each other, just as in later years the Karaites and the rabbinic Jews hated each other."

They looked for a coming Messiah from God, but some of their basic religious teachings (such as having their own Temple and priesthood) was so far from what the Jews in Judea and Jerusalem taught, that the religious Jews of Judea and the rest of Palestine, hated them with a passion, and would have nothing to do with them.

When you also understand how most Jewish women were treated and looked upon by many of the Jewish religious teachers of the day, as kind of second class citizens, undeserving of much if any attention when it came to religious matters, then what the apostle John relates to us about Jesus meeting with and talking "religion" to this

Samaritan woman at a well, is all that more amazing. What He did was certainly amazing to His disciples, as they had grown up in a Jewish religious world that was many times far removed from that which was really of God.

Jesus came to a city of Samaria called Sychar. It was near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph many centuries earlier. There was a water well there called "Jacob's well."

Jesus was getting very tired from walking and sat down to rest beside this well. It was nearing the hottest part of the day, about noon. With the sun blazing down from above, the coolness of the well, the thought of a nice cold drink, was very appealing to Jesus.

At the same time up walks a woman from Samaria to collect water from the well in her container. Jesus' disciples had all gone to the city to buy food. He had no container to drop down into the well and retrieve any water.

"I would like you to give me a drink please," said Jesus to the woman. With utter astonishment the woman replied, "How on earth is it that you being a Jew, talk and ask me for a drink, when you know I'm a Samaritan woman?"

John informs his readers that the Jews had no dealings whatsoever with Samaritans (John 4:5-9).

Jesus now started on what would be a religious conversation that would lead to great results over the next two days.

"If you knew the very gift of God that sits before you, and who it actually is that is talking to you and asking you for a drink of physical water, it would be you who would be asking Him for the living water that He could give you."

The woman again looked at Jesus in amazement and said, "Sir, you speak strangely, for you have no container to draw water from the well which is very deep, so how could you possibly get any what you call living water from it? Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his cattle?"

"Oh, everyone who drinks of this water," said Jesus, "shall thirst once more, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give them will never thirst. The water that I give will become like a spring of water welling up and flowing constantly to eternal life."

The woman still not getting that Jesus was speaking about spiritual matters, the Holy Spirit, living spirit water remaining and flowing within the believer, was eager to have some kind of physical miracle, and so replied, "Sir, please give me this water, that will make me never thirst again, and never have to come to this deep well to draw out water. It is hard on my back and arms to have to do this daily physical chore."

Jesus knew she was not getting the insight of the true message He was conveying to her. So He tried another approach.

"Go, call your husband, and come back here," Jesus requested. "But I have no husband," replied the woman.

"That is very true," responded Jesus, "for you have had five husbands, and the one you are now with is not your husband, so in saying you have no husband you have answered correctly indeed."

"I surely perceive you are a prophet," said the woman, and then continued with, "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain; and you Jews say that the main city to worship God at is Jerusalem. "

"Well lady," Jesus replied, "I can tell you this. The hour is coming when you will not worship the Father either on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. The hour is coming and even now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for that is the kind of people the Father is looking for to worship Him. God is spirit not flesh and blood, and so those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth."

Jesus was here referring to the time that was to come when the armies of Rome under Titus would invade Palestine in 70 A.D., destroy Jerusalem and other places and scatter the Jews, so no organized worship of God in some central location would take place anywhere in that land. Then also Jesus was making a lesson that certain physical things in the worship of God really meant nothing to the Father unless the heart was right with Him. Outward ceremony even in a place that God could approve of was useless if the inner heart was not acceptable to Him.

"I know the Messiah is coming, he who is called the Christ. When he comes, he will be able to tell us all things, as you seem to be able to do," the Samaritan woman said confidently, but with a questioning mind as she looked at this man she had called a prophet.

"I who speak to you am this Messiah," Jesus said kindly but firmly to her.

It was at this point, before she could answer or say anything about what Jesus had just told her, that the disciples returned from the city and stood there in shock to see Jesus talking to a woman in private, and a Samaritan woman at that. They were shocked but none was willing to question Jesus as to the reason why. The woman knew what was going through the minds of these other men and so quickly ran off back to the town, leaving her water jar behind. She was too excited and amazed by the whole event to worry about a water pot.

The only thing on her mind was to get back to town so she could tell as many people as would listen, about a man who told her all that she had ever done. She asked them if it was possible that this was the Messiah to come. She told them to go and see for themselves, and many of them did head out of the city to see the man she was telling them about (John 4:10-30).

Meanwhile, as all this was happening in the city, Jesus' disciples were asking Him to eat of the food they had brought to Him. "I have food to eat of which you know nothing of," was Jesus' reply to them.

"Who has brought Him food while we were gone?" said some disciples to others.

Jesus then told them exactly what He was meaning. "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing the work He sent me to do. Do you think harvesting will not start until the summer is over, four months from now? Take a look around you! There are vast fields ripening before your eyes, and are ready for harvesting at this present time.

"The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. I'm not talking about fruits from trees and vines. There is great joy for both the planter and the harvester. You know what they say, 'One persons plants and another person harvests.' That saying is very true, for I'm sending you to harvest where you did not plant; others had already done that work, and you will gather the harvest."

For centuries God had sent His servants to teach and preach His word to the people of Israel. Before Jesus came to do the work of God, there was John the baptist and his disciples preparing the hearts of the people for Jesus' disciples to reap what had already been planted in their hearts. It was a spiritual harvest of food that Jesus talking about, as the main and most important food to eat and to get busy harvesting.

The Spiritual Harvest In Samaria

The apostle John in his Gospel tells us that many Samaritans from the city the woman came from, believed her testimony that the man she had encountered at the well did tell her things in her life that were very true. Many went out to Jesus and asked Him to stay in that town with them and expound more things to them about God and His word. Jesus indeed did do so and stayed with them for two days.

Because their hearts and minds were receptive to be instructed and taught the truths of God, many more believed the words of Jesus.

They privately told the woman who first talked to Jesus at the water well, this: "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard from Him ourselves, and we know that this man is indeed the Savior of the world, the promised Messiah, that God in His word said would one day come to this earth."

After the second day of being with the Samaritans Jesus departed and headed for Galilee. He did not go to His own town or neighborhood for He had said that a true prophet of God is seldom accepted and given honor by those who knew him running around, going to school, and growing up in their community.

When it comes to the true religion of God and someone boldly teaching and preaching it, this is so very true. Many communities will praise and honor a local person who gets fame, makes it big time, in say, the movie industry, or singing or music arts, or professional sports. But teaching the truths of God, that call for personal repentance and a change of life to conform to the will of God, that is a whole new ball game, and most who have known this person from a child, in the local community, will not give much honor to them.

Especially was this true of Jesus' community, for Jesus was also preaching that He was the Messiah, the Son of man, and even the Son of God. Those who had seen Mary and Joseph bring this Jesus child home with them from Jerusalem, and had lived around them for years, just could not accept Him as the Son of God, the promised Messiah.

Jesus was able to harvest a spiritual people into the Kingdom of God from many parts of Palestine, and the area of Samaria, but not so from His own area and town where He grew up as a boy and young man.

An Official's Son Is Healed in Galilee

Arriving once more in Cana of Galilee, where He had made the water into wine at the wedding feast, an official of some sort from Capernaum came and begged Jesus to come and heal his son, who was at the point of death (John 4:46-47).

Jesus a little disconcerted because the man wanted Him to literally go to Capernaum and do a miracle over the sick body of his son, said to him, "Unless you see some physical signs and wonders from my hands, you just will not have faith to simply believe my words."

The man's mind just did not really hear Jesus' words, but he said once again to Him, "Sir, come to my city before my child dies. "

Jesus answered him by saying, "Go back home, your son will live. "These words did get through to the official, and he believed them. So he started on the journey back to his town. Before he arrived, his servants came out to meet him, and told him that his son was alive and well. He inquired of them as to the time when his son recovered from near death.

"Well it was at the seventh hour yesterday when the fever left him, " said his servants. With that information the father knew that that was the exact hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." The official and all his household believed that this man called Jesus was from God and very special.

John tells us that this miracle was the second sign that Jesus did when He had come from Judea to Galilee (John 4:48-54).

Jesus had returned to Galilee with great power from the Spirit. Much report went out concerning Him into all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being well received and praised and glorified by all (Luke 4:14-15).

CHAPTER TEN

Jesus Returns To Nazareth And Is Rejected

Jesus was a regular Sabbath synagogue attender, and on returning to His home town Nazareth, where He spent much of His childhood, He naturally went to church on the Sabbath day.

Part of the service was to always have someone read from the Scriptures. Jesus stood and all knew He was willing and wanting to read from God's holy word. He was handed the book of Isaiah, the ancient prophet. Jesus opened the book and deliberately found a certain passage, and He began to read:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and to give sight to the blind, to set at rest and peace those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

He then stopped reading, closed the book and sat down. How He read those words must have caught the attention of every single person in the building, for it is stated that all eyes were fixed on Him. If they thought His presence and voice was dynamic, they certainly were not expecting His next words to them.

"Today this very Scripture has been fulfilled right in your sight and your hearing."

They really did not quite "get it" - they all continued to speak well of Him and wondered at the eloquent words coming from His lips.

Then they began to mutter among themselves, "Isn't this young fellow the son of Joseph. "And by that they were meaning to say that Jesus was just the son of a tradesman, a carpenter, not the son of some prince, or king, or prestigious rich person who could have been given some expensive and honored education in the top Universities within the lands of the Roman Empire.

Jesus knew their thoughts, how they were thinking He could amount to no great acclaim, for to them He was just a "nobody" like themselves.

Christ answered them, "Doubtless you will quote to me the proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself; what we have heard you did over in Capernaum, well do here also in your own place of upbringing.' "

He went on speaking, "It is a truth that no prophet is acceptable in his own home land. I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up for three years and six months, when there was a great famine in all the land. And Elijah was sent to none of them but only to one widow of Zarephath in the land of Sion. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them were cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

Oh, they got the message now alright. He was now telling them that many who should have "been with it" and should have had God with them, were out in left field, sat on the grass eating their lunch, when they should have been part of the big ball game, and playing on the winning team, on the team where the only true Holy God was captain, and Jesus as His vice-captain. If they had been spiritually mature and ready to join that team then miracles would have happened to them as it did to that one widow and to Naaman the Syrian. Jesus was telling them they just were not alert and driving in the drivers seat, but were curled up in the back seat, sleeping.

Oh, yes, they got the picture this time, and were they ever white hot with anger. So full of wrath they were that they pushed Him along out of the city, to a brow of the hill that the city was built on. There they were planning to actually throw Him down head-first, with a possible result being death. They were ready to kill Him.

Jesus must have looked at them at this point in such a way, and with the very power of the Spirit of God flowing from Him, they were stunned. Just could not move, could not bring themselves to throw Him down the cliff. Jesus, we are told, simply walked through the middle of the crowd and went His way (Luke 4:16-30).

Jesus Returns to Galilee Again

Jesus then left Nazareth and went to Capernaum by the seaside, which was in the territory of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali when those tribes lived there before they were deported by the Assyrians way back in about 720 B.C.

This was actually a fulfillment of that written about by Isaiah, "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, towards the east, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - the people who lived in darkness have come to see a wonderful light, and for those who sat in the place and in the shadow of death, light has dawned upon them " (Isaiah 9:1-3).

This is another instance that makes prophecy interesting to say the least. For as you read Isaiah 9, not many would gather from it that it would have a fulfillment in this account of Jesus going to stay there as recorded by the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 4:12-16).

It was from that time forth that Christ really began to proclaim, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14,15).

Peter, Andrew, James, John, Are Officially Called To Jesus' Ministry, After A Great Catch Of Fish

Jesus had already been with some of the men who would now be called by Him to follow Him on a constant basis during His ministry. We have seen this in past chapters.

There was a time of overlapping of the ministry of John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus. Jesus had been out here and there, getting His feet wet as we might say, easing into the main full time work that was now ahead of Him. He had, on some of those occasions taken along a number of men, all whom we could classify as "His disciples."

Now, it was time for picking ones whom He wanted to follow Him on a daily basis, as a way of life with Him, until the time for His death.

The Gospel writer that covers this account in-depth is Luke. He takes eleven verses to fill us in on the details of these four men (Peter, Andrew, James and John) being called from their normal secular work jobs to full time in Jesus' ministry.

Jesus was by the Lake of Gennesaret (also known as the Sea of Galilee). He was preaching to them the word of God. The crowd grew and grew, until they were pressing all around Him. He saw two boats, empty, for the fishermen were washing their nets on the shore. Jesus climbs into one, which belonged to Peter, and asked him to move it out, away from the shore. Now He could teach the people and not have them pressing too close to Him.

After the teaching session, Jesus asked Peter (and it would seem Andrew his brother was with him, if we look at the other Gospel writers) to pull further out into the water. This they were glad to do as they could cast their nets out to pull in some fish. Not far away was another fishing boat with James and John, also two brothers, and with them was their father Zebedee. They were fishing partners with Peter and Andrew.

Peter was not sure if he really wanted to cast out his net for they had worked all night and had caught not one fish. Jesus said, "Go out into the deep and put down your nets for a catch."

"Well....okay," said Peter, "For you we will do so, but I do not see the point of all this, for we got nothing all night long. "

It was not long before Peter's face turned into a look of astonishment. The catch of fish was so great the nets were breaking. So Peter called on their friends and fellow fishermen, James and John, in the boat nearby, to come and help them. The help was given and both boats were filled so full with fish that they were close to sinking.

Simon Peter was so awe stuck at all this, he knew he was in the presence of God in the flesh, Immanuel, and that hit him like a plank of wood between the eyes, that he, Simon Peter, was a sinner. He cried out for Jesus to leave Him, saying, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man."

All the men that were there were just as astonished. But all this was done to teach those men something much more permanent in nature. Something of far more important value than catching mere physical fish. Jesus said to Peter and the others, "Do not be afraid; from this time forth you will be catching men."

Of course Christ was meaning that their new job was to catch or bring people into the spiritual family of God, into the Kingdom of God, by proclaiming the Gospel of salvation.

Jesus now beckoned those four men to put away being fishermen and to be with Him and be one of His full time disciples. They immediately obeyed and went with Him. Zebedee (the father of James and John) and some hired hands were not called to go

with Jesus, they stayed and presumably continued the fishing partnership and business, but without Peter, Andrew, James and John (Luke 5:1-11; Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20).

Teaching In Capernaum

Back to Capernaum goes Jesus, and on the Sabbath day He immediately goes to the synagogue and teaches. They were, it is written, astonished at His teaching and His words, for they knew He was teaching them as one having authority, being very sure of Himself, and that what He taught was the very truth of God. This was indeed different to them, for the scribes taught in no such way, for they were not at all sure many times as to what the Scriptures taught or said, or how to understand them (Mark 1:21-22).

Jesus Heals A Man With A Demon

As He was teaching in the synagogue there came up to Him a man possessed with a demon. "Ah, why are you having anything to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" the demon cried out in a loud voice through the man. "I know who you are, others may not, but I sure know who you are. You are the Holy One of God," the demon cried out further.

"Be quiet, and come out of him," answered Jesus.

The demon threw the man to the ground, but did not hurt him. Then the demon came out of him as Jesus had commanded.

The people around were all shocked with amazement. "What is this word He speaks? For with authority and with power He commands the evil spirits, and they come out of people."

So, the report of the mighty words and powerful acts of Jesus spread into all the surrounding regions (Luke 4:33-37).

Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-In-Law And Others

After the synagogue meeting was over Jesus was invited over to the house of Peter and Andrew. James and John were invited to come also. There in the house was Peter's mother-in-law, who was very sick with a fever.

He came in and took her by the hand, so lifting her up, and the fever immediately left her. She was now able to serve them and provide them with physical food for a good Sabbath meal. Yes, others may have been able to have done all that, but Jesus wanted this relatively small sickness that this lady had to be gone from her, so she could also enjoy a fine Sabbath meal with them. It was a small kindness miracle that Jesus did, somewhat like when He turned water into wine at the wedding feast we read about earlier.

When evening had come, and the sun was setting, many brought friends and relatives who had various sicknesses, to Him to be healed.

You will notice, this large work of healing was not done on the Sabbath, but after the Sabbath was over, when the sun was setting and the evening had come. Jesus did a few Sabbath healing, but the large numerous healings were not on the Sabbath day. It took much effort and work and strength out of Jesus, after doing healing upon healing. Jesus would often have to go away by Himself into the hills to refresh Himself after spending hours healing people. Such hard continuous work was clearly not what He wanted to do during the Sabbath hours.

At this healing session many demons came out of people crying, "You are the Son of God." Yet, He rebuked them and told them not to speak, because they knew He was the very Christ.

For some reason, known perhaps only to Jesus, He did not want this truth of Him being the Son of God shouted around. At this particular time Jesus had a reason, although we are not told what it was or why He told the demons to be silent with those words.

Preaching In Other Cities

The next day, very early, Jesus was up and away to a lonely spot where He could pray and meditate. But the solitude was not to last long, as the people discovered where He had gone. They would have kept Him there to continue to heal every kind of disease, sickness, pain, and the paralytics, the epileptics and those troubled with demons. His fame was spreading like wild-fire, even into the land of Syria as well as all over Palestine.

Simon Peter and many other of His disciples came to Him and told Him that everyone in that local area was searching for Him. At the hearing of this, Jesus said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach the good news of the Kingdom of God there also; for that is why I am here, that is my job and commission given to me of the Father."

And He went throughout Galilee, teaching and preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons (Matt. 4:23-25; Mark 1:35-39; Luke 4:42-44).

Cleansing A Leper

Coming from the secluded mountain spot and moving on to the next town, great crowds of people were following Him, and out of the crowd a man suffering from the disease of leprosy (a terrible skin disease that can easily be passed on to others, hence most people kept far away from those with that sickness) fell before Him on his knees and cried out, "If you will, you can make me whole and clean."

Jesus looked upon him with great pity, stretched out His hand and touched him (no one would ever touch a leper as they knew they would likely come down with the same disease), and answered him said, "I will make you whole. Be indeed clean." And immediately the leprosy disappeared from his skin.

Jesus, in sending him away, charged him to tell no person what had happened to him, and added, ".....but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to the people."

Christ was very respectful of all the word of God and knowing that the Old Covenant had not yet in an official way been replaced by the New Covenant, He expected people to abide by all the laws and commandments, even the physical ceremonial ones that had to do with offerings to be given through the priests at the Temple in Jerusalem, concerning after being made clean from certain diseases.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Jesus At Home

Certainly the Gospels show and record that Jesus was a wandering preacher, moving about all over the Holy Land. It is also recorded that at times He really did not know where He was going to rest and sleep for the night, and there were probably many times He and His disciples slept under the stars during the warmer parts of the year..

While all the above is true, there is recorded for us an interesting verse in the Gospel of Mark. We read in chapter two, and verse one, "And when He was come to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was AT HOME. "

Mark does not say He was in the home of a friend, or relative, or in the home of one of His disciples. Mark says He "was at home." A phrase that within the context of words around it, would indicate this home was Jesus' home.

And coming from a background of the carpenter trade, it should not take us by surprise that either with Joseph (His earthly step-father) and/or with His other brothers, they built a house for themselves, or specifically for Jesus, at some point in past time.

Mark puts it in such language that indicates this was Jesus' home at Capernaum. And while "at home" we have the story that follows, which contains certainly one large important truth Jesus was again revealing to the masses and to the religious leaders of the day.

Jesus Heals A Paralytic And Forgives Sin

We shall let Luke tells us the story, found in his fifth chapter. Jesus was teaching (as we have seen, at home in Capernaum), and some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every town of Galilee and Judea, even from the city of Jerusalem itself.

Some men carrying a man on a bed, one who was paralyzed, came to the house hoping to bring the paralytic to Jesus for healing. Yet there was such a large crowd of people in the house and door-ways, it was impossible to get through to where Jesus was. But, they were not about to give up that quickly. One of the men suggested they go up on the roof top (the houses were built with flat roofs in the Holy Land in those days), remove some tiles and let the paralyzed man on his bed down to Jesus from the roof top. The others all thought this was an excellent idea and so proceeded to follow that suggestion.

Imagine the scene. First, a whole appearers in the roof, all look up, and secondly, behold down comes a bed with a paralyzed man laying on it. It would seem Jesus (and probably all the other people present) knew exactly what they wanted done. He perceived they had much faith. He looks at the paralytic and says, "Man, your sins are forgiven you. "

Sometimes in the foolishness of our mind we may do a silly or dare-devil physical act (that God would not have wanted us to do) and it sometimes ends in the physical breaking of our body in some form. Whatever this man had done to bring about his paralyzation, Jesus knew it was a sin (not revealed to us exactly what or when or how), and told him He would forgive that sin. Now, other examples in the Gospels show us that not all bad physical problems that happen to us are the result of some sin we do, but there are times it could be.

This is a case of where Jesus knew the man's physical problem was the result of some foolish physical sin he had done. In the most part God does not inflict us with physical ailments when we sin in mind, thought, or word. If He did then most of us would be crippled a thousand times over. But there are times God allows some of our foolish physical actions to move in dire results. He may not always step in and prevent the tragic end result of our physical errors. Jesus forgave the sins of this man and was willing to heal his physical body.

Well, at those words by Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees looked at each other in shock and anger, saying among themselves, "Who can forgive sins but God only?"

Jesus knew what they were saying. He could read their hearts and the looks on their faces.

"Why do you question in your hearts," said Jesus to them, "which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But I said it the way I said it so you may know the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. "

Now, the scribes and Pharisees were correct in thinking that only God can forgive sins in the strictest sense, and certainly in any healing where sins are to be forgiven. Jesus was again showing and proving to them and all the people standing by, that He was God in the flesh, that He was the Immanuel (God with us) that was promised to come by the prophet Isaiah. He was showing them that as God in the flesh, He did have authority to forgive sins. He was teaching them that He was part of the Elohim (a singular God with a plural form) they all knew about in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Jesus once more turned to the paralyzed man and said, "I say to you, pick up your bed (in those times people's beds were often a roll up type mattress) and go home."

Immediately the man rose up and departed, glorifying God as he went his way. Needless to say the crowd was just amazed, filled with awe, and praising God they said, "We have seen strange yet wonderful things today" (Luke 5:17-26).

Levi (Matthew), A Tax Collector, Is Called To Be A Disciple

Jesus left the home and went again besides the sea, where even more of a crowd gathered around him. And He taught them many things about the Kingdom of God. He was walking along a little while later and He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus (this is he that was called Matthew and the one whom we believe wrote the Gospel of Matthew), sitting at the table of the tax gathering office, and He said to him, "I want you to come and follow me."

We are not told any "behinds the scene" details as to whether Levi knew Jesus from some other time before. Whatever the case may have been, Matthew immediately rose up and went with Jesus. The place they were going to was Matthew's very own house. It would seem Jesus had no hesitation at times in inviting Himself over to certain individual's homes, and enjoying a meal with them and others. This we must look upon as not being "forward" or "ill-mannered" but in the context of doing the work of God, teaching people the truths of God, calling disciples to follow Him. It was often the way Jesus did things, and nobody it seems got offended at that way.

Now, some did get offended by the company of persons Jesus did allow to be around Him when in someone's home. This was the case here while in Levi's home enjoying a meal, teaching and relaxing.

Mark, in his Gospel says, many "sinners" and other tax collectors were present (they weren't liked at all by the Jews for they collected taxes for the Roman Government). The word "sinners" is used often in the Gospels to refer to "sexually immoral" people, and especially to women who sold their bodies to men for sexual gratification.

Well, when the Scribes (writers of the books of God as we have in the OT) and the Pharisees (leaders of the popular common religious party bearing that name) saw Jesus keeping company with such people they looked down their nose and got quite indignant about the whole scene. "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" they asked of Jesus.

Jesus gave them an answer that they could not but clearly understand what He was meaning. "Those who are well and healthy do not need to go to a doctor, but it is those who are sick who need the help of a doctor," Christ first said to them, and concluded with, "I have come to do a work not among those who are spiritually righteous and healthy, but among those who know they are sinners" (Mark 2:13-17).

Jesus was certainly not intending to mean that He thought the Scribes and Pharisee leaders were righteously healthy, for other parts of the Gospels make it very clear He thought nothing of the kind about them. We will see some pretty plain words later that Jesus used to tell them where He thought they stood when it came to spirituality.

What He said to them here was with tongue in cheek. The scribes and Pharisees could not see their sins and lack of true spirituality, but many others could see their own sins, such as sexually immoral persons and tax collectors (who often cheated the people through power of authority and with fear tactics, and gained more taxes than required by the law, pocketing it and becoming quite wealthy).

Jesus, was telling those self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, He was concerned with, and was there to serve and help, those who could see their sins and wanted spiritual healing. Those who could not, but thought they were spiritually fine and dandy, He could not help.

We must all come to see that no matter how "righteous" we may be in the eyes of the society we live in, and our own standards of life, that we still have sins, that we are sinners in the light of the perfect holiness of God.

Jesus Talks About Fasting

Many people at large knew some who were either disciples of John the Baptist or disciples of the Pharisee sect. They knew that disciples of both often fasted (going without food and water for a day or even many days). For years they had seen and heard of those disciples setting one or more days aside to devote to pray, study, meditation, on the things of God. But, in observing Jesus' disciples for maybe months, they could never see, nor did they hear about, any of His disciples ever fasting for any length of time.

Finally, some were just so bewildered by it all they had to ask Jesus about it, that is, why His disciples did not fast, while other disciples from other religious leaders did fast. Jesus gave His answer as found in the Gospel of Luke.

"Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then after that they will fast. No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it as a patch on an old garment; if he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does the new wine will, as it ferments, burst the skins and it will all spill out, and the skins will be useless. But new wine must be put into new wineskins. Further, no one after drinking old wine desires to drink new wine, for he will usually say, 'The old tastes better' " (Luke 5:33-39).

Fasting is done to draw close to God, to really put aside all physical things like work, play, preparing and eating food, and to devote all the time to getting as spiritually close to God as can be humanly possible. Fasting is to learn from God through His word, through pray, through meditating on His word, and letting the Spirit of the Lord teach and guide you.

With Jesus being God in the flesh, the Immanuel, the perfect teacher, the one to set the perfect example of human holiness through the Spirit, and as He was also there right in their midst, they were as close to Him, to God, as could be expected and desired for in this physical life. Jesus' disciples had no need to fast to get spiritually close to and in tune with God. He was already close to them, and all the help, all the teaching, all the answers to their questions, was there rubbing shoulders so to speak, with them.

Fasting, under those circumstances was not a correct or needed mixture for spiritual insight. The old way of getting close to God was not needed while the new way and perfect example of spirituality, was living, walking, and talking among His close disciples.

As Jesus had said to them, fasting is also a time for serious mindedness and it has some inner sadness to it, not that that is not a good thing at times, for such can and should produce spiritual growth and joy. But having Jesus with them was like being at a

wedding. It was a time to live with physical (and of course mental) happiness and excitement, enjoying the day and hour that belonged to the bridegroom.

For Jesus' disciples it was not a time to wander off by one's self, leaving Him behind, heading for the wilderness to fast in order to get insight and teaching from God, for God was right there with them in the flesh, in the form of Jesus Christ, to teach and bring them insights from the Father in heaven.

Jesus would not always be physically in their midst. One day He would return to heaven. After that day, then fasting for His disciples would be once more important as a method to draw close to God, to learn of Him, to be corrected and taught by Him through the Spirit. Until then, fasting for Jesus' disciples was not needed as the perfect new way was so very close to them, hence the purpose for fasting was quite redundant and unnecessary for those who were Jesus' close disciples.

Jesus Heals A Man On The Sabbath And Encounters Trouble From Religious Leaders

There was in the city of Jerusalem by the sheep gate a famous pool of water, called in the Hebrew language "Bethesda" which means "house of grace." It had a roof with five porches, giving ample protection from the heat of the sun and yet easy access to the pool itself.

This pool was indeed a gracious place, for when the waters moved, miraculously at times, and the invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed, got into the water, they were healed. God, through this water miracle, was granting physical healings to some of the people.

It was one of the Festival times and Jesus went up to Jerusalem and on a Sabbath day He visited this Bethesda pool. There He saw a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. He was lying under one of the porches, hoping to get into the pool when the waters moved.

"Do you want to be healed?" asked Jesus of this man. "Oh, yes sir, but I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is moving. And while I'm trying to get there on my own, someone else always gets there before me," answered the man.

It would seem that the miracle God gave was on a "first come, first served" basis. It only lasted for a very short time.

Jesus looked with sympathy and compassion upon the man and said, "Rise, pick up your bed-roll and walk."

Immediately the Gospel of John records, the man was healed, stood up, picked up his bed-roll and walked away praising God.

It was soon noised abroad what Jesus had done. Some of the religious leaders heard Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day. They sort out the healed man and looking down their nose with a condemning attitude said to him, "Do you not know it is the Sabbath, and therefore it is not lawful for you to be carrying around your bed-roll. "

The religious leaders of the Pharisee sect had about 600 laws for Sabbath observance. Most of them were of their own making. It was all to do mainly with physical do's and don'ts. They had become so materially minded about keeping the Sabbath that doing kindness, showing love, having mercy, and even serving someone in need on the Sabbath, was put to one side in favor of keeping hundreds of physical man-made laws, one of them being that people should not carry their bed-roll on the Sabbath. Doing that to those religious leaders was carrying a "burden" and so working, hence breaking the Sabbath.

The healed man, at this moment in time, could have cared less about any man made rule or law of Sabbath observance. All he knew was that God had healed him and he was walking.

"Well, the man who healed me, told me to take up my bed-roll and walk," replied the happy hearted man to the questioners and condemners.

"So who is this man that told you to do this thing?" asked the religious leaders.

The healed man was now kind of stunned, for he then realized he did not know who this man was. He would have liked to have known, but he now remembered that after the healing the man immediately walked away into the large crowd. At this time the man could not tell them who it was that healed him.

It so happened that a little later in the day, in the Temple, Jesus found the man He had healed and spoke once more to him. "Ah, you are well and healthy again. Be careful to sin no more, lest a worse sickness befall you," Jesus said to him.

We have seen already that some of our physical problems in life can be our own fault, because we have done something against the natural laws of nature. Sometimes breaking those laws, what Jesus clearly called "sin" - sin in the physical, can lead to physical sickness and troubles for us. Sometimes we do foolish things without thinking we may end up hurting ourselves.

We may be walking along going to school, and we see this thin brick wall, about three feet high. We think it would be fun to try and balance walk along the top of it, so without much more thought up we get and with one foot in front of the other away we try to balance walk. But we maybe never did this before and certainly had never practiced on something much lower to develop our skill first, before trying it on a three foot wall.

Well, we slip and fall, smash a knee, twist an ankle, or even break a leg, as we hit the ground. We have done a type of sin, a physical sin against the laws of gravity and our own human body.

It would seem this man had done such a sin in his life (but we are not told exactly what it was he had done) that left him unable to walk. Whatever it was Jesus called it a sin, and told him to be careful and not sin in this manner again, or something worse than not being able to walk, may come upon him.

The New Testament teaches that our physical bodies are the Temple of God. God can dwell in us through His Holy Spirit, and so we then become His spiritual Temple in a manner. He wants us to appreciate and look after and take care of our physical bodies.

We should stop and think before we act or do certain physical things in life, as to whether it is too dangerous, and could possibly injure us if doing such a thing does not go smoothly. Some things can be too "reckless" - too "far out" - too "wild" and we are then taking chances with our bodies and minds that God would not have us take chances with, for as He has written, our bodies are His Temple for Him to dwell in.

After Jesus had found the man and spoken to him again about his healing, the man went and told the religious leaders who the person was that healed him. He told them it was Jesus.

All of this happening on the Sabbath was just another reason for those leaders to seek out Jesus and persecute Him, for breaking one of their made up laws of Sabbath observance.

Jesus looked at them, probably with some anger, as he saw their cold, unkind, unmerciful hearts, and said, "My Father is still working, still doing good things on the Sabbath, and so I will do good works also on the Sabbath."

It's true, God the Father still feeds the birds on the Sabbath day, still brings up the sun, or sends the rain to feed the trees and flowers. Doing good to people that come our way, and that really need a helping hand on the Sabbath is living within the laws and love of God. It is also doing correct good works just as God is still doing on the Sabbath.

Well, with those words from Jesus' lips, that God was His Father, those Jews knew He was making Himself equal with God, a part of the very Godhead, above any angel, putting Himself right up there on the God level of existence, as a part of God. This made them see red hot fire. It was bursting their blood vessels. Now they were so angry with Him for not only in their eyes breaking their Sabbath laws, but now having the affront to say God was His Father.

Those Jews now sought all the more to find a way to kill Him. They knew what making someone your "father" mean. They knew it was putting yourself in that "family" with that father, in as close relationship as literally possible. Jesus had told them before that He was God in the flesh, that He had authority as a part of the God family, to forgive sins on earth. Telling them here that God the Father was His Father, was telling them again what He had told them before, but putting it in a different way.

They clearly got the message, understood fully what He was saying, and to them it was blasphemy, and so were more determined than ever to want to see Him dead (John 5:1-18).

The wonderful truth of the matter is that the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that all true children of God today, have God as their Father, and Jesus Christ as their elder brother, in as literal a way as can be possible.

Spirit filled Christians are now and will be in the future, a part of the very family of God, bearing the nature and name of God. God the Father is enlarging His Family, by having many sons and daughters born of Him (2 Cor. 6:16-18).

All in that family will be equal in the sense that they are equal family members, all bearing the name of that family. But as in the human family, not all will have the same authority or the same gifts. God the Father will always be the head of that family (1 Cor. 11:3).

It is a wonderful, wonderful honor and privilege to call God, "Our Father." Jesus did, and so may we.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Christ Lays It On The Line

Many were the disputes and the problems Jesus had with the religious leaders of the Pharisee sect, and others also of the Sadducee priestly group and the Scribes. What John records for us in his chapter five (verses 19-47) of the Gospel book that bears his name, are words from Christ that are plain, no punches pulled, that Jesus was very God in the flesh. He had the authority to speak those words with a dogmatic tone of voice.

Jesus said to them, "Truly, with truth, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing; for it is whatever He does that the Son also does likewise.

"The Father loves the Son, and shows Him all that He Himself is doing. And yes even greater works than these He will show Him, that you may be astonished and marvel. As the Father can raise the dead and give them life, so the Son as well will give life to whom He will.

"The Father has decided to judge and condemn no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent the Son.

"It is the truth, that I say unto you, he who hears my words and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life. He will not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life eternal.

"Once more it is the truth that the hour is coming, and even now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."

Jesus, by saying the hour now was here, did not mean to say there were resurrections taking place, and people coming back to eternal life, as He was speaking those words in His teachings in the towns and country-side. He was meaning that many "spiritually" dead in their sins, were believing His words, repenting, and gaining grace and eternal life.

Then one day all such people will be raised to life in a resurrection, at the trumpet voice of the Son of God when He returns to this earth. That truth is taught in many passages throughout the NT and in the Gospels, as we shall later come to see and read about.

Jesus then went on to further explain what He was meaning:

"As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment and condemnation, because He is the Son of man, and knows what human life is all about, having experienced it.

"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the graves will hear His voice and shall come forth from death. Those who have done good, to the

resurrection of eternal life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment."

Putting all the passages together in the New Testament that talk about this subject of resurrections, we come to see that there will be at least two great resurrections. The one resurrection is for all the true children of God that have lived in faith from Adam to the coming again in glory and power of the Son of God, when His voice will go forth with a shout.

Those dead in the graves will rise together with the children of God alive in the flesh, at the coming of Christ. They will all be glorified together with eternal life, and meet Jesus in the clouds of this earth, and so be with Him forever more (1 Cor. 15 and 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

There will also be another general resurrection for many people who were not called to salvation in this lifetime. The 20th chapter of the book of Revelation mentions this resurrection, where it indicates the book of life will be opened to them. This is after the 1,000 year reign of Jesus and the saints upon this earth, as the first part of the chapter describes.

It is the Father's will that all persons be given a full and clear opportunity to know the only name whereby anyone can be saved, to repent, and find the way to eternal life (Acts 4:12; 2 Peter 3:9).

Jesus said all that are in the graves will one day hear the voice of the Son of man and come forth to live again. But, it will not all happen in just one resurrection at one single event in history.

Christ now really started to get specific and hit the nail on the head with many listening to Him.

"I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is very just, because I seek not my will but the will and way of Him who sent me. If I bear witness to myself, testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid. But there is someone else who is testifying about me, and I can assure you that everything He says about me is true.

"In fact you sent people to listen to John the Baptist, and he was preaching the truth. But the best testimony about me is not from a man, though I mention to you John's testimony that you might be saved. For John and his ministry shone brightly for a while and you benefited and rejoiced, well some of you did.

"But I have a much greater witness than John - my teachings and my miracles. They have been assigned to me by the Father, and they testify that the Father has indeed sent me. And again, the Father Himself has also testified about me."

Jesus continued, "You have never heard His voice or seen Him face to face as I have. You also do not have His message in your hearts, because you do not believe me, the one He sent to you.

“You search the Scriptures because you believe they give you eternal life, yet it is those very Scriptures that point to me! But you refuse to come to me so that I may give you eternal life.

“Your approval or disapproval means nothing to me, because I know your hearts that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come to you representing the Father, and you refuse to welcome me, even though you accept others who only represent themselves. It is no wonder you cannot believe me! You can honor each other, pat each other on the back, but you do not really care about the true honor that comes from God alone.”

In His final breath on this matter, Jesus told them, "Yet, it is not I who will accuse you first, of this dishonor before the Father. Moses will accuse you! Yes, Moses, the one on whom you set your hopes. But if you had fully believed Moses and what he wrote, you would have believed me because he it was that wrote about me. And since you do not then believe what he wrote, how then it is possible for you to believe what I say?"

Wow! Yes indeed, Jesus hit them right between the eyes with all those words. He made it very clear where many of those religious leaders of His day stood in spiritual relationship with the Father. They just simply did not! They had no connection with the Father at all. They were playing at religion, playing among themselves, patting each other on the back, accepting each other on human terms, but their hearts were far from seeking the ways of the true God in heaven and believing His written word.

With proudness they accepted Moses as their great physical ancestor. But in the area of where it really counted, believing what Moses had written, they struck out three times. And so they could not, would not, did not see that this Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the one who had been with the Father from the beginning, and the one whom the Father had sent to earth to teach His truths and perform His miracles.

Pharisees Accuse Jesus' Disciples Of Breaking The Sabbath

Matthew in his Gospel tells us that it was about the same time the above took place that Jesus and His disciples were walking through the grain-fields on the Sabbath day. His disciples were getting quite hungry and so began to pluck the ears of grain, rub them between their hands and eat the flour substance then produced by that action.

The Pharisees were tagging along not far behind. They noticed what Jesus' disciples were doing. With indignation they shouted, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

If you read this account as given by the three Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke) you will notice the Pharisees did not quote any verse to back up their dogmatic utterance. Even after Jesus answered them, they did not attempt to support their accusation with any Old Testament law of Sabbath observance. Why not? Very simple, there was not and is not any such law in the written word of God.

What the Pharisees were accusing Jesus' disciples of doing was breaking a point of one of their man-made Sabbath laws, that they, the Pharisees together with the Scribes, had manufactured and invented. Recorded history tells us that the Pharisees had about 600 Sabbath laws. They had the mind-set that their invented laws of Sabbath observance had the stamp of approval on them by God Himself. Such was not the case at all, as Jesus went on to explain.

Jesus reminded them (written in the Scriptures they all read) of the time when David and his men were so hungry that they went to the House of God and asked the priest to give them the holy bread that in the letter of the law was only for the priests to eat, and not for anyone else.

Jesus did not go into all the details of this account when answering the Pharisees. They got the point with the basic answer Jesus gave. We see in 1 Samuel 21 that David asked the priest and the priest then offered the old showbread that had served its purpose in the Temple.

David was very much into the habit of regularly inquiring of the Lord (1 Sam. 22:10). This was the purpose of his visit to the priest, who also regularly sought God's will through the use of the precious stones that were in the priest's breastplate (ephod) known as the Urim and Thummim. Through these precious stones God gave yes and no answers to questions asked. What very likely happened was that David asked the priest, and the priest went to inquire from the Lord if he should grant David his request and the answer came back as yes.

God, as Lord of the Sabbath, the one in charge of Sabbath regulations and observance, was going to set aside a letter of the law command concerning the holy bread of the Temple, and was going to allow David and his men to eat it, as they were very weak in the knees (as we may say) from hunger.

God was looking at a situation that was at hand in the physical lives of some of His people, and was quite willing to set aside a physical law in order to fulfil a greater law, one that entailed showing kindness, mercy, love, compassion. And all such greater laws were quite in line with the observance of the Sabbath.

Then again, as God is the one in charge, as He is the law maker, the governor of all that is good and right and lawful, He has the authority to govern the observance of the Sabbath, even His Temple, as He chooses under any particular circumstance and situation that may arise in any era of time.

Jesus did not stop with the example of David and his men and the bread of the Temple, but also gave them another example to meditate on.

"Or have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath the Priests in the Temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? "

In a technical letter of the law way, when reading the words of the fourth commandment, and understanding that the Priests in the Temple still continued to do the work of administering the animal sacrifices on the Sabbath, you could say they most certainly

did "work" on the seventh day of the week. So, in that technical letter of the law way they broke the Sabbath commandment, of not working on that day at your job.

But, we also read in the law of Moses that God allowed the priests to work on the Sabbath day and He held them guiltless, blameless. He did not look upon them as breaking the Sabbath day. As God is the creator of all things, physical and spiritual, as He is the creator of the Sabbath day and the rules that apply to observing it, He can then set the rules as He chooses in how to observe the Sabbath day. And for the priests in the Temple, doing much physical work on the Sabbath, God said the rule of not working at your job on the Sabbath, did not apply to them.

God was Lord of the Sabbath. He was in charge as to how the rules for observing it would apply in any given situation, and with whomever persons within any situation that arose on the Sabbath day.

What Jesus continued to tell these religious leaders was very meaningful and significant.

"I tell you, something greater than the Temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath " (Matt. 12:1-8).

The something greater than the Temple standing there, was Jesus Himself. If they had recognized that He was Immanuel, God in the flesh, the promised Messiah, the very Son of God, they would have realized He had authority over what He allowed His disciples to do on the Sabbath day, and allowing them to then pluck grain and eat it as they strolled through the fields, was not sin, or was not breaking the Sabbath.

Also, if they had understood the mind and love of God, in that God does in many circumstances, put mercy and kindness to serve people in their physical needs of comfort (such as not going hungry) before some letter of the law, then they also would have not condemned Jesus' disciples in their actions as they walked through the grain fields. They would have realized the mercy, love, and kindness of God, was far above any of their self-righteous man-made laws of Sabbath observance.

Then lastly, if they had really known, if they had been willing to admit, that Jesus was the Son of man, God in the flesh, the creator of the Sabbath, the one greater than the Sabbath, the one who was in charge of setting the rules for Sabbath observance in any situation, they would have understood that as Jesus did not stop the disciples from plucking the grain and eating it, then He had set the rule in that situation that such actions on the part of the disciples, was not in any way breaking the observance of the Sabbath day.

They would have recognized Jesus was lord, governor, of all rules for Sabbath observance under all situations, and that He had the authority to adjust those rules as the circumstance arose for any specific condition on any Sabbath day. What the disciples were doing, in Jesus' mind, was in no manner breaking the law of Sabbath observance.

Jesus Heals On The Sabbath And Angers Many

On another Sabbath day when Jesus was in the synagogue and was teaching the word of the Lord, there was a man there who had a right hand that was withered up in some manner. It may have been a disformed hand from birth, or maybe it had been burnt in a fire, or some other accident had caused it to be withered.

Well, the scribes and Pharisees, knowing what Jesus had done on other Sabbath days, were watching Him out of the corner of their eyes to see what He would do when He noticed this man with the withered hand. They were probably hoping within their minds that He would help this poor man, but not to praise Him and give God the glory, but to accuse Him of breaking their man-made Sabbath laws.

Oh, for sure, Jesus knew their evil thoughts. He said to the man with the twisted and gnarled up hand, "Come over here my friend, and stand by me." The man arose and came and stood by Jesus.

"I ask you," said Jesus, looked at everyone, but especially the scribes and Pharisees, "is it lawful and proper on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or destroy it?"

Looking around again upon them all He went on to say to him with the withered hand, "Stretch out your hand."

The man did as Jesus told him to do and his hand was restored to its normal size and function.

The self-righteous scribes and Pharisees were just boiling over with fury, and with whispers among themselves they discussed with one another what they might be able to do against this Jesus fellow that they considered a great Sabbath breaker (Luke 6:6-11).

Jesus Continues To Heal And Fulfil A Prophecy Of Isaiah

Jesus knew the hearts of those religious leaders were against Him, so with His disciples He withdrew to the sea shore. Yet by this time His fame had spread so far abroad that a huge crowd of people followed Him. They came from Galilee, from Judea and Jerusalem, from beyond the Jordan, even from the region Tyre and Sidon, up on the west coast of Palestine, quite a distance from Jerusalem. They all came to hear Him speak. So many there was that He had to tell His disciples to have a boat ready that He could get into off shore, lest He be crushed by all the people around Him.

Another reason why so many followed Him, and came from so far away, was because of His healing powers. They wanted to touch Him to be healed. Many who had evil demon spirits within them fell down before Him and cried out, " You are the Son of God." Yes, those evil spirits knew exactly who He was and through the mouths of humans confessed it in a public manner. Jesus more often than not ordered them not to make Him known in this public way. It was not yet time for such open publication, in that manner.

All this was to fulfil that which Isaiah the prophet had spoken, in the forty-second chapter.

"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick, till he brings justice to victory; and in his name will the Gentiles hope."

Jesus was not coming with great fan-fare, the blowing of trumpets, a big firework display, to announce His teaching and preaching. He was not coming with large display ads in the local news papers. He did not want publicity campaign managers running all over the land announcing His fame and unique origin.

As for the talk about a bruised reed and smoldering wick, one of the old master Bible commentators, Albert Barnes, gives the meaning of all this. We read these words in his commentary on this passage:

"The reed is an emblem of feebleness, as well as change (Matt.11:7). A bruised, broken reed, is an emblem of the poor and oppressed. It means that he would not oppress the feeble and poor, as victorious warriors and conquerors did. It is also an expressive emblem of the soul, broken and contrite on account of sin, weeping and mourning for transgression. He will not break it. That is, he will not be haughty, unforgiving, and cruel. He will heal it, pardon it, and give it strength.

"Smoking flax. This refers to the wick of a lamp when the oil is exhausted - the dying, flickering flame and smoke that hang over it. It is an emblem, also, of feebleness and infirmity. He would not further oppress it, and extinguish it. He would not be like the Jews, proud and overbearing, and trampling down the poor.....He will not treat them harshly or unkindly, but will cherish the feeble flame, minister the oil of grace, and kindle it into a flame.

"Till he send forth judgment unto victory. Judgment here means truth - the truth of God, the gospel. It shall be victorious. It shall not be vanquished. Though not such a conqueror as the Jews expected, but he shall conquer..."

Jesus was to conquer, but not in the way and manner that most of the religious leaders of the day and their followers thought and taught that the Messiah would come. They could only see the prophecies in the Old Testament that talked about a powerful warring Messiah to come to set up His Kingdom on the earth and rule all nations (which prophecies are yet to be fulfilled).

They had overlooked all the prophecies of His coming as a life giving Messiah. A Messiah to bring love, peace, forgiveness, to repentant souls longing to be strengthened and brought back from a smoldering wick ready to die out, into a bright burning flame of joyful salvation (Matt.12:15-21; Mark 3:7-12).

Here again on the sea shore Jesus was living and doing the very words that Isaiah the prophet was inspired to say He would do.

Jesus' Choice Of The Twelve

The time had come for Jesus to call and start a special group of disciples from within His larger body of followers. This was something new and different from what John the baptist had done with his disciples and indeed different from what Jesus had done so far in His ministry. He was about to choose a special 12 disciples, and as they were going to be chosen for some different work and gospel commissions for the then present and into the future, from what the other disciples would do, it was very important that He chose the twelve with much thought and prayer.

Jesus went up into the hills alone to pray as He often did at other times. He continued all night in prayer. This decision of twelve to pick for His inner circle of close disciples called for all night prayer and meditation. Jesus set us an example in all things He did. There could well be times in our life when confronted with serious and large decisions that we must make, that all night prayer and meditation is needed to ensure we make the correct decision. When other Elders in the Church are to commend and ordain other men to the ministry, a very serious undertaking and commission to be given to others, it should be done under prayer and fasting, which could be for more than a day, maybe for a number of days over a period of time (Acts 14: 21-23).

Jesus took time to pray about the choosing of these twelve disciples, even praying all night long. When it was daybreak, He called all His disciples to Himself and from them He chose this special twelve. He named them "apostles" which means "ones sent forth." Here was also a new name given to a new formed section within the New Testament Church of God. The function then of apostles was brought into being by Jesus. This newly created position by Jesus shows us that it is not wrong for new functions to be created within the body of Christ, the Church of Christ, when and if certain functions are needed for doing the work of God.

Why did Jesus choose twelve at this time? There was indeed a very important reason for calling twelve. Jesus was not just looking at the present, but way into the future when the Kingdom of God would come to be established on the earth, when it would rule all nations, when all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the literal government of God ruling the entire earth, would come to pass.

Many prophecies in the prophetic books of the Old Testament tell us that when Jesus returns in glory to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, then the literal people of Israel and Judah will be again united as one people, or 12 tribes united under one banner so to speak. They are to return to the land area we call the Middle East today, where the city of Jerusalem is located (Ezekiel 37; Jeremiah 30, 31, 33; Isa.11).

Jesus promised that the twelve disciples would each sit upon a throne of authority governing a tribe of Israel (Matt. 19:27-28). And so for the plan of God to contain this governing structure for the people of Israel during the 1,000 year reign of God's Kingdom on earth, Jesus knew there needed to be a special twelve called out from

among His many disciples who would each be given rule over one of the twelve tribes of Israel, in that coming Kingdom age.

The names of these twelve specially called out disciples were:

Simon, whom Jesus named Peter.

Andrew, who was Peter's brother.

James and John.

Philip and Bartholomew.

Matthew and Thomas.

James the son of Alphaeus.

Simon who was called the Zealot.

Judas the son of James.

Judas Iscariot, who became the traitor (Luke 6:12-19).

After Jesus had chosen the twelve He came with all His disciples down from the hills and stood on a large flat area of land. Soon a huge multitude of people came to Him from all Judea and Jerusalem and even from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon. They came to hear Him speak and to be healed of their diseases. Those who were troubled with evil spirits were also cured. Such was the power that came from Him all the people clambered to get close enough to touch Him and so be healed of their sicknesses and demons.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Sermon on the Mount

Many have thought that Jesus gave this famous so-called Sermon on the Mount to all the crowd of people that came to Him from Judea and Jerusalem and the sea coast. But the Gospel writer Matthew shows us that this was not the case at all. After Jesus had spent some time with the crowds that came to Him, He wanted once more to get away, they were pressing in on Him all wanting to touch Him as we have seen. Jesus again retreated into the mountains. He sat down and it was His disciples that came to Him.

“And seeing the multitudes He went up on a mountain and when He was seated His disciples came to Him” (Matthew 5:1). It was His disciples not the vast crowds that He taught. The words of Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7 were given to them, not the general population.

“And Jesus opened His mouth and taught them saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:3-12).

The Beatitudes

Here in a few verses Jesus gives the heart and the core, the foundation of what is a true Christian, a true son and daughter of God the Father.

The poor in spirit are those who have put away pride and human vanity. They have been willing to see themselves in the light of God's word, in the light of the Holiness of God Himself. They have humbled themselves to acknowledge their sins and wrong ways and words and thoughts. They have repented of being a human sinner, repented of breaking in one way or another the holy laws, commandments, statutes, and precepts, of God.

They see they are nothing compared to a Holy God. They have cried out for His mercy, for His grace, for His love. They have put themselves into the spirit of mind that they will love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their life, with all their mind. They are willing to serve Him, to do His will not their own, to love and obey His commandments. They stand in respectful awe of the entire word of God.

It is to this person with this attitude of mind that God will look and take note of and call His child (Isa. 66:2). To such a person Jesus promised that the Kingdom of heaven would be theirs, that they would be a part of it, that they would live forever in the very Kingdom family of God.

Those who mourn and shall be comforted are those who first of all mourn within themselves as they see the sins and faults and errors they have done in their lives. As they see where they have missed the mark in what the heavenly Father would have them do, think, and speak, they are deeply sorry. This gives them a repentant mindset and places them in the position to receive God's loving forgiveness and so be comforted with His salvation.

Those who mourn are those who also go on after being comforted with personal salvation, to mourn for the evil and sins they see around them in the world from day to day. The child of God at times really gets upset, mourns and sometimes literally cries (Jesus shed tears at times over the sins of Jerusalem and the people around Him) when they see or hear about certain evils that happen in the world or in their local town or city.

Such children of God often cry out for His Kingdom to soon come to earth so that all the pain, sorrow, and evil, the world contains will be a thing of the past. One day, as the heavenly Father has promised, His children who now mourn at times will be everlastingly comforted when His Kingdom is set up on this earth.

The meek are those who do not think of themselves above what they should. They are not full of vain bigheaded thoughts about themselves or their talents or abilities. They realize all they have is from God. They realize all they can be is from God. They are willing to be corrected, to learn, to be shown and led into the ways and truths of the Lord. They are humble enough to want to serve and do the commandments of God.

They know that meekness is not the same as "weakness." They understand that people like Moses was meek, yes, it is even said of him that he was the meekest man of his time but they know that Moses was not "weak." He was strong in and for the Lord. Being meek is really being strong in the ways and life of how God wants you to live.

Meekness is being righteous and Jesus was probably thinking about Psalm 37 when He uttered these words. For in that Psalm it is the righteous (those who do and live in a right way with God) who shall it is said, inherit the earth. Yes, the children of God are to live forever on this earth. They are to inherit the Kingdom of God or heaven, but that Kingdom is to come from heaven to this earth as Revelation 19 through to 22 fully explains and shows us. So to inherit the Kingdom of heaven is indeed to also inherit forever this earth.

Jesus said it was blessed to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Now one Bible definition for righteousness is found in Psalm 119:172. There we see that all of God's commandments are righteousness. Many today want you to believe it is not important to live by God's commandments. Many today want you to believe God has "done away with" His holy law of the ten commandments and just about all of His other commandments also. Many today say if you strive to live by all the commandments of God you are trying to gain salvation by human works.

Well, many today have many ideas as to why you should not hunger and thirst after the righteous commandments of God. But for Jesus, as far as He was concerned, if you did hunger and thirst after them, you would not only be filled and satisfied, but you would be also very blessed.

Jesus went on to say that it was also a blessing to be a merciful person, to show kindness, a loving and forgiving attitude towards others.

There will be many times in life, many situations will come our way, when people will do us harm, treat us like dirt as they say. People at times will say nasty things about us, talk behind our back, call us names, tell bad stories about us that are not true. They may plot to harm us in different ways. They may get jealous of us for whatever reason and become our enemy. They may try to take revenge on us for something they consider we have done to them.

There will be plenty of opportunity in life to act and to think in a merciful manner towards others, to not pay back in kind as others have done to us. There will be times when some people will come to us and acknowledge they have acted badly towards us and ask us to forgive them. Jesus said it was a blessing to be merciful towards others. For by being merciful you would also obtain mercy. He was no doubt especially thinking of the mercy that the Father in heaven would show towards you, for you showing mercy towards your fellow man.

The pure in heart were also a blessed people, so blessed Jesus said, that they would see God. The clear inference is that those who did not have a pure heart would not see God. All of the children of God will one day see the very face of their heavenly Father (Revelation 21 tells us that). If you do not see God the Father, it means you will not be living. It means you will not have had a pure heart, for it is the pure in heart that shall see God.

The heart of man is a mixture of good and evil. Without the nature and Spirit of the Lord coming into the heart to wash it, to cleanse it, to fill it with the love of God, to purify it from its natural carnal fleshly ways and thoughts, it is then spiritually impure. Such a natural heart without the Spirit of God does not belong to Him. God is Holy. The natural heart without God in it is unholy. Only when the heart is purified by the indwelling of the Spirit of God is it classified by God as pure, and as belonging to Him. Only then can that person be considered by God as His child. All this is what the apostle Paul was telling us in Romans chapter 8.

When the heart is made pure by the presence of God through His spirit dwelling in it, then we are His. And we receive the Spirit of God through repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). Our sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ on an ongoing daily basis (John explained it more for us in I John chapter 1 and the first part of chapter 2). Hence we are in the sight of God one with a pure and clean heart.

With a pure heart Jesus said people would indeed see God. They would one day inherit eternal life and see God's face as is promised in the book of Revelation (chapter 22).

If you want to be a son (or daughter) of God, Jesus said you would have to be blessed by being a peacemaker. What does it mean to be a peacemaker? Does it mean you are a doormat for people to walk all over? No, surely not, for the people of God in the Bible stood strong and firm for their faith. Many of those who were called to proclaim the truths of God to others and to nations, were bold and courageous, not backing down even in the face of the threat of death.

Does it mean you must be timid and consoling to other religious leaders that oppose the word of God? Hardly! For Jesus and the apostles as we can see from the New Testament did not back down against those who would debate or corner them on theological issues. There are times when the people of God must also act as Jesus acted towards false religious leaders (we will come to Matthew 23 and the strong words Jesus used against false religionists later in the Gospel story).

I think it best to try to understand what being a peacemaker is, by looking at it from the opposite side of the coin. A peacemaker is one who is generally as a way of life, trying to be at peace with everyone, even when and while living a dedicated Christian life, and also when trying to proclaim the good news of the salvation and truths of God's word. He or she is not out looking for trouble, not out to deliberately cause a fight or disturbance (though such may arise when teaching and/or living the way of the Lord the first century apostles certainly encountered less than peaceful persons, out to harm them, as they lived and taught the Gospel). A peaceful person is trying to act and live and speak as Jesus told them to do, "Be you as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves."

A peaceful individual has a basic good natured attitude and disposition about them. They are not nasty in words, not bad tempered, not grouchy, always seeing the negative side of things, not forever complaining about everyone and everything. They are not out to pick a fight over the least bad thing that others do to them. They often let the evil of others coming their way, pass them by with no thoughts of revenge or how they can get back at them. They want if at all possible to be at peace with people as they live and practice and proclaim the love of God through Jesus Christ.

Peaceable people are basically upbeat, happy, friendly, smiling people. Their conversations are mainly positive and not bitter, sarcastic, negative, filled with put-downs of others. They exhibit a lot of patience in all they do and with all people they meet. Peaceable people are persons that others like to be around and enjoy having as neighbors and working co-workers. Peaceable people find that small children are drawn to them, for small children can sense persons who are peaceable and easy to feel comfortable and happy with. Children had no problem in coming close to Jesus and letting Him pick them up to bless them.

Such is the nature of persons who are peacemakers. For such is the foundation of the nature and character of God, hence those with His nature in them will be peacemakers and so will also be called "sons of God."

To emphasize that the righteousness of God is for all peoples of all ages to seek after, Jesus went on to say that those who were persecuted for the sake of righteousness, because they were practicing righteousness as a way of life, were blessed. The

commandments of God which are righteousness are forever (Psalm 111) and though some would encounter words and actions of persecution from those who did not like the laws of God or who thought the New Testament abolished them, Jesus said the ones receiving the persecution for serving righteousness would have the Kingdom of God, they would inherit it and be a part of it.

Then Jesus finished this part of His sermon and teaching by letting His disciples know that in choosing to follow Him, it would not always be an easy road to walk. It would not necessarily be a bed of sweet smelling roses, or sitting in some beautiful park on a warm and sunny day enjoying a large chocolate dipped ice-cream.

Sometimes, to not only accept Jesus as your personal savior, but to believe what He said and to obey Him, to follow His example in all your conduct of life, will anger various people, even ones who call themselves "religious" and claim they are "Christian." These people will often say false things against you, lie about you, and try to bring all manner of harm to you, mentally, emotionally, and even physically.

Jesus has told us beforehand that such may come our way because we follow Him in everything. He said we would eventually be blessed and have a great reward for remaining loyal to Him. He reminds us that it has been no different for other who lived before us. All down through the centuries, yes, even as we read through the Old Testament, we can see that many of the prophets of God were reviled and persecuted for standing firm to the word and truth of the Father in heaven.

In Luke's account we have Jesus as saying, "But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets" (Luke 6:24-26).

Is it wrong or somehow "not quite Christian" to be rich in a physical way, or to be fully satisfied with food, or to laugh? We should not take Jesus' words here out of context from the whole Bible. As we read the whole of God's word we can see that some of His people were physically blessed with material riches. And many were fully satisfied and provided with food, as well as enjoying themselves with laughter and song. It is clear that God does not think such things per se are wrong or not proper to have if you are His child.

What Jesus here in the Sermon on the Mount is saying is that those who disregard God's way, His truths, and His commandments, those who just simply "live it up" as we say, who want to fill their minds and life with only the material things that can be obtained in this lifetime, who put all their energies into being rich, full of everything physical, and want to "party all the time," while ignoring the way of God, will one day have to answer for this mind-set. They will finally come to the point of realizing that putting the physical things first (and God second, or God never at all) is not the way to eternal life. They will indeed mourn and weep.

Jesus also said, "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."

Another fact contained in the Bible, when you read it all from start to finish, is the fact that those who taught and preached the Word and Commandments of God, were never popular with the masses of the people or with most of the leaders of the various nations. And they were not popular with the masses of other religious leaders. Jesus gives here a pretty constant and overall rule of thumb, if you are liked and spoken well about from the large mass of people and world leaders, then you probably are NOT speaking the Word and Truths of the Almighty God, certainly not in the way you should be teaching and preaching them.

Those who are popular as "religious teachers and preachers," who are spoken well about from the large majority of people, are more than likely, according to Jesus, false prophets and false religious teachers. That verse in Luke is well worth remembering when you start to look at all those out there who claim they are the religious ministers of God.

Be Good Examples Of God's Way

Jesus continued: "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is then no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under by the foot of men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a cover, but put it on a stand, that it may give light to all that be in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

We should be able to say with the apostle Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation...." We should not be trying to hide what we believe or stand for. But this does not mean we are to be preaching constantly to all whom we come into contact with. You will notice the two examples Jesus gave. He did not say we are to be like the blast of a trumpet sounding out a war alarm. He did not say we are to be like a loud radio filling the air waves with its sound, nor like a fog horn sounding the danger to those nearby.

There maybe times when we can do personal evangelism, and teach people the way and salvation of the Lord, but by and large we are to live as a Christian like the shining light set on a stand, in all we say, and do, showing forth the good works that are part and parcel of being a child of God. By so living many will glorify and thank the Father who is in heaven.

The Law Of God Is Not Done Away

Jesus went on to say: "Think not that I am come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, not one iota, nor a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

The first part of the above has been often twisted all out of proportion and people have tried to make it say that when Jesus ended His life and had fulfilled all that was written about him, then all things were fulfilled and so the law and the commandments were then abolished. But Jesus clearly talked about all being in effect until heaven and earth passed away, not just until the time of His death. Heaven and earth are still here. Hence so is the law and the prophets and the small and great commandments of the Lord.

The last part of what Jesus said makes it crystal clear exactly what He was meaning. Anyone coming along who would relax or diminish even the least commandment would be looked upon as least by the kingdom of heaven, but he who obeyed and taught them would have great favor in the eyes of that kingdom.

Jesus further went on to nail down exactly what He was meaning, so none would or should ever misunderstand. The scribes and Pharisees were ardent law observers. They tried to be super righteous in following all the laws of God contained in the Old Testament. But they often interpreted them incorrectly, misapplied them, blew some of them way out of proportion, sometimes added their own ideas to them (such as the 600 or more laws they invented for Sabbath observance), or worst yet set up their traditions in place of the commandments of God. All of this we shall see expounded by the Gospel writers as we proceed further into the life and ministry of Christ.

Of course the scribes and Pharisees thought they were very righteous. It was a false self-righteousness that they had and not the righteousness that came from God. Jesus said His followers needed to have the true righteousness that is founded upon the truth of God. But that truth most assuredly held that the laws of God were in force and effect until heaven and earth passed away. And those who obeyed them and taught them would be called great in the kingdom of God.

Jesus Explains The Spirit Of The Law

Now Jesus goes on to amplify and enlarge and make more binding some of the laws of God:

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother without cause, shall be liable to judgment; Whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire."

Jesus here starts to answer some of the Jewish interpretations of the laws of God. Notice, He does not say, "It is written" but "you have heard it said to the men of old." Now, sometimes the interpretation of the literal letter of the law was basically correct, at other times it was not so correct. Jesus was not only going to give the true understanding of what the letter of the law was meaning but He would take it a step further.

He would enlarge it to bring in the heart and intent of the spirit of the law. He had the authority from the Father to do this very thing, and so make the laws of God much fuller and broader under the New Testament. It had been prophesied centuries earlier that one of the acts the Messiah would do when He came was to not only make the law

honorable but also to magnify it, enlarge it, to include the spirit of the law as well as the letter of the law (see Isaiah 42:21).

With the help of the Albert Barnes Bible Commentary we can better understand what Jesus was teaching in the passage just quoted.

Intentional killing, with planned forethought, of another person, would indeed bring the one who so killed into judgment. The law of God did teach and state that judgment was to be passed on those who intentionally killed another person. Actually such murderers would be put to death under the letter of the law of the Old Testament (Lev. 24:21; Num. 35:16). The law did not state by whom this judgment should be done, and it was left to the Israelites to organize courts to have authority over such crimes (Deut. 16:18). But Jesus here goes a step further. He says that anyone who is "angry" (a state of heart and mind) with his brother without cause shall be liable to judgment.

The judgment court of the Jews was a court that sat in each city or town and commonly had seven members. It was the lowest court among the Jews and from such a court an appeal might be taken to the Sanhedrin, or the highest court in the land, the supreme court of the Jews which sat in the city of Jerusalem.

We notice Jesus said "without cause" for there is a time to be angry. The Bible teaches there is a righteous and justifiable anger, a holy anger if you will. At times Jesus looked upon the hypocritical Pharisees with anger (Mark 3:5). And Paul was inspired to say, "Be you angry and sin not" (Eph. 4:26).

What Jesus addresses here is being angry without cause; that is, unjustly, rashly, hastily, where no offense has been given or intended. In that case Jesus was saying it would be evil anger. It would be an evil hatred that would break the spirit of the 6th commandment. The apostle John was later inspired to write that "he who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). As interpreted later in the Gospels by Jesus, a brother is anyone of the human race.

Jesus went on to say that whoever says to his brother "Raca" (Jesus used this Syriac word originally and it means speaking with great contempt, coming from a verb that means to be "empty" - "vain" - denoting "senseless, stupid, shallow-brains"), shall be in danger of the council. The original word for "council" here is "Sanhedrin" the highest of the Jewish courts, the supreme court of the land, just as most nations today have a supreme court, to which appeals from lower courts can be taken for a final and unalterable decision.

This Sanhedrin court was instituted in the time of the Maccabees (a Jewish family group) about 200 years before the time of Christ. It was composed of 72 judges. The high priest was the president of the court. The 72 members were made up of the chief priests, elders of the people, and the scribes. The chief priests were the ones who had discharged at one time, the office of high priest, and those who were the heads of the 24 classes of priests (as arranged under the reign of king David) and were called in an honorary way "high" or "chief" priests.

The "elders" were the princes of the tribes, or heads of the family associations. Not all (for there would far too many) elders sat in the Sanhedrin but only those chosen or elected. The "scribes" were the learned men (like our lawyers of today) of the laws of Israel, elected to this Sanhedrin court. This court usually sat in Jerusalem in a room near the Temple.

Jesus was saying that those with a "raca" mindset towards their brothers were indeed in danger of coming under the judgment of the highest court, which in spiritual terms would mean the court of heaven itself.

Still, there was another step further into real danger for those who had a wrong attitude towards their brothers and sisters. If you were in the mindset of saying "You fool" to your brother, it stood for the attitude of and expression of the highest guilt, and had been used as an expression for "idolaters" (Deut. 22:21) and also one who was guilty of great crimes (Josh. 7:15; Psalm 14:1).

Such an attitude of mind placed one in the danger of "hell fire." The original language in which Jesus spoke it says, "the Gehenna of fire." The word Gehenna is made up of two Hebrew words that signifies the "Valley of Hinnom." We need to take a little time and understand this Valley of Hinnom for it came to be the example Jesus would often use to picture the fire of the second death for the destruction of the unrepented wicked at the end of the 1,000 year reign as foretold in the 20th chapter of Revelation.

Quoting from the Albert Barnes Bible Commentary:

"...This was formerly a pleasant valley, near to Jerusalem, on the south side (or south east). A small brook or torrent usually ran through this valley, and partly encompassed the city. This valley the idolatrous Israelites devoted formerly to the horrid worship of Moloch (2 Kings 16:3; 2 Chron. 28:3). In that worship the ancient Jewish writers inform us that the idol of Moloch was of brass, adorned with a royal crown, having the head of a calf, and his arms extended, as if to embrace anyone. When they offered children to him, they heated the statue within by a great fire; and when it was burning hot, they put the miserable children into his arms, where it was soon consumed by the heat. And in order that the cries of the child might not be heard, they made a great noise with drums and other instruments about the idol. These drums were called "Toph" and hence a common name of the place was "Tophet" (Jer. 7:31, 32).

"After the return of the Jews from captivity, this place was held in such abhorrence, that, by the example of Josiah (2 Kings 13:10), it was made the place where to throw all the dead carcasses and filth of the city; and was not infrequently the place of executions. It became, therefore, extremely offensive; the sight was terrific; the air was polluted and pestilential; and to preserve it in any manner pure, it was necessary to keep fires continually burning there. The extreme loathsomeness of the place; the filth and the putrefaction; the corruption of the atmosphere, and the lurid fires blazing by day and night, made it one of the most appalling and terrific objects with which a Jew was acquainted....."

We can conclude from all this that what Jesus was saying was that he who has the ultimate in hateful murderous attitude towards a fellow human being, an evil and

unrepentant mindset of contempt and disdain for another person, has already in the spirit and intent of the law against murder, broken that commandment (though they may not have literally in the letter of the law physically killed that person). With that murderous spirit of mind they stand in judgment of the heavenly court, which may pass judgment on them unless they repent, to be burnt up in the final fire of the second death, represented by the fires of the Valley of Hinnom.

Because of all this, Jesus further went on to say:

"So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly I say unto you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."

The whole sense here is that Jesus was teaching His followers that they needed to have an attitude of reconciliation, of wanting to be at peace and reconciled with all people. Not to be harbouring malice, resentment, hostility, revenge towards our fellow man. We must make the effort to be reconciled. It is not good enough to wait for the other to come to us, we need to go and meet with those whom we have difficulties with, and as much as we can do, as much as it is within our power, to try and be at peace with our fellow man.

The altar was the place where under the Old Testament they offered their sacrifice to God. It was then the outward expression of a religious service towards God, showing you were devoted to the way and service of the Lord, that you wanted to worship Him. Jesus was saying then, that to worship God, and for God to accept you in worship towards Him, it would be useless to partake in worship with God unless you had first made the effort to be at peace with those who were not at peace with you for whatever reason, be it your fault or their fault.

It should be the Christian's attitude of mind that they also do not want to go to court with anyone, and if they do find themselves in a "court" situation (because the accuser has brought about court action) they should try to what we today call "settle out of court" and so reconcile some peace with their accuser.

It may mean you bite the bullet, take some heat or not get all the justice that you think you should get, but the follower of Christ does not want to battle with people, they are not vindictive, hard nosed people, who must always have their pound of flesh and win the fights they sometimes get into (be it their fault or the other persons fault). God's people are basically not trouble makers, who want peace not war and will go the extra mile to make peace.

Then, Jesus also gave some practical wisdom to the Christian. You maybe in the "court situation" because you have been unwise or careless or just in plain error in what you have done. You may be fully to blame! So, better acknowledge it, seek reconciliation and peace with the accuser who may have the right to accuse you, and settle the matter

before getting to court. If you do not, then you may find yourself in deeper trouble from the punishment the court imposes on you.

The main point is. God wants and expects you to be a peace loving and peace seeking person that holds no animosity towards another person. God wants you to do your part in being at peace with all mankind. This, Jesus was saying is the heart and core of the 6th commandment, not just the letter of the law of not murdering another person. And if you do not seek after the whole meaning of that law to live it in mind as well as action, then the judgment of the court of heaven will come upon you and there will be no way out once it has been enacted in the fires of the second death.

Jesus went on to expound on another commandment:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into Gehenna fire. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into Gehenna fire."

Oh yes it was taught by the religious leaders of Israel that people were not to commit adultery, for that was one of the ten commandments of God, but they probably never taught the "spirit of the law" which would mean people could "lust" after the opposite sex all they liked, and indeed there was no punishment in the courts of Israel for so lusting. But Jesus here magnifies this law to include the thoughts and desires of the mind, if they are dwelt upon.

The dwelling upon the thoughts bring sin, to see and acknowledge the good form of the outward appearance of a man or woman is not wrong, but if you continue with a lustful dwelling upon their outward form, then sin is born. This is what God inspired James to tell us in the book that bears his name, chapter one and verses 14 and 15.

King David of ancient Israel saw the woman Bathsheba bathing herself. He looked and dwelt upon her beauty, desire and lust flared up in his heart, and he went on to commit adultery with her. The whole story of the sins of David with Bathsheba and the punishment God delivered to him is recorded in 2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12.

Cut Off Your Right Hand Or Eye If It Causes You To Sin?

Concerning the words about Jesus saying to cast away your right eye and right hand if they cause you to sin, must not be taken literally. First, God designed the human body. The apostle Paul said the human body was holy if God dwelt in it, that it was His holy temple, and we should not defile it. He even said that God would not be pleased if we defile it (see 1 Cor. 3:16-17). Then secondly, is it really the eye or the hand that sins? It is not the mind where sin is conceived and formed. If sin was conceived in the eye or hand and Jesus literally meant us to cut them off, then all of us would soon have no eyes, no hands, probably no arms and no other bodily parts as well, including our head, for sin can be in the mind.

"The Hebrews, like others, were accustomed to represent the affections of the mind by the members or parts of the body (Rom. 7:23; 6:13). Thus, the 'bowels' denoted compassion; the 'heart,' affection or feeling; the 'reins,' understanding, secret purpose. An 'evil eye' denoted sometimes envy (Matt. 20:15), sometimes an evil passion, or sin in general. We read in Mark 7:21, 22, 'Out of the heart proceedeth an evil eye.' In this place, as in 2 Peter 2:14, it is used to denote strong adulterous passion, unlawful desire and inclination.

"The right eye and hand are mentioned, because they are of most use to us, and denote that, however strong the passion may be or difficult to part with, yet that we should do it. 'Shall offend thee.' The noun from which the verb 'offend,' in the original, is derived, commonly means a 'stumbling-block, or a 'stone' placed in the way, over which one might fall. It also means a 'net,' or a certain part of a net, against which, if a bird strikes, it springs the net, and is taken. It comes to signify, therefore, anything by which we fall, or are ensnared; and applied to 'morals,' means anything by which we fall into sin, or by which we are ensnared" (Albert Barnes Bible Commentary).

Sometimes in life we find we cannot partake in a certain job employments (that may pay us very good wages, or that we are especially skilled in) because the job would violate a commandment of God or violates the observance of the 4th commandment, the keeping of the Sabbath.

To follow Christ we may at times have to give up keeping company with some people we were very close to, because we have changed the way we live and their way of life and attitude would only pull us down from the high calling we now have in Christ Jesus. Later in the ministry of Jesus we shall see where He told people that to follow Him would sometimes mean giving up a close friend, a brother or sister, a child, or even a wife or husband.

Some hobbies we once had we may have to part with because they are too reckless and dangerous, putting our physical body in the path of major destruction or even death. For the Christian, God teaches that our bodies are the temple of His Holy Spirit and we are not to defile them in unnecessary dangerous games or thrills that may give us a momentary rush or pleasurable adrenalin surge up the spine.

It could mean that certain types of "movies" or "music" that we were wildly into before becoming a Christian, we may have to "cut off" and cast away, because we now realize they are far from what a Christian should expose themselves to.

Many things that we once held dear and close to us, that were a part of our daily life, our very being, that we thought we could not live without, will have to be "put away" when we become a child of the heavenly Father. Yes, sometimes we must cast to one side things once held precious to us, we must do it, if they are things not pleasing to God. If we do not then we cannot have eternal life in His Kingdom, but we shall be cast one day into the Gehenna of fire and be forever no more.

God's View On Divorce

Jesus went on with commenting on another of the laws of old: "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say unto you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulterous; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Deuteronomy 23:1-2 allowed for a man to divorce his wife. There were two main theological schools of the Pharisees (the most popular religious group among the Jews of that time). The most famous and the most popular of these schools taught that the law in Deuteronomy allowed for divorce for any trivial reason. Hence, most believed and practiced this understanding of divorce, and the reasons some men divorced their wives were over such matters as not liking her looks any more, or burning the toast for breakfast one time too many (the first example was the case, the second I give as a kind of the trivial reasons Jewish men divorced their wives).

It was probably true that divorce under the Old Testament was given and allowed on a broad and wide range, from serious issues to much less than serious ones. Later, Jesus told the Pharisees that divorce under Moses was allowed, but only because of the "hardness of the heart." Most people were so out of tune with God, so fleshly minded, so wanting to do their pleasures as the whim of time and mind took them, God allowed divorce on a pretty loose scale (Matt. 19). But now it was the New Testament time, and Jesus had come to make the law of God honorable and to magnify it, as we have seen.

The original intent of God from the beginning was to not have divorce on anywhere near the loose and large scale He allowed it under the age of Moses. Jesus would now restore the original intent, divorce would be tightened up, not allowed for anywhere near the trivial reasons as before. Jesus did say divorce would be allowed for "unchastity." A study of the Greek word used here for "unchastity" as it is used throughout the New Testament, shows it is a word that covers any sexual immorality. For married couples it would cover the act of adultery, a husband or wife going to bed and sleeping with another man or woman.

Swearing And Oaths

Another law, the law of "swearing", Jesus would now change and bring under the enlarged "spirit of the law" for New Testament times:

"Again, you have heard that it was said by them of old time, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths.' But I say unto you, swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne; nor by earth; for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your words be, Yes, yes, No, no, for what is more than this comes from evil."

The law respecting "oaths" is found in Lev. 19:12 and Deut. 23:23. An oath is a solemn affirmation, or declaration, made with an appeal to God for the truth of what is affirmed, and implies you ask for His vengeance, renouncing His favor, if what is affirmed is false. A false oath is called "perjury" in our courts of law today.

The Jews it would seem had gone beyond declaring oaths before God, swearing using the name of Jehovah. They now had introduced oath swearing by all manner of other names. And probably did not think thus swearing by these other names that important (compared to swearing by the name of God) if they observed the oaths or if they broke them.

Their swearing also took on a flippant, mundane, conversation language, much like many today in our society do. "I swear by all the tea in China, it happened that way" some may exclaim today when wanting people to really believe what they are saying is the truth. It may not be the truth, or it may be part of the truth, or way over exaggerated, but they want you to really believe it was exactly as they told it, and swearing by the tea in China, is supposed to somehow make it so.

Remembering again that most of the people under the Old Testament age were carnal, then "oath" swearing probably had its place. Indeed, it was probably needed for God gave it as laws to govern certain parts of the life of the Israelites. But for the New Testament Christian Jesus magnified this law in abolishing it outright. No swearing, no oath swearing of any kind, by the name of God or by the name of anything else, was needed for those who were the children of God from now on out.

The Christian should be telling the truth at all times, and needed not to call upon God to establish what they had to say (so God could punish them if they spoke falsely) as being true, for they would have a mindset of always telling the truth.

Some will say Jesus was only speaking about mundane conversational swearing, and not about "legal court" oath swearing (i.e. "Place your hand on the Bible and swear after me" as done for witnesses in courts of law) but through the apostle James, God made it abundantly clear that oath swearing period was out for the true Christian. James wrote, "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by ANY OTHER OATH: but let your yes be yes and your no, be no; lest you fall into condemnation (Greek is 'hypocrisy')."

The courts of law in our land allow for Christians to NOT put their hand on the Bible and to "affirm" that what they say will be the truth, instead of oath swearing on the Bible.

Also, a Christian can only tell as to what their memory will allow them to remember for any specific recall of an event. Sometimes the mind forgets things, or misplaces the order of things. Hence they try to say what they think or remember to the best of their present ability. They do not want to convey the idea that God is speaking, and hence be found to be a hypocrite or play actor, if they should be proved to be inaccurate over some point.

An Eye For An Eye?

Jesus continued: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye or an eye, and a tooth or a tooth.' But I say unto you, that you resist not evil; but whoever smites you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue you by taking you to the law courts, and takes away your coat, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels

you to go a mile, go with him for two miles. Give to him that asks of you, and from him that would borrow from you, do not turn away."

The command for "an eye for an eye" is found in Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21. In these places it was given as a rule to regulate the decisions of judges. It is one of those parts of the Old Testament that has been greatly misunderstood. Many have thought that because of such laws all kinds of people in ancient Israel were walking about with only one hand, one eye, one leg, a huge black eye (till it healed), broken legs, bloody noses or broken noses, with this or that broken bone etc. The literal application of this law would indeed over time produce a nation with countless deformed and crippled people.

What should have been done when trying to understand this section of the laws of Moses, would have been to have gone to the Jews themselves, their scholars and their ancient writings. If this is done you will soon find that throughout the whole history of Israel, this law of "an eye for an eye" was never taken as something that should be done in a literal manner. It was never a practice in Israel to cripple people. Can you imagine a court that had a room wherein people were taken and had their eye plucked out, or hand chopped off, or a leg smashed and broken with some kind of baseball bat type instrument. The thought is quite horribly gruesome to think about such ever taking place in any country let alone Israel.

The truth of the matter is that the Jews have always known this section of the laws of Moses were for the court "magistrates or judges" only, and that it was a figure or manner of speech that told them they had to meter out "just" and "fair" compensation (usually in monetary or physical goods) to those who had been disfigured in some way by the intent or the accident of others. Ancient Israel was never a wholesale chopping block for human dismemberment of the body.

By the time of Christ the Jews had extended it from the magistrate or judge to the "private person" and private conduct, and made it the rule by which to take "revenge." They considered themselves justified, by this rule, to inflict the same injury on others that they had received.

Jesus was against any such idea. He declared that the law had no reference to private revenge; that it was given to only regulate the magistrate; and that their private conduct was to be regulated by different principles than a personal vendetta of physical punishment upon those who had done them or their loved ones physical harm and pain.

But we need to keep all this in balance with all the rest of the Bible, and with everything that God taught and allowed and gave in other laws He prescribed. Jesus was not intending to teach that we should sit by passively and see our families murdered, or to be casually murdered ourselves, by thugs or robbers, or the crazy "drugie" from the streets, or by people hired to murder us. Jesus was not teaching that we should coldly and without feeling sit by and watch our wife or daughters raped, or our children beaten up, and not try to stop such brutality.

Natural instinct, the law of nature, the law of right and wrong and all human decency, under such situations of violent surprise, as well as the very law of God, allows for self-

defence in such circumstances. God actually gave laws to ancient Israel that allowed for self-defence in some situations of life.

Jesus is not dealing with large life and death, huge traumatic cases like that of rape, but with much smaller situations like that of someone slapping us across the face with their hand. With such He wanted His disciples to be willing to take the wrong instead of entering into strife and law suits. This does not mean we cannot remonstrate firmly, yet mildly, on the injustice being done to us, and insist proper justice we should have. Jesus Himself gave us an example of this in His own life (John 18:23).

Have another look at the verse about if someone smites you on the cheek turn to him the right cheek also. Have you ever stopped to analyze the above verse? If I walk up to you and hit you in the face, how is it possible for me (being right handed) to hit you on the right cheek? Most people in the world are (and have always been) right handed.

The only way to smite someone across the right cheek that makes any sense is to back hand them with your left hand which, in the Middle East, and the western world for that matter, is an insulting gesture.

After the example of turning the cheek that Jesus gives, the second example of Jesus' is that of being sued in courts of law. Again, one can plead for justice to be done, but if the man is so full of hate, animosity, and determined to take all advantage that the law can give him, going to the expense of costly law suits etc. Then Jesus taught we should not imitate him - rather than to contend with a revengeful spirit in courts of justice, and to perpetuate the broil, we should take a trifling injury, and yield, even if our cloak is also taken.

Jesus, I think, used this example to show He was talking about smaller issues of life. Our coat and even our cloak, may be somewhat important to us (especially on cold, hot, or rainy day) but they are relatively easy to replace. He did not give the example of someone trying to take our house or our business away from us (which could be very important to us and our families who are under our care). Paul, at one time in his life, when being taken to the Jewish law courts (and smaller Roman courts) by some who were against him, appealed to the high court of Rome, for justice.

As a Roman citizen Paul had every right to so appeal to the high court of Rome. In this case it was sufficiently a large matter (his life in certain ways being at stake) to warrant his stand for justice. This was not a small matter of some Jews wanting to have his coat because they liked the silk it was made from (see Acts 23:12 through to the end of chapter 28).

It may be of interest to the reader here, that we talk about the "coat" and the "cloak" that Jewish man wore in those days.

The Jews wore two principle garments. An interior garment, and an exterior garment. The "interior" here called the "coat," was made commonly of linen, and encircled the whole body, extending down to the knees. Sometimes beneath this garment, as in the case of the priests, there was another garment, corresponding to our undergarments. The "coat" was extended to the neck, and had long or short sleeves. OVER this

garment, was commonly worn an upper or outer garment called the "cloak" or mantle. It was commonly nearly square, five or six cubits (a cubit being about 16 to 18 inches in length) in length and just as wide. It was wrapped around the body and thrown off when doing heavy labor work.

The next New Testament instruction of Jesus' - about going a mile with those compelling you, has also not been understood very well by many. We shall quote from the Albert Barnes Bible Commentary once more, and so see what Jesus was explaining as what should be an attitude for Christians.

"The word translated 'shall compel' is of PERSIAN origin. Post-offices were then unknown. In order that the royal commands might be delivered with safety and despatch in different parts of the empire, Cyrus (the great king of Persia) stationed horsemen at proper intervals on all the great public highways. One of those delivering the message to another, and intelligence was thus rapidly and safely communicated. These heralds were permitted to COMPEL any person, or to press any horse, boat, ship, or other vehicle that they might need, for the quick transmission of the king's commands. It was to THIS CUSTOM that our savior refers. Rather, says He, than RESIST a public authority, requiring your attention and aid for a certain distance, go peaceably twice the distance....."

Ah, we see here than that Jesus was referring to certain authorities in public office who had authority from governments to ask you to co-operate with them, and that New Testament Christians should be more than willing to co-operate, even going beyond the letter of the law. Jesus was teaching that His followers should have respect for other government authorities and their duties, even if they were not a part of the Church of God and did not believe in God's word the Bible. It really has nothing to do with any "Joe Blow" demanding you help them. Giving help to such, and going beyond the call of duty, would for them come under a whole set of other considerations, such as time, money expended (if it was going to involve money), family responsibilities, regular work responsibilities, danger involvement etc. etc.

No common man has the right or authority to demand you be their slave for whatever task their whim takes them into, and makes them think they must compel you to work with them in their undertaking.

The last part of this section of Jesus' teaching can also be misunderstood if you do not take into account the whole teachings of the New Testament.

Albert Barnes says it very correctly I think in his commentary:

".....It is good to give something to an undeserving person, than to turn away one who really needs it. It is good to be in the HABIT of giving. At the same time, the rule must be interpreted as to be consistent with our duty to our families (1 Tim. 5:8) and with other objects of justice and charity. It is seldom, perhaps never, good to give to a man that is able to work (2 Thes. 3:10). To give to such is to encourage laziness, and to support the idle at the expense of the industrious. If such a man is indeed hungry, feed him; if he wants anything further, give him employment. If a widow, an orphan, a man of

misfortune, or a man infirm, lame, or sick, is at your door, never send them away empty. See Heb. 13:2; Matt. 25: 35-45.

"So of a poor and needy friend who wishes to borrow we are not to turn away or deny him. This deserves, however, some limitation. It must be done in consistency with other duties. To lend to every worthless man, would be to throw away our property, encourage laziness and crime, and ruin our families. It should be done consistently, and of this every man is to be the judge. Perhaps our savior meant to teach that where there was a DESERVING friend or brother in want, we should LEND to him, without usury, and standing much about the security."

Here Albert Barnes says correctly that we must follow this instruction of Christ's by taking into account the rest of the Bible and our families well being, as well as discerning the worthiness of the individual asking for the lending hand, and not just giving to perpetuate their laziness or predetermined mindset to "live off other people."

Some of Albert Barnes' last words are old English. He was saying that to lend to a worthy friend or brother should be done without charging money, or demanding some security such as telling them to leave with you something like their "CD player" till they returned to you what you are lending them.

Love Your Enemies

Jesus further comments on a popular teaching of His day: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say unto you, Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the corrupt tax collectors do the same? And if you are kind to only your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to become perfect, fully mature, even as your Father in heaven is perfect and fully mature."

Here we find a classic example of Jewish teachers misunderstanding, misapplying, and reading into verses of the Old Testament things that God never intended at all. It is an example as well of picking out certain verses, misapplying them, while at the same time overlooking verses that would teach the exact opposite from the theology you have invented from the misapplied verses.

The command to love your neighbor was indeed a law of God (Lev. 19:18). God never said that you were to hate your enemy. The Jewish teachers had "assumed" that with God saying to love your "neighbor" He was meaning love your Israelite neighbor only, and hence you could dislike your enemy (anyone outside of Israel). Then to further complicate and mess up their minds on this point, the Jewish religious leaders had seen where God in His word as given through Moses, stated that the Israelites should not marry their sons and daughters to those outside of the nation of Israel (Deut. 7:1-3).

They stopped reading it would seem with verse three. And as God was going to deliver them into their hand and utterly cast them out and give Israel the holy promised land,

then surely God hated everyone outside of His chosen people Israel and so they too should hate, despise, and esteem as nothing, all people but their Israelite neighbor.

What they failed to see and do was to read Deuteronomy chapter 7 and verse 4. God did not want the Israelites to marry those from outside of Israel because of one very basic and important reason - they were unconverted, their minds were not in tune with the Eternal God and His way of life. By marrying such people it would mainly be the Israelites who would be drawn away from the pathway of the true God, and not the other way around (the heathen coming to serve the God of Israel). Such is the way of the human heart, much easier to leave off serving God than to accept Him and follow His ways.

The instruction of the Lord had nothing to do with "hating" all who were not your Israelite neighbor, and had nothing to do with not being kind and helpful to those outside your "church" or "nation." Many verses were overlooked that taught kindness to all peoples (see Exodus 22:21; 12:49; Numbers 15:15-16).

Then adding to all this false idea of hating your enemies was the well known passage of Deuteronomy 23:3-6. Here God forbade the Ammonite or Moabite to enter the congregation of the Lord for ten generations (that part was probably overlooked - ten generations) because they did evil towards Israel (verses 4 and 5). Israel was to not seek their peace nor their prosperity (verse 6). This was all for some specific reasons as stated, and it was a punishment from God towards these people, for a certain time period.

The Jewish leaders had misapplied this and the one in Numbers (concerning marrying outside Israel) to believe God "hated" the enemies of Israel, and to them anyone outside of the nation of Israel was an enemy. They thought God wanted them to never seek the peace with anyone who was not of Israel, hence this false teaching of "love your neighbor but hate your enemy" was a common sentence to pronounce and to live by for the Jewish community of Jesus' day.

Here are some fine comments on this passage by Albert Barnes:

".....LOVE YOUR ENEMIES. There are two kinds of love, involving the same general meaning, or springing from the same fountain of goodwill to all mankind.....The one is that feeling by which we APPROVE OF THE CONDUCT of another, commonly called THE LOVE OF COMPLACENCY; the other, by which we wish well to the PERSON of another, though we cannot approve HIS CONDUCT. This is THE LOVE OF BENEVOLENCE; and this love we are to bear towards our enemies. It is impossible to love the CONDUCT of a man that curses and reviles us, and injures our person or property, or that violates all the laws of God; but though we may hate his conduct, and feel deeply that we are affected by it, yet we may still wish well to the PERSON; we may pity his madness and folly; we may speak kindly OF him, and TO him; we may not return evil for evil; we may aid him in the time of trial; and seek to do him good here, and to promote his eternal welfare hereafter, Rom.12: 17-20.....

"BLESS THEM THAT CURSE YOU. The word BLESS here means to SPEAK WELL OF or TO. Not to curse again, or to slander, but to speak of those things which we can

COMMEND in an enemy; or if there is nothing that we can commend, to say nothing about him.....

"DESPITEFULLY USE YOU. The word thus translated means, first, to injure by prosecution in law; then, wantonly and unjustly to accuse, and to injure in any way.....

"THAT YOU MAY BE THE CHILDREN OF YOUR FATHER.....In this passage, the word is used because, in doing good to enemies, they RESEMBLE God. HE makes his sun to rise on the evil and good, and sends rain, without distinction, on the just and unjust. So his people should show that they IMITATE or resemble him, or possess his spirit of doing good in a similar way.

"WHAT REWARD HAVE YOU?.....If you only love those that love you, you are selfish.....it is not genuine love for the CHARACTER, but love for the BENEFIT; and you deserve no commendation. The very PUBLICANS would do the same.

"THE PUBLICANS. The publicans were taxgatherers. Judea was a province of the Roman empire. The Jews bore this foreign yoke with great impatience, and paid their taxes with great reluctance. It happened therefore, that those who were appointed to collect taxes were objects of great detestation. They were, besides, men who would be supposed to execute their office at all hazards; men who were willing to engage in an odious and hated employment; men often of abandoned character, oppressive in their exactions, and dissolute in their lives. By the Jews they were associated in character with thieves, and adulterers, and those who were profane and dissolute. Christ says that even these wretched men would love their benefactors.

"AND IF YOU SALUTE YOUR BRETHREN, etc. The word SALUTE here means to show the customary tokens of civility, or to treat with the common marks of friendship.....He says that the WORST men, the very publicans, would do this. Christians should do more; they should show that they had a different spirit; they should treat their ENEMIES as well as wicked men did THEIR FRIENDS. This should be done, (1) because it is RIGHT; it is the only really amiable spirit; and, (2) we should show that religion is not SELFISH, and is superior to all other principles of action.

"BE YOU THEREFORE PERFECT. He concludes this part of the discourse by commanding his disciples to be PERFECT. This word commonly means finished, complete, pure, holy. Originally it is applied to a piece of mechanism, as a machine that is complete in its parts. Applied to men, it refers to completeness of parts, or PERFECTION, where no part is defective or wanting. Thus Job (1: 1) is said to be perfect; that is, not holy as God, or SINLESS - for fault is afterwards found with him (Job 9: 20; 42: 6), but his piety was PROPORTIONATE - had a completeness of parts - was consistent and regular. He exhibited his religion as a prince, a father, an individual, a benefactor of the poor. He was not merely a pious man in one place, but uniformly. He was consistent everywhere. This is the meaning in Matthew. Be not religious merely in loving your friends and neighbors, but let your piety be shown in loving your enemies; be perfect; imitate God; let the piety be COMPLETE, and PROPORTIONAL, and REGULAR. This every Christian MAY BE; this every Christian MUST BE" (End of quotes from Albert Barnes' Bible Commentary. Capitalization for emphasis was ours whereas Albert Barnes used italics for emphasis).

Luke, in his Gospel, chapter 6:27-36, gives us further words and teaching on this overall matter of loving your enemy and doing good to those who may not be your friends, or who may be taking advantage of your Christian charity.

Jesus was setting here a new standard in verses 30 to 36. Under the New Covenant age it was no longer good enough to help and serve your friends, those who would serve and help you when you needed help.

We must take the whole context of these verses if we are to understand the foundational truth Jesus was teaching. He was not looking at or talking about people who would use your kindness and wipe their feet on it, walk all over you, take advantage of your charity. He was not trying to say that His disciples should be a "soft touch" - an easy target for what people could get from them, or that His followers should be a "push over" for selfish people, tricksters, and con-artists.

Other teachings of Jesus show that it is correct and proper for Christians to be "worldly wise" and to be good stewards of all that God gives them. A number of parables Jesus taught show this truth of what I've just stated.

But there is another side to being a true Christian in all of this material world and how you handle what God has given you to handle. And this is the side Jesus wanted to give emphasis to at this point among His teachings to His disciples.

A Christian should have a basic attitude of doing good to those who are not your friends, who may even dislike you, and who want to be your enemies. There is not much credit, no gold stars on your report card, if you only do good to those who you know will do good back to you. As Jesus said, even the gravest sinners can do that to each other. And if you lend anything or give anything to only those who you know will give and lend back to you, what credit or honor is that to you, even the wildest sinners can do that to each other.

The attitude Jesus wanted from His disciples was the attitude that the Most High God has.....being kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. There are times when you should serve, give, lend, do good, to those who cannot or will not return the kindness you have shown to them.

Jesus said that in doing and living that kind of life, the Father would reward His child, in fact their reward "will be great." The reward may not always come in this lifetime, but it will come. There are many times in our Christian walk that we are to be merciful, even as our Father in heaven is merciful.

So, we come to the end of Matthew chapter five. We shall continue reading and expounding Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, in the next chapter of the New Testament Bible Story.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Sermon on the Mount (Continued)

Don't Go Good Deeds To Be Noticed By Others

And Jesus went on to say: "Take care! Don't do your good deeds publicly; to be admired, because then you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give gifts to someone in need, don't shout about it as the hypocrites do - blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I assure you, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone, don't tell your left hand what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in secret, and your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you."

We also need to be careful in understanding what Jesus was MAINLY getting at here. In a great many cases it is just not possible to give to someone, especially if it is a large gift, without someone knowing, and then the possibility they tell others about your kindness. If you are famous in the public eye, it will be even harder to give to others in a secret way. And if you are famous and give huge amounts to charity then it is harder still to "do it in secret."

The founder of Microsoft and the famous "Windows" nearly everyone in the world uses on their computers, Bill Gates, is one of the wealthiest men in the whole world. It has been said that he "gives away" more money in any single year than the total revenue of some "countries" of the world. You do not hear about his charity giving very much at all, so Bill Gates, for being a famous man, has done a pretty good job of keeping his "good deeds" to himself, without any loud publicity about it. He lives in a large and relatively expensive home, but when you see him on TV he is dressed very modestly, even casually, and you would never think to look at him that he is one of the wealthiest persons in the world.

The main thing Jesus was getting at here is that we be humble, quiet, laid-back so to speak, in our good deeds giving. That we have an attitude of doing it yes, helping others when and where we can, and how we can, but doing it all in relative quietness, with no big blaring sounds of announcements to the neighborhood, town, or world, that you are "giving to others."

Many in Jesus' day were doing just that. They were literally hiring people to blow trumpets in the churches and on the street corners to get the attention of people, and then having it shouted out they were doing such and such good deeds. Most of these people Jesus knew (because He knew the hearts of people, could see into their heart and know their motives) were hypocrites, play-actors, pretending to be someone they really were not. Their religion was all about "acting" a part, pretending, putting on an outward show to make people think they were so righteously in tune with and walking in the ways of the Lord. The truth was they were anything but true God fearing and humble children of the Father.

Jesus taught that we should do good deeds to others, but in doing them, to be humble and try to do them all as much as possible without anyone knowing about it.

Jesus then turned His attention to the subject of prayer, another religious deed that had been greatly abused by certain ones, to again make people think they were "very religious."

"And now about prayer. When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on the street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I assure you, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go off by yourself, shut the door behind you in your room, and pray to the Father secretly. Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you openly.

"When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered only by repeating their words over and over again. Don't you be like them, because your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask Him!

"Pray after this manner: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored and praised. May your Kingdom soon come. May your will be done on earth as it is being done in heaven. Give us our daily requirements. Forgive us our sins, just as we forgive those who have sinned and done evil against us. Lead us not into trials and temptations, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen "

Jesus' instructions on some points of prayer are pretty simple and straightforward. You are to pray basically in private. Now that does not mean a husband and wife cannot pray together. In marriage two become one as ordained by God way back in Genesis chapter two. It does not mean congregations cannot get together and pray. We have examples in the book of Acts (that we shall see in detail much later) where the Church of God did meet and have times of prayer together (usually under some severe trial that was upon them or some of their members).

What Jesus is addressing here is our regular basic everyday prayer life. It was to be a private matter, not something that was done on the street corners and with the attitude of "look everyone, I'm so godly I'm praying, you can all see then I'm so religious." Some were performing their prayer life exactly like that, making it a big public production. Again, Jesus knew their hearts and they were in the main religious hypocrites so He said.

Our prayer life is mainly to be a personal thing, done in privacy, and the Father who then sees in private, will reward us "openly" as it is in the KJV translation. We are also not to use vain repetitions. Our prayers are to be from the heart, not something like reciting a poem and maybe doing it over and over. As Jesus said there are some religions that teach only through a set repeating of certain words can their prayers be answered. That was not the case with the Father, Jesus explained, for He knows our thoughts and needs and requests even before we begin to pray.

Of course that does not mean we should not pray. It is a lot like an earthly father (or mother also) knowing the needs and desires of his or her children (what they would like

for their birthday, and that sort of thing), but still wanting their children to talk about it to them.

Jesus Gives A Model Prayer Outline

Jesus then went on to give a basic outline of prayer. There maybe many other things we can pray for and talk to our heavenly Father about, but here we find some of the very basics that should be a pretty regular part of our prayers.

The supreme God in heaven is "our Father." It is clear from reading all the Gospels that Jesus taught a "family" relationship between the Himself and the Father and us. That we were all part of one large heavenly family, with the Father God being the supreme head in authority, but still our Father, with all that a "father" is within a family unit. Wonderful and glorious it is that God is our "father" and we are His sons and daughters.

We need to honor and praise our Father in heaven and honor His name, just as we should try to honor the name of our own earthly family. We need to be always full of praise, thanking God for all the wonderful blessing we have, both spiritually and physically. Stop for a moment now, put this book to one side for a little while and think of some of the many good things you have. Then praise the Father for them. Make this meditation and praise a part of your regular prayer life.

Praying for the soon coming Kingdom of God should be a constant priority. If you have read about that Kingdom and how it will govern the entire earth one day, as related by all the Old Testament prophets. If you understand what that age will be like, and you reflect on the evil, sorrows, pain, hardships, wars, sicknesses, of today's age, then you will want to cry out for God' s Kingdom to soon come, to deliver this world from Satan and all his wrong ways, and to see the knowledge of the Lord filling this earth as the waters cover the sea beds.

You will want to see God's will done on earth as it is being done in heaven. You will want to pray that the Lord's children will stay faithful, and be a light of doing God's will to all around them. You will want to ask for help from God via His Holy Spirit to love and obey His word, His will, His commandments.

Yes, it is okay and fine to ask our heavenly Father for our daily needs. He knows we are physical human being that need physical things each and every day in order to live our life. It is "daily" needs we need to ask for, not to amass stock-piles of "goodies" for a time far into the future. It is not wrong to have a nest-egg or two (the book of Proverbs teaches us that) but praying that the Lord will grant us what we need (and that could be spiritual, emotional, as well as physical) for each day, as the day comes, is the focus in this basic outline of prayer from Christ.

We are to remember we are sinners, and to ask for forgiveness, as we forgive others for sinning against us. Notice, it is being forgiven, asking to be forgiven, AS, in like manner as, we forgive others who do wrong to us. Just a few verses down below this prayer outline, Jesus said, "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Kind of plain would you not say? We must be willing to forgive others, if we expect our Father in heaven to forgive us. Sometimes others come to us asking for us to forgive them, when they acknowledge they have done us wrong. Sometimes, they have done us wrong and cannot see that they have or will not admit they have. We still must have forgiveness towards them, at least within ourselves, a kind of "Forgive them Father for they know not what they do" attitude, as Jesus did when surrounded by those who nailed Him to the cross and wanted to see Him dead.

Letting go and forgiving someone does not mean you are a sitting duck for them to trample all over you again and again. But it does mean you "let go" and are not having sleepless nights over the matter, or figuring out how you can "get back at them."

Having this kind of forgiving attitude towards human beings means that you will sure obtain forgiveness from the Father in heaven when He needs to forgive you for your wrong doing towards Him.

We need also to pray that God will not lead us into temptation. Hummm, a little hard to understand for James was inspired to write that God does not tempt any man (James 1:13). God does not try to break us down by He Himself putting a snare or trap into sin, in front of us. But He does allow sin to be around us. He does allow Satan and the demons to do their evil work. He does allow various trials, test, and troubles to come our way.

The best way to understand what Jesus was saying, is I think, to ask God that He will lead us "out of" trials and tests that could lead us to sin. To ask God for wisdom (James chapter one again) in dealing with life situations, for the ability to be corrected and to learn from life the lessons we need to learn, and then after learning them to not fall into the same errors again. We ask God for all this, and so in granting it to us, He is leading us out of the sore trials that can come our way, and throw us into a real mess.

We ask Him for help from the ways and influence of the evil one. For the evil one is always there like a roaring lion sneaking about searching for whom he can devour (1 Peter 5:8). One of the great ways to stand up against the devil and not be slain by him is to do as the apostle Paul said, put on the whole armor of God. We can pray for help to do just that (see Eph. 6:10-18).

We finally once more give our heavenly Father praise and honor and glory, for He indeed has the power and the glory for all things, and certainly to answer our petitions. His is the Kingdom that is in heaven and that will one day come to this earth, which we can be a very part of for all eternity.

Fasting

Another tool that has always been used by the people of God to obtain victory, spiritual strength, and closeness to the Lord, is that of physical "fasting" - going without food and water for a period of time. Jesus now instructs on this matter.

"And when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad face: for they change their faces in different ways that they may appear to people to be fasting. Truly, they have all the

reward they shall get. But you, when you fast, put on hair cream, and wash your face, be in your physical appearance so people will not know you are fasting. But your Father which is invisible to you, but sees all secret things, He will reward you openly."

Moses fasted for 40 days (Deut. 9:18); Elijah also did the same (1 Kings 19:8); Esther fasted (Esther 4:16); David fasted (Psalm 35:13); and Jesus fasted for 40 days (Matt. 4:2). Fasting had always been apart of the life of God's people. Jesus here did not say "if" you fast, but "when" you fast, taking it for granted that His followers would fast.

It was to be done again without public notice, in fact in such a none noticeable way that people would not know they were fasting. This was quite opposite from the way many in His day practiced fasting. They wanted people to know, and went far out of their way to make sure they knew they were doing it. All to put on the false face that they were super religious. They had their reward of acclaim from the public, but their practice of religion got no higher than the ceiling with God.

But the Father knows the heart, and He can see when His children serve Him, even if the world does not, and He will reward them, sometimes even in an open way in this lifetime. If not in this life then surely in the age to come, in His Kingdom.

For most people today to fast more than three days without food or drink will be beyond them. Then you can fast for half a day, missing one or two meals. Our time should be spent in prayer, Bible reading, and meditation, when we fast. The whole purpose behind it is to get close to God.

Don't Worry About Your Physical Needs

Naturally, as we live in a physical world and must have certain physical things to sustain us, Jesus had to speak on this subject also.

"Store not for yourself physical treasures on this earth, where moths and bugs and rust can eat them up and destroy them, or where thieves can break in and steal them from you. Store your treasures in heaven, where it really counts, and where they will never become moth eaten or crumble away with rust, and where they will also be safe from thieves. Where your true treasure is there will be your heart also.

Your eye of the heart and mind is the lamp of your body. A pure eye lets in the sunshine into your life. But an evil eye shuts out the light and plunges you into darkness. If the light you think you have is really darkness, oh, how deep indeed is that darkness you have!

No person can two serve masters. For you will hate and despise the one while you love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and disregard the other. So in like manner you cannot serve and be slave to God and at the same time to physical money and goods.

So I am telling you, don't be overly anxious and worried about everyday life - whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Does not life consist of more than food and drink and clothing? Take a look at the birds. They do not need to plant or harvest or put

food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to Him than the birds. Can all your over anxious and fretful worries add a single moment to your life, or food to your stomach?

And why be fretful about your clothes and what you shall put on from day to day? Take a look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't sit and fret about their clothing. Yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as the lilies are. And if God cares so wonderfully about flowers that are here for only a short season and then they are gone, do you not think He will care for you even the more? Oh, you that have so little faith!

So do not fret and be overly concerned about having enough food or drink or clothes. Why be like those without God who indeed are concerned about such things? Your heavenly Father already knows all the physical things you will need in order to live, and He will provide these needs for you from day to day if you will first of all seek His righteousness and make being a part of His kingdom your primary concern in this life.

So do not be anxious about tomorrow for tomorrow will bring enough of its own problems and troubles. Today's troubles are enough to be concerned about without adding what may or may not come tomorrow" (Remember I am paraphrasing Jesus' words).

The Bible is a complete book and we must read it all and take into discernment all parts of what God teaches us on any particular subject. The book of Proverbs, as well as elsewhere in the Gospels and other parts of the New Testament, show us that it is not wrong to be wise in this physical life, to have some put away for a rainy day as they say.

Jesus, we shall see, also taught us to be good stewards of all the physical things we have. God does not want us to be spendthrifts, lazy, living with a "oh, I couldn't care less" attitude, and sponging off other people as if everyone owns us a living. There are so many passages in the Bible that show that a Christian is to work (if he/she at all can), not to be a "lazy bum" to put it bluntly. A Christian is to take care of his own (as the apostle Paul once said), to be a responsible person and be one who uses and actually increases what God has given him to use.

What Jesus was saying then, in the light of all the totality of the word of God, is that our life, mind, heart, thoughts, should not be wrapped up in the physical things of this life; how we can get more and more, how we can stockpile more and more material goods. We are not to be consumed, anxiously concerned and fretting over making sure we have huge amounts of more than enough to live on.

This is true what I'm about to tell you. I once met a man who had been away for a four day week-end, and he had not slept at all, for he was on some course that went through the nights even, teaching, teaching, and still more teaching. I was amazed when he told me this and he could see it in my facial expression. "Oh, that is nothing!" he exclaimed, "I was once in California on a 7 day course and we never slept for 7 days, the teaching continued day and night." Then in a matter of fact manner and with absolute sincerity and meaning every word, he said looking me straight in the eye with a cold serious face, "Hum, I want to be a millionaire."

Jesus on the other hand said your heart, your mind, your life, should first of all be seeking God's righteousness and His Kingdom. That, He said, should be the most important mission in life for you. As we have seen, Jesus taught that to serve Him, sometimes we would have to part with certain physical things, maybe a job, or a person once close and dear to us, and there may come times we would wonder how we were going to have the physical things we need in this life just to continue living. When we read through the letters of the great apostle Paul we find that sometimes he was in great need of the physical things in life, but God always saw him through and provided for him, not always as much as he may have personally wanted, but enough.

Jesus was saying and telling us that we need faith, we need to trust our heavenly Father. He knows what we need for each day, so trust Him to provide it for you, seek first His righteousness and His Kingdom, and be assured God will give you your needs for the day.

Be Careful How You Judge

Jesus said, "Do not judge unfairly, that you be not judge unfairly. For others will judge you as you judge them. Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged. And why worry about a speck in the eye of your brother or sister or friend, when you have a log in your eye? How can you even think of saying, 'Friend, let me help you get the speck out of your eye,' when you cannot see past the large log in your own eye? Hypocrites! First get rid of the log in your eye; then perhaps you can see clearly to get rid of the speck in your friend's eye."

We know from the rest of the New Testament, that to discern right from wrong, to judge the righteousness or sin of an act or way of life that someone may have done or may be living, is not wrong. We can see from 1 Corinthians chapter 5, that Paul said he had judged the matter of an unrepentant sinner in the congregation at Corinth, and told the people of the church there that they also needed to judge the matter.

Jesus on another occasion, said of Peter, "You have rightly judged" (Luke 7:43). And at another time said, "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgement" (John 7:24).

So, it is evident, Jesus was here in Matthew chapter 7 telling us that we need to be very judicious, circumspect, guard, mindful, attentive, on how we judge others and their actions. We need to be careful not to jump to wrong conclusions. We need to have all the facts on the situation. And we also need to be able to look into ourselves and see our faults, weakness, errors, before we start to bring down the hammer on the faults of others.

It is very important that we always remember and apply the words of Paul as found in Galatians 6:1-3. "Dear brothers, if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path, remembering that next time it might be one of you who is in the wrong. Share each other's troubles and problems, and so obey our Lord's command. If anyone thinks he is too great to stoop to this, he is fooling himself. He is really a nobody."

The Gospel writer Luke gives us a few more words that Jesus said in this context of judging righteously and correctly (Luke 6:39, 40).

To be able to judge righteously means you must become like the one who is the holy righteous judge of all people's hearts and minds. The disciple is never above their teacher, and everyone who acquires the full teaching of their teacher, will be like their teacher. In this instant Jesus was talking about the children of God becoming like God in righteous judgment. If they did not then they were still as blind men, and would be leading and teaching others to follow that blindness, and hence blind men would be leading blind men. Such blinded ones would both fall into the ditch as they tried to lead each other in the wrong ways of judging and condemning sin and sinners.

Then another key that is required to unlock the door of righteous judging is what Jesus went on to add in verses 41, 42 in Luke chapter 6 (also in Matthew). It is the key of first being able to examine yourself, look at yourself honestly, admit to yourself your errors, sins, and where you miss the mark at times. You must first be able to see the log of sins in your life, if you are going to be a true effective and helpful judge of errors and sins in other people. By doing this in your life, you will be humble in how you try to help another with their problems of sin, and weaknesses of the human flesh. It is not wrong to convert a man from the error of his way (see James 5:19, 20), but it must always be done in the context of what the apostle Paul was inspired to tell us must be the context of such righteous judging (see Gal. 6:1-3).

Be Careful How You Hand Out Your Treasures

This may shock some people, but Jesus taught that sometimes it is not prudent to give out the holy and fine pearls that God gives us, to other people.

"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the pigs, for they may simple trample what you give them under their feet, and even turn and beat you up" (Matthew 7:6).

Sad to say, but some out there are so against and so hate the holy and fine pearls of God, that they will only laugh at them, disregard and immediately trample them under their feet, and some may get so violently upset at what you are trying to give them, they will literally try punching you out.

We need wisdom in ascertaining the heart and mindset of people towards what we know as the holy things of God. Wisdom to know when and where and with whom, to share such holy things.

Effective Prayer And Requests

Jesus also knew that praying or requesting something from the Father in heaven, was not always answered the first time, but it would be answered and you would receive that which is best and good for you.

"Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find it. Keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you." The original language of the New Testament shows that Jesus said it this way, KEEP ON asking....looking.....knocking....

Jesus continued, "For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks finds. And the door is opened to all who knock. You parents, if you have children and they ask you for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they should ask you for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Of course not! If you being sinful people know how to give good things to your children, how much more then will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him."

God the Father loves His children. He wants the very best for them. He will give us that which He knows is good for us. Sometimes, as James told us, we may ask amiss (James 4:3), so of course we will not receive. The apostle John was inspired to give us two other conditions in order to receive from the Father.

"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22). "And this is the confidence we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14).

So we see that the "whatsoever we ask" must be according to His will. We may not receive the good gift from above (James 1:17) immediately. So as Jesus said, we must keep on asking. Later we shall see where Jesus gave a parable especially to teach that God's people must not faint, but continue in prayer, supplication, and request, and the Father will, in His time, answer and give.

Doing Good To All People

How should we live our basic day to day lives as we mingle and converse with other people? Jesus told us how. "Therefore whatever things you would like other people to do to you, do also to them, for this is the summary of all that is written in the law and the prophets."

Most of us like to be treated by others in a nice respectful, even kind and helpful manner. So, said Jesus, we must likes treat others in the very same kind and respectful manner, for this is what God has taught from the beginning, this is what in the overall way, the Old Testament was teaching through its many laws, commandments, statutes, and precepts.

The Narrow Gate - Another Shocking Statement

Oh, some of the teaching and statements that Christ made are truly shocking and in many respects quite the opposite of what a lot of theologians of the Christians religion today tell you. A lot of them preach that it is as easy as falling of a log to get as they may say "to heaven." Jesus taught exactly the opposite!

Listen to this! "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the NARROW gate. The highway to destruction is BROAD, and its gate is WIDE for the many who choose the EASY WAY. But the gateway to eternal life is SMALL, and the road is very NARROW, and ONLY A FEW EVER FIND IT."

Coming to Christ in repentance (knowing and acknowledging you have sinned, that you are a sinner) may be relatively easy (but many today who accept Christ as their Savior don't even know what sin and repentance is), but that is just the beginning of the road to salvation, we must continue to walk its path, to "grow in grace and knowledge" as Peter wrote (2 Peter 3:18) and we must make our calling and election sure by doing the things Peter listed in 2 Peter 1:3-11. We must "endure to the end" as Jesus said in Matthew 24:13, and then we shall be saved into the Kingdom of God.

Yes, Jesus knew there was much more to "being saved" than just "giving your heart to the Lord" as many preach today. The fact is, you can think and argue with all the arguments in the world, but the words Jesus spoke here are CLEAR and SIMPLE - the road to eternal life is NARROW, the doorway to enter is SMALL, most in this life will not walk that narrow way, and only the FEW in this age will enter the Kingdom.

False Prophets And Fruits

Jesus warned us that many would come along telling you they were Christians, telling you they knew Christ, accepted Him as Savior, telling you they were speaking in His name (Mat. 24:4-5), but they would be deceivers.

Here He says, "Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are really wolves that will tear you apart and eat you up. You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit. You do not pick grapes from a thornbush, or figs from a thistle bush. A healthy tree produces good fruit, and an unhealthy tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. So, every tree that does not produce good fruit is eventually chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, the way to know and identify a tree or a person is indeed by the kind of fruit that is produced."

Jesus is speaking in a very personal way here, of personal fruits, the way of life, that people live. He is not speaking about people who have large numbers of other people following them, as fruit. There have been some very evil men down through the centuries, such as Hitler, in the 30s and 40s who had hundreds of thousands devoted to him and his cause and desire to rule the world. Having people follow you is not what Jesus was talking about at all. It was the personal fruit of the person in their day to day lives, how they lived according to the way of the Lord, and how they lived in relation to others, as taught by the Word of God.

Jesus continued, "Not all people who sound religious are godly. They may refer to me as 'Lord, Lord,' but they still will not enter the Kingdom of heaven. The decisive and pivotal issue is whether they OBEY my Father in heaven. On judgment day many will tell me 'Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name, and even cast out demons and evil spirits in your name, and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply to them, 'I never knew you. Go away; you that continued to work lawlessness. ' "

There it is again, from the very lips of Jesus Christ Himself, from the one that many claim to know and follow and believe in as Savior of the world. Many want to have Jesus as Savior but will NOT BELIEVE what He said and taught. He clearly said you can have His name, call yourself a Christian, do all kinds of seemingly "good" things in His very name, yet on judgment day He, Jesus, will not know many of these people. He will tell them He never walked with them, never lived in them. He will tell them to depart from the Kingdom, and the main reason He gives is that they were LAWLESS!

They did not do what He had just said above, OBEY the Father in heaven. They were not within the laws, commandments, statutes, and precepts, of the Father. They did not live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). They did not do what Jesus had already expounded previously in this Sermon on the Mount as we covered in Matthew chapter 5:17-20.

To ensure a place in the Kingdom Jesus went on to say, "Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is like a wise person who builds a house on a good solid rock. Though the rains and storms come in mighty torrents and the floodwater rise and the winds beat against that house, it will stand and not fall because it is built on rock as a foundation. But anyone who hears my teachings and ignores them is like a foolish person who builds his house upon the weak and shifting sand. When the rains and floods come and the wind blows hard against that house, it falls with a mighty crash."

Believing and obeying what Jesus taught is just as important as believing in Him as personal Savior. The two go hand in hand, like a horse and buggy, like a car must have a steering wheel and tires as well as a motor, to correctly move along the correct road, so too, the whole life of a Christian must consist of believing ON Jesus and believing IN Jesus, believing and obeying what He taught. As one famous hymn says, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

Matthew then records: "After Jesus finished speaking the people were amazed at His teaching, for He taught as one who had real powerful authority - quite unlike the lawyers of the law called scribes."

Jesus had finished His Sermon on the Mount.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Great Faith of the Centurion

The Gospel of Luke tells us that after Jesus had ended teaching the people (which we have seen were not the great multitudes but His closest disciples, the twelve plus a number of others), He moved on to the town of Capernaum. In this town there was a centurion. What was a centurion? Well, the Roman army was made up of "legions" of soldiers, a legion being about six thousand men. There were ten divisions of about six hundred men to a legion. Each division was divided into three units (two hundred men to a division) and each was divided into two centuries of men, each under the command of a centurion. So a centurion was an army man in charge of 100 men of war. The centurions were always chosen from among Romans who were stable and reliable and who had demonstrated their courage and maturity. The army in Judea consisted of Italian and Syrian troops. Generally no Jews served in the Roman army, hence the Roman troops and centurions were not Israelites.

Now, this centurion in the town of Capernaum had a slave who was very dear to him. But the slave got sick and was close to dying, so he asked elders from among the Jews to go to Jesus and ask Him to come and heal his slave. The elders said to Jesus, "This centurion loves our people and even built us a synagogue. He is very worthy to receive your help and for you to come and heal his slave, please we implore you to come and heal this man's slave."

Jesus was somewhat impressed by their words and decided to go to Capernaum. When He was not far from the centurion's house, the army officer sent some of his friends to Jesus with these words, "Lord, please do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to receive you into my house, that's why I did not come myself to you. But I know that if you just say the word my servant will be healed. For I know what having authority is like, as I am a man set under authority, yet I have authority over soldiers under me. I say to one, 'go,' and he goes; and to another 'come,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'do this,' and he does it."

Jesus was humanly stunned at these words, waited for a moment and then said, "I tell you all, not even in Israel have I found such faith."

When those who had been sent by the centurion returned to the house, they found the slave healthy and healed from his near death sickness (Luke 7:1-10).

Jesus Raises A Dead Man

It was not long after this event that Jesus went with His disciples and a great crowd following Him, to the town of Nain. As He got close to the city gates He saw a man being carried out who had died, the only son of his mother, a widow. A very large crowd from the city of Nain was with this widow. It was obvious to Jesus and all, that the widow was in great grief, she was crying.

"Do not weep," said Jesus to the mother. And He came and touched the open coffin and the bearers stood still. Looking at the dead man He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." At these words the young man sat up and began talking. And Jesus turned him over to his mother.

The people stood there with dumbfounded amazement and even fear, some saying, "Oh, indeed a mighty and great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has surely visited His people!"

After this miracle the report concerning Jesus spread like wildfire throughout all Judea and the surrounding country (Luke 7:11-17).

John The Baptist And His Question

John the Baptist had baptized Jesus, had seen the heavens open and the Spirit like as a dove descend on Jesus. At that time he really knew who the Messiah was, but with time passing and the human heart can leading to "human doubts." Maybe John thought Jesus would have done things differently than what He did, well no matter what the reasoning was in the mind of John, he was now not so sure that this Jesus man was the promised Messiah.

By the time we reach this point in the ministry of Jesus, John had been put in prison, and from prison he sent two of his former disciples to the Lord Jesus with this question, "John the Baptist has sent us to you with this question, 'Are you the one who was to come, or shall we look for another yet to come?' "

Luke in his Gospel records that in that very hour of this question being asked, Jesus cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and to many that were blind He restored to them their sight. Then after all that, Jesus answered them saying, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk again, lepers are cleansed, the deaf do hear once more, and even the dead are raised to life again, the poor in material wealth have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed indeed is he who is not offended in me."

The messengers of John went there way back to tell all these things to him. After they had gone, Jesus thought it was the appropriate time to tell the crowds about John and who he really was or where he fit into the prophetic Scriptures of old.

"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind, weak and unstable? What did you really want to see? A man clothed in soft and fine raiment? Ah, those who are dressed in gorgeous apparel and live in luxury are those in kings' courts. What did you go out to see? A prophet? Oh yes, I tell you he was more than a prophet. For this was he of whom it was written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way before you come on the scene (Malachi 3:1).' I tell you, among all those born of women none has been and is greater than John; yet he who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he."

When many heard this, including some tax collectors, they knew it had been right for them in the sight of God to have been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the

lawyer scribes had rejected God's purpose and design and refused to accept John as from God and thus would not be baptized by him (Luke 7:18-30).

Matthew in his Gospel account adds more insight into this occasion which is well worth noting. He records Jesus as clearly stating that, "And if you will accept it, he (talking of John the Baptist) is the Elijah who was to come. He that has ears to hear with, should make sure he hears" (Matt. 11:14).

Yes, Malachi the prophet of old had it revealed to him by God that someone in the power and the spirit of the old famous Elijah the prophet, would come, to prepare the hearts of the people, so they would be really to note who the Messiah was and to accept His teachings (Malachi chapter 3).

The old original Elijah had died centuries earlier. He was still dead. It was not going to literally be the original Elijah that somehow would be resurrected to life, that would come back to earth, but someone of like godliness and boldness (see Matthew 17:9-13). In this account in Matthew 17, of Elijah and Moses appearing with Jesus you will note it was a VISION, something seen with the mind's eye, not an actual physical reality. And there again Jesus makes it clear that John the Baptist was the promised Elijah to come, and the disciples then understood it all.

The other addition Matthew records are these somewhat strange words that Jesus said, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force" (Matt.17:12).

There have been various thoughts of interpretation as to what Jesus meant by these words. Some think He was referring to the violent death of John (having his head taken off) and the violent death of Jesus (to come later), by the hands of basically hurtful and violent in nature, persons. This could possibly be understood that way, but I feel the context, somewhat before, but certainly afterwards, in Matthew's Gospel, lends itself to understand Jesus' words here as explained by Albert Barnes in his Bible Commentary.

"From the days that John began to preach.....He says that there was a great RUSH, or a CROWD pressing to hear John. Multitudes went out to hear him, as if they were about to take the kingdom of heaven by force. See Matt. 3:5. So, says He, it has continued. Since the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, or the GOSPEL, has been preached, there has been a RUSH to it. Men have been EARNEST about it.; they have come PRESSING to obtain the blessing, as if they would take it by violence. There is an allusion here to the manner in which cities were taken. Besiegers PRESSED upon them with violence, and demolished the walls. With such EARNESTNESS and VIOLENCE, He says, men had pressed around Him and John, since they began to preach.....multitudes had thronged around Him and John to hear the gospel" (emphasis was by Albert Barnes, who used italics in his commentary, where I used capitals).

Jesus also said that "violent men take it (the Kingdom of heaven) by force." This corresponds to Luke 16:16.

Men must have a forceful mindset of really wanting to enter the Kingdom. They must "hunger and thirst after righteousness" - obey God, live by His every word (we have

seen already Jesus' teaching on all this in the Sermon on the Mount), be more truly righteous than the scribes and the Pharisees. They must be forcefully determined to enter the Kingdom by the small gate, the narrow pathway. They must add to their faith in earnest desire all the things Peter admonished us to add to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:3-11).

To Jesus entering the Kingdom, inheriting the Kingdom, was not as easy as falling off a log. It would mean a person had to have a forceful, pressing, eager desire, to believe IN Jesus and also to believe ON Jesus.....to trust and obey!

What Jesus Thought Of His Generation

Jesus had now been preaching for some time. He had been to many towns and cities, proclaiming the good news of salvation and the Kingdom of God. He had done many a miracle and even raised to life a few that had died. Yet, despite all this a lot of the people and certainly a lot of the religious leaders were not "happy" with Jesus. So, He finally looked around and said to all within hearing distance, "To what shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like in attitude of mind? They are like children sitting in the market square or at the shopping mall, calling to one another, 'We have piped and played our musical instruments, but you did not dance to our tunes; we wailed out our songs of depression, but you did not weep with us.' "

Jesus went on with these words: "For John the Baptist has come to you eating no fine bread and food and drinking no wine; and you have said of him, 'He has a demon.' The Son of man has come eating fine food and drinking wine; and you say of Him, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by all her children" (Luke 7:31-35).

Jesus was telling them here that most of them had little wisdom. They had certain facts, oh yes, they knew about and had seen both John and Jesus in action, certain facts they had, but they could not put them together to make good godly wisdom of it all. They had preconceived theological ideas of what a prophet of God should be like and act and live like in their outward physical life style. They couldn't accept John because he lived in the wilderness and did not partake of the normal food of the city dwellers, and didn't even dress like most people, then add to all that he didn't drink wine. To them he was an outsider, a man from the "backwoods" as we might say today, someone from the hills of Kentucky, a "hill-billy" man. And with their view of "religion" such a man could not possibly be sent from God, so he must have an unclean spirit within him, possessed with a demon.

Then, they looked at Jesus. Here was this fellow saying He was from God, His disciples claiming He was the Messiah to come. Now, He ate very well, even having meals with "rich folk" at times in their homes. He also drank wine quite often it seemed. And He would befriend and keep company with the despised tax collectors and with the sexual sinners (such as prostitutes) down on "skid-row" - the ones "across the tracks" from the so-called "good normal people." To them this fellow called Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard or an alcoholic, maybe all three together.

They were wrong of course on every count. They failed to see that many of the prophets in the Old Testament were not from the "normal" city dwellers, but from the countryside, from farms and from the wide open spaces. They failed to see that many of the old prophets lived out in the country much of the time. They failed to see that God does not require everyone to look, dress, eat, and live in the city, as clones of each other. They failed to see that such outward signs and differences in people, do not automatically make them from God or from the Devil.

They failed to see that God does not demand or teach that you should never enjoy a fine meal with lots of fine food and wine. They failed to see how at times their great godly kings such as David lived from time to time, and certainly Solomon (who was blessed by God, in a physical way, while he walked with God, more than anyone).

They had a totally wrong theological mindset as to what on the outward physical life style, a man of God should be like. And if it did not fit their preconceived ideas they were ready to call those who taught and lived differently than their theology, either from Satan himself or a wild drunken party type fellow.

They certainly lacked Biblical knowledge, or they were so set in their ways, with their man made standards of the physical, that indeed they had no wisdom.

Sadly, there are some Christian religions today that have "set physical rules" as to what makes a "Christian." Some teach card playing is wrong, some teach going to a movie theatre (even a fine wholesome movie) is wrong, some say dancing (even between husband and wife) is sin. Some teach drinking wine or any alcoholic drink is sin. Some teach wearing colored clothes is wrong and wear all black. Others will not have a TV or radio because to them such things are from the Devil. And on and on it goes.

It was no different in Jesus' day. It seemed with many that no matter what you did, how you lived your life in the physical (that nowhere was forbidden by God), you could not please them. If you didn't fit in with their physical theology of what was right and wrong, you could not possibly be sent and inspired of God.

Many in so thinking, lost out on the Kingdom of God, their lack of wisdom kept them from the one true door to the sheep fold. We need to be very careful we do not make the same mistake.

Jesus Bemoans Three Cities But Gives Hope To Others

Still thinking along the same thoughts of how deceived and deluded most of the people were, Jesus zeros in on three cities He had openly taught in and done mighty miracles in, yet they had still not repented.

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? Oh, no, you shall be brought down to hades (the grave). For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained to this very day. But I tell you that it shall

be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you" (Matthew 11:20-24).

This section of Scripture is very important in noting the plan of salvation that God has for the world and for all peoples who have ever lived in all nations on the earth. Most people read right over this section and do not comprehend the importance of the words Jesus spoke.

He is speaking of a day called "THE judgment" or "THE day of judgment." You will notice Jesus said it would be more TOLERABLE for some than others. This word "tolerable" means, to be tolerate towards, to be acceptable towards, to be allowable to people, to be fair, to be gracious towards. You will also note that some cities never saw the works of God, never really had a chance to repent, to come to know what sin was, what the laws of God were, what they were doing wrong, and to turn and repent of those sins. The cities Jesus bemoaned were cities that had been given and seen the might miracles of God and also had the truths of God proclaimed to them.

When we understand the plan of salvation that God has for all mankind, when we understand the meaning of the great Feasts of the Lord as recorded in Leviticus 23. When we understand that as Jesus later said, no one can come to the Father UNLESS the Spirit of God draws them, opens up their mind to the truths and the word of the Lord. When we understand all people are blinded, as Paul would explain to the church at Rome in Romans chapters 9 through 11, that people cannot come under grace and salvation unless God removes that blindness through His Spirit, usually by the means of teaching and preaching from the human people God sends forth with His word (Romans 10:17-21). When we understand all these things, and that God will have mercy upon all that are in unbelief and blindness, but in His time frame (Romans 11:32), then we can understand what Jesus was saying here in Matthew chapter eleven.

The book of Revelation, in the 20th chapter, tells us there will one day, after the 1,000 year reign of Christ on this earth, come a time of a great general resurrection of all peoples. The books (Greek is "biblios" - where we get the word Bible from) will be opened, and the tree of life, will be available to them. They will see the word of the Lord, they will have salvation offered to them, when in their first physical life they were blinded and had not seen the works of the Lord or heard the preaching of God's truths to them. It will be "tolerable" for them, mercy and a tolerate heart will be shown them. God will accept that they lived and died without knowing or even being given a chance to repent of their sins.

And Jesus says that at that time, in that judgment, when they do see the miracles and works and the words of the Lord, those blinded and yes sinful cities of old, will fast repent. Jesus knew their hearts and minds and attitudes deep within. He knew they were of such a mind, that when given in the future the works and words of God, they will readily repent. But, the mind and heart of some of the cities where Jesus did do the mighty works of God, and did preach the wonderful ways to salvation, were such, were so hardened, so stiff-necked (see again Romans 10:17-21), that they would be put to shame by the quick repentance of old sinful city people like that of Sodom, when they would come up in a resurrection on that judgment day, to be given the words of God and have the book of life opened to them.

Jesus Remembers Those Who Did Believe And Repent

Then again, it was not all unsuccessful what Jesus had done and taught. Some did indeed listen, hear, and did repent. They did come to the knowledge of the truths Jesus was telling them, and did decide to not only believe IN Him but to also believe ON Him. Jesus was now about to remember such people, yet He also knew that it was the Father who had called, removed the blindness, and given grace to them.

"I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from those who are wise and understanding in their own minds and have revealed them to babes of humility and repentance. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and on one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:25-27).

We need to note here that it is both the Son of God and God Himself who act as one unit to reveal and open up the mind of people to see and accept their salvation (see also John 6:44).

Jesus continued: "Come to me, all you who are heavy laden with burdens of all kinds, and I will give you rest and peace of heart. Come and take my chains upon you, and learn of me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest and peace for your lives. For my chain is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Jesus did not say that coming to Him would free you of troubles, burdens, trials, a chain or two that life often lays upon us, but He did promise that with Him, and whatever life throws at us, the burdens would be bearable. You would be able to go through them with a gentle peace of heart, and not be boiling mad (ready to burst a blood vessel), or worried so silly you are paralyzed with fear, or so depressed you cannot get off the floor. He promised that with Him life would be easier to live and burdens lighter to bear.

You may be asking yourself, "What is the difference between believing IN and ON Jesus, or the other way around, believing ON Jesus and believing IN Jesus?"

The Greek word "en" is often translated and often means, "INTO." We can think of it this way ... ON is "surface" while IN is "within" or "inside of." Many can believe on the surface of Jesus, they can believe God exists, believe Jesus once lived on earth, believe that He was a great man, with great powers, even a prophet from God. They can believe all this, and James was inspired to tell us that the demons believe God is, believe on, but they still tremble (James 2:19). Their believing ON the facts that a person exists, and can do miracles, is only SURFACE belief, a surface belief in the polish, but is not DEEP, WITHIN, INSIDE belief of the very nature of the wood.

Many people I have known over the years have told me they believed there is a God, but that belief on God did nothing to their inner character of thoughts, reasoning, speaking, and actions of life and they still went their own way doing their own things, without any thought of whether God approved of their thoughts, words, and actions. Their surface believing on God, did not effect their life.

Those people who also with the belief on the existence and power and glory and holiness of God, have a belief that is IN, inside, within, into, the God of heaven and Jesus Christ His Son, within an analogy, they eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus and the Father. They will make them both, and what they are, their nature and character of mind, a PART of themselves. They will go INSIDE of God the Father and Jesus, find what makes them "tick" as we say, and want to "tick" with them and as them, in their lives (words, mind, thoughts, actions). They will then be partakers of not only the surface skin of Jesus, but partakers of His very inner being.

Jesus once put it this way to His followers, as we read in John chapter 4, starting with verse 53. Jesus said that unless His disciples ate His flesh and drank His blood they were no part of Him, and those who did eat His flesh and drank His blood DWELT in Him and He in them.

Some of His followers could not understand this analogy of Jesus' and thought He was meaning something of a literal sense and many walked away from Jesus at this point in His ministry, and as He Himself said, He knew from the beginning who they were that believed NOT, believed not into the innermost being of Himself.

They only had a surface belief, just ON the surface, not IN, or into His very being of character and mind.

Jesus was not teaching a literal eating of Himself, for He went on to explain in verse 63 that it was a "spiritual" inner matter that He was talking about, and making His WORDS (hence the Bible) a part of your inner being. Jesus was God's WORD personified - taking God's word and putting it into a flesh and blood body so to speak.

Believing IN Jesus is living His word - God's Word - the Bible, living by every word of God as Jesus said in Matthew 4:4. It will INCLUDE believing ON Jesus automatically, but you could believe ON the surface and yet never believe INSIDE of Jesus.

Believing IN Jesus includes the "on" part but believing only ON does not automatically include the "in" part.

We as true children of the Father need to believe IN Jesus, and then our whole life will revolve around being fully INSIDE of their nature and character. Then we shall DWELL IN Jesus and He will DWELL IN us (see also John 14:23).

The Parable Of A Creditor Forgiving Two Debtors

One of the more friendly Pharisees one day asked Jesus to eat with him in his house. Jesus accepted. While they were eating, a woman of the city, one of the prostitutes, learned that Jesus was eating a meal in the house of this Pharisee. She came to the house with an alabaster container of ointment, and stood weeping behind Jesus, at His feet. She realized she was a sinner of great magnitude. She began to wet Jesus' feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and also kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment she had brought with her.

At seeing all this the Pharisee indignantly thought within himself, "Why, if this man was truly a prophet from God, he would surely have known what sort of a woman was touching him, a woman who is a great sinner."

Jesus knowing what the man was thinking to himself answered him saying:

"Simon, I have something to say to you. A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed him a hundred dollars, and the other owed him 10,000 dollars. When they could not pay him back, he forgave them both of their debts. Now Simon, which of the two will love him the most?"

Simon answered without much hesitation, "Why, I suppose the one whom he forgave the most, the one who owed him 10,000 dollars." Jesus replied, "Oh, yes you have answered and judged rightly." Then turning and looking at the woman He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house and you gave me no water to wash my feet as is the custom and polite thing to do, but she has wet them with her tears and dries them with her hair. You gave me no kiss as is the custom, but she has kissed my feet continually over and over again. You did not anoint my head with oil as is often done, but she has anointed my feet with ointment she brought herself. So I tell you, her sins, which indeed are many, are forgiven for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little loves little. "

Then looking at her with kindness and mercy He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

At these words those sitting with Him at the table looked at each other and among each other began to say, "Who is this person, who forgives the sins of people?"

But Jesus looked again at the woman and told her, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:36-50).

When God opens the mind and starts to reveal His word and truths to people, it is often the largest sinners (as we humans look upon certain sins, like sexual sins) who can clearly see they are sinners and in need of forgiveness, that are first to cry out (even literally like this woman above) and come to God in humble repentance. Those of us who grow up in nice "respectable" families, with "good" parents, maybe going to "church" once a week, and just live middle of the road, average lives in "acceptable" communities as decent law abiding citizens, often find it difficult to see ourselves in the light of God's Holiness, often find it difficult to acknowledge we also are sinners, and in comparison to God, all our human righteousness is but filthy rags.

Jesus could and did have the authority to "forgive sins" because He was God in the flesh. He was as we have seen in previous chapters, Immanuel, which means "God with us." Later in the Gospels we shall again see how some people thought Jesus was blaspheming and even sinning by saying He could forgive sins; for they knew only God could forgive sins, and they just would not accept that Jesus was a member of the Godhead, that He was a part of what we call "God" - a God member come to earth as a flesh and blood human.

Jesus Had Women Disciples

Many mistakenly think that all the disciples that followed Jesus around Palestine were all men. The truth of the matter is that some of those disciples were women. Here is what Luke wrote:

"Soon afterwards He went through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the Kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, AND ALSO SOME WOMEN who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and MANY OTHERS, who provided for them out of their means" (Luke 8:1-3).

Wow, Jesus even had a wife of Herod's steward as part of His overall companions and disciples. Some in pretty high places of the elite of the world came to understand the truths of God, so much so that they became part of the whole of those who followed Jesus around the country. Luke says there were many other women also. And why not indeed. God is no respecter of persons. He created both man and woman. All can be His children. God is going to have not only sons but DAUGHTERS in His family (see what Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 6:17,18).

These women provided that womanly touch, provided what women as so good at, making sure you have your clothes washed and mended, good cooked meals (even if it was over the camp fire many times), and all the hundred and ones things that they do in making a family happy and a pleasure to belong to. We must remember that with all the disciples following Jesus around all the time from city to city, village to village, it was indeed like one large family. It was important that women be a part of this family. And they most certainly were as Luke tells us.

Jesus At Home And Heals A Blind And Dumb Demoniac

Jesus thought it was time to return home. We suppose when Mark put it this way in his Gospel, he was referring to the town of Nazareth. Such a large crowd surrounded Him that it was even impossible to even sit and eat a meal. In fact Jesus' friends, when they heard about the situation went out to pull Him away from the crowd, for they thought "He is beside Himself" with knowing how to cope with so many people all around Him that He could not even eat a meal (Mark 3:19-21).

Then, before His friends could catch Him away, someone in the crowd brought forth a man who was not only possessed of a demon but could not speak and was blind. Jesus healed the man so he could both speak and see. All the people round about were amazed, and began to say among themselves, "Can this be the son of David?"

The people were saying this because it was becoming clear to them that no mere human man could do these things that they were seeing, but only someone from God, with the power of God in him.

Then the Pharisees heard what the people were saying to each other, and they then said, "It is only by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons."

Jesus, knowing full well what they were thinking, said to them, "Every kingdom or government divided against itself will fall, and no city or house divided against itself can stand; and if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then can his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But on the other hand if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then truly the Kingdom of God has come to you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house, unless he first binds up the strong man? Then he indeed can plunder his house. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me just scatters abroad" (Matt.12:22-30).

Jesus was from God, He was doing everything by the power of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. Satan does evil and harm, that is what he is all about, Jesus was doing good, helping and restoring lives, giving health, delivering people from the power of demons. It was ridiculous to think Jesus was doing all this through the working of Satan.

And then we have the clear basic fact that if you are not on Jesus side, on His team, you are working against Him. You may not be doing so with a deliberate set mind, but those who are not with Jesus are living and often thinking and reasoning contrary to all that He and the Father stand for. Hence if you are not on Jesus' team you are on the opposing team. The Pharisees in the main were on the opposite side to Jesus. Let's make sure we are with Jesus and not against Him.

The Unpardonable Sin

Jesus had not finished telling the Pharisees some very important up front information. Continuing from where Jesus left off, He said:

"Therefore I tell you, every sin or evil speaking can be forgiven - except evil speaking against the Holy Spirit, which can never be forgiven. Anyone who evil speaks against me, the Son of man, can be forgiven, but evil speaking against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, either in this age or the age to come. A tree is identified by its fruit. Make a tree good, and its fruit will also be good. Make a tree bad and its fruit will also be bad. You bunch of snakes! How could it be possible that evil men like you could speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what comes out of your mouth in the words you say. A good person brings forth good words from a good heart, and an evil person brings forth evil words from an evil heart. And I tell you this, that you must give an account on judgment day of every idle and evil word you have spoken. The words you now say reflect your fate then, either you will be justified, be in right standing with God, or you will be condemned to die (Matt.12:31-37).

Speaking evil against the Holy Spirit has really bothered some. As Jesus said, doing such can never be forgiven. Some have been concerned they have literally spoken the "wrong words" at some point in their life and so they are doomed to never be forgiven and hence will be condemned on judgment day to die in the lake of fire (Revelation 20).

We notice Jesus did say that EVERY SIN and "evil speaking" (even against Himself as a person, as the Son of man, while He was walking the earth at that time) CAN be forgiven. The whole Bible says the same thing. There is not a SINGLE SIN that cannot be forgiven. But what does the Bible teach as a fundamental prerequisite to be "forgiven"? The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, teaches that REPENTANCE is an absolute requirement to be forgiven of sins. Upon acknowledging we have missed the mark, done wrong, done or said evil or sin, we can REPENT, and God has promised upon heart-felt repentance there is NO sin that cannot be forgiven.

Jesus, we will notice, said of those Pharisees that they were "evil" and being evil they spoke "evil things" against the Holy Spirit. Those Pharisees would NOT REPENT! They would not acknowledge their evil ways and evil words. Here was the Holy Spirit of God working mightily in Jesus, speaking the truths of God, doing the magnificent works of God, calling people to REPENT of their sins, but those Pharisees just would NOT repent, and in their un-repentant attitude of mind they were even saying that the "working power" of the Holy Spirit of God, was EVIL and from Satan the Devil.

Anyone who will NOT repent when the Holy Spirit is working to give them the truths and ways of the Father in heaven, anyone who will not repent when God through His Holy Spirit is calling them to repentance, just CANNOT then be FORGIVEN! It is only the humble repentant person that God can look to, that God can FORGIVE (see Isa. 66:2; Ps. 103:8-18; Ps. 1; Ps.119).

Psalms 119 is full of the way of salvation. Grace and mercy and forgiveness, is given to those who love and serve and meditate on the laws, commandments, statutes, and precepts of God - who love the truth of the word of God. And all of that will lead one to see their errors and sins, and to REPENT! The New Testament is full of the truth that we must come to live in an attitude of mind that is "humble repentance" as a way of life, a way of the daily heart. If we live the way of life that the apostle John tells us about in 1 John 1:6-10 and 2:1-6, then we can have full confidence that we have not and never will commit the "unpardonable sin."

If, we continue to be of an evil heart and mind, un-repentant when God's Spirit reveals to us His workings and truths, we shall bring forth evil fruit, be it in words or deeds or both, just as the Pharisees were doing. And they were supposedly "religious."

When we stand before Jesus on judgment day, it will then indeed be our words (which is really our heart and mind speaking, Jesus did say above, "From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks") that will make us right before God or make us wrong. If we are in the wrong it will be because we have been like the Pharisees, evil and unrepentant, turning our back upon the working power of the Holy Spirit that reveals light and righteousness and truth to us, and so in essence saying we want nothing to do with the Holy Spirit, and that this Holy Spirit is not from God but from Satan.

Surely, and indeed it is so, as Jesus said, such an attitude of un-repentance, can never be forgiven, for God can only forgive and have mercy upon and show grace to, those who acknowledge that working power of the Holy Spirit is from Him, and REPENT of their sins!

A willingness to let the Holy Spirit work in our lives, to lead us to truth, to teach us, to correct us, to show us our errors and sins, and for us to be of a REPENTANT mindset, is the key. The Pharisees were not of this attitude of mind and were in danger of being condemned on judgment day. If we are never like the Pharisees in heart of mind, we shall never be remotely close to ever committing the unpardonable sin.

The Sign Of Jonah - Three Days And Three Nights

After all this that Jesus spoke to the Pharisees they put their tongue in their cheek and probably with sarcasm, said, "Okay teacher, we wish that you prove who you say you are with a sign." They wanted a sign like no other, other people had done miracles similar to Jesus' but they wanted something like moving the sun back to just above the horizon when it was high in the sky at noon. They wanted something truly physically spectacular.

Jesus, probably with some righteous anger for their unbelief, replied to them, "It is an evil and adulterous generation of people that seeks for a stupendous sign; but no such sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Here's the sign I give. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, the grave" (Matt.12:38-40).

What a sign, the only stupendous miracle sign Jesus would give to prove He was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. It was the sign of His resurrection, that after three days and three nights being dead in the grave, He would come back to life.

People have no trouble believing that Jonah was literally in the belly of the great fish for a literal three days and three nights. They have no trouble believing Jesus literally fasted for a literal forty days and forty nights as recorded in the Gospels. But when it comes to believing He was literally dead in the grave for literally three days and three nights, for 72 hours, they just cannot believe that. Most of Christianity believes Jesus died on a Friday afternoon, put in the grave later that day and was resurrected early Sunday morning. The time most believe Jesus was in the heart of the earth is much less than three days and three nights.

The truth is when we put together all the verses on this subject of the length of time Jesus was in the tomb, we see that Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday afternoon, buried later, what we call Wednesday evening, and was resurrected on what we call Saturday evening, making His rest in death in the tomb just exactly as He said, three days and three nights, a literal 72 hours. As the Gospel writer John tells us in John chapter 20, when the ladies came to the tomb it was yet DARK that Sunday morning, and they found the tomb EMPTY, they found that Jesus was already NOT THERE. Of course He was not there for He had been resurrected as He said. He had been resurrected late Saturday evening, three days and three nights after being put in the heart of the earth the previous Wednesday evening.

Jesus continued to berate, castigate, take to task, the generation of people He was living among, with similar words that He had used earlier:

"The men of Nineveh will rise in THE judgment WITH THIS generation and shall condemn it; for they REPENTED at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, someone GREATER than Jonah is here among you. The Queen of the South will rise in THE judgment WITH THIS generation and shall condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, someone GREATER than Solomon is here among you" (Matt.12:41-42).

Salvation per se was not given to the people of Nineveh, but when told by Jonah they had better mend their ways in this lifetime or their city, with them in it, was doomed for destruction, they DID REPENT of their wrong ways and mindset. Yet, the people in the main, and the religious leaders, would not repent of their errors and sins, when Jesus, God in the flesh, much greater than Jonah, was among them telling them to repent. The Queen of the South, was not given salvation per se, yet she came all the way from afar to hear what God was doing through Solomon. But those right next door to Jesus would not come to Him for salvation and repentance that He was offering. And He was much greater than Solomon.

When all these people of old come up in THE judgment resurrection (mentioned at the end of Revelation chapter 20) along with most of that generation of people Jesus was living among, the ones of old, because of their "human attitude" (something that is often just human and not even God led through the Holy Spirit) it will be easier to entreat and work with them and lead them to salvation, relatively speaking, than the ones of Jesus' time, who saw and heard Him in the flesh. They will be ashamed and condemned. They will still find it hard to repent, compared to the ones Jesus gave in His two examples.

Still thinking of THAT generation that He lived with and among, Jesus went on to say:

"When the unclean evil spirit has gone out of a person, that evil spirit passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from where I came.' And when he does return he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then that evil spirit goes and finds seven more spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that person becomes worse than the first. So shall it be also with this evil generation" (Matt.12:43-45).

Jesus looked beyond His ministry, beyond His death and resurrection, beyond the first years of the apostles going forth with power spreading the Gospel, and saw and foretold, that most would not repent, and accept Him as Messiah and Savior, especially the scribes and Pharisees. Although many were made whole, had unclean evil spirits cast out from among them, were cleansed at least on the physical side of things, but because they did not PUT the right clean Holy Spirit within them, moving on from where they were to salvation, they were just empty, easy targets for not only the original evil spirit to come back and influence them, but many other evil spirits also. Hence they would end up worse off than at the beginning.

So it was for that generation of Jesus' time. By A.D. 70 Titus the great Roman military leader had descended on Judea and Jerusalem and laid waste the city and killed thousands of Jews. It is written that all true Christians had a warning before Titus and his army arrived, and all fled and escaped with their lives, but the main populace suffered great slaughter.

Jesus' True Mother And Brothers

Matthew tells us that while Jesus was still speaking to the people inside where they were gathered, his mother and His brothers came and stood outside wanting to speak to Him. "Your mother and your brothers are outside wanting to talk to you," someone said to Him. "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Jesus replied. "I tell you," looking around at those who were around Him, "my real mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do His will. They are my mother, my brother, and my sister" (Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21).

Yes, Jesus did of course have a physical mother, her name was Mary as we saw in earlier chapters. Jesus also had physical brothers, or to be more technically correct, half brothers. Mary and Joseph her husband, had a marriage just like most marriages, they had more children after Jesus was born. We saw in earlier chapters that it is recorded that Joseph did not "know" Mary (a Bible way of saying that he did not have sexual relations with her) until AFTER Jesus was born. But after that event, he did sleep with Mary his wife and have sexual relations with her, and they did produce more children themselves, as most married couples do. Remember it was God the Father not Joseph that was the "father" of Jesus via the miracle power of the Holy Spirit.

Mary did NOT remain a virgin all her life as some teach. Jesus did have literal brothers. They, with their and Jesus' mother Mary, came to where He was teaching and wanted to speak to Him. He used this opportunity of "mother and brothers" to emphasize how and who His real mother and brothers and sisters were - it was they who heard the word of God and obeyed it, they who did the Father's will.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Parables And Miracles

Farmer Scattering Seeds

Later that same day Jesus left the house and went down and sat by the sea. But the people followed and soon there was an immense crowd all gathered about Him. It was too large a crowd for comfort as they say, so He got into a small fishing boat and taught them as they listened on the shore. He told them many stories such as this one.

"A farmer went out to plant some seed, by hand as usual. As he scattered it across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on thin soil with underlying rock. The plants sprang up quickly enough but they soon withered under the hot sun and died because the roots had no depth in the shallow soil and had no nourishment. Some other seeds fell among the thorn bushes that engulfed the tender shoots and choked them, so they died also. But some seeds fell on fertile ground, with good top soil, and they flourished and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted. Anyone who has ears to hear with should take note and listen and understand what this means" (Matt.13:1-9).

Story after story, Jesus related to the people. His disciples finally came to Him and said, "Why do you always tell stories when you talk to the crowds of people?" (Matt.12:10).

Jesus answered: "It is you my disciples that have been permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven, but others have not been permitted. To those who are of a ready mind to receive my teachings, more understanding will be given them, and they will have an abundance of knowledge on spiritual matters. But to those whose heart is not really acceptable of my teachings, even what they have will be taken away from them. That is why I tell stories to the crowds, because people see what I DO, but they do not really see what they should. They hear what I SAY, but they do not really hear what they should, and do not understand the depth of true meaning I have for them. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says, 'You will hear my words, but you will not understand them: you will see what I do, but you will not perceive its meaning. For, the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes, so they do not see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them' (Isa.6:9-10)" (Matt.13:11-15).

Here is how Mark worded the last phrase, "...lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them" (Mark 4:12, KJV).

It is quite a shock to many if they slowly read these words of Jesus and just believe them for what they say and tell us. Jesus here clearly proves to us that some in this physical lifetime are NOT called by God, they are not given the spiritual eyes to see with, to comprehend, to understand the truths of the Father. They are blinded by the way of their society they live in, they are blinded by their own heart and mind that does not want to really see God and all of His word and ways and truths. And as shocking as

it seems to many, God and Christ are leaving them in their blindness. They are not being called to be converted and to have their sins forgiven in this age they live in.

We have already seen that God has a plan of salvation, and that such individuals will be resurrected in a large general resurrection, with those of Sodom, Nineveh, the Queen of the South, and millions of others, who also lived and died without being offered salvation. Their day of salvation will come at the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth, in the period called in Revelation 20, the GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT, and Jesus we saw earlier called it "THE judgment" when people from the past would rise with people of His generation.

We see here that many of Jesus' generation were left in their blindness of hard-heartedness. Jesus was not trying to convert them and hence forgive their sins. This is very difficult for some to understand and to believe, but it is nevertheless a very true teaching of Jesus' and the New Testament (see also how Paul wrote about it in Romans chapter 9 through 11).

Explanation Of The Scattered Seeds

Jesus then looks at His disciples and says, "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. I tell you for sure, many prophets and godly people have longed to see and hear what you are seeing and hearing, but they could not, it was not to take place in their lifetime.

"Now, here is the explanation of the story I told about the farmer scattering seeds of grain. The seed that fell on the hard pathway represents those who hear the good news about the Kingdom and just don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches the seed away from their hearts, as quick as the birds come to eat it off the pathway. The seed that fell on the thin rocky soil represents those who hear the message of the Kingdom and receive it with joy. But like young plants in rocky soil, their roots do not go down very deep. At first they grow some, but then they wilt away when problems, trials, tests, or persecution comes upon them. The seeds in the thorn bushes represent those who hear and accept the word of the Kingdom, but all too quickly the message and truths they have are crowded out by the cares and concerns of this life and the lure of physical wealth, so they produce no lasting crop.

"Ah, but the good soil represents the hearts and minds of those who truly accept God's message of the Kingdom and salvation and produce a huge harvest - thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted" (Matt.13:16-23).

Once more Jesus teaches us that it is not just good enough to start on the narrow road to the Kingdom and salvation, one must stick with it, never give up, "endure to the end" as Jesus said later in Matthew 24. Then we shall produce a crop that can be harvested, we shall be saved, harvested into the Kingdom of God.

Story Of The Wheat And Weeds

Another parable Jesus puts before them, saying: "The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his

enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So when the plants came up and produced grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seeds in your field? How then are there these weeds?' He answered them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and pluck them out?' But he said to them, 'No; because in gathering the weeds you may root up the wheat also with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest time, and at the harvest I will tell the reapers to gather the weeds first and bind them up in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn' " (Matt.13:24-30).

Explanation Of The Wheat And Weeds

Jesus left the crowd and returned to the house. His disciples were very puzzled about what the parable of the wheat and weeds meant. "Master, please explain to us the meaning of the parable you gave about the wheat and the weeds in the field," they said to Him. Jesus answered:

"He who sows the good seed in the field is the Son of man; the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons or children of the Kingdom; and the weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of man will send His angels, and they will gather out of His Kingdom all causes of sin and evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear with should make sure he hears" (Matt.13:36-43).

Jesus talks about His angels gathering the elect, the saints, the children of God, together when He comes in Matthew 24:29-31. Paul talks about this same event in 1 Corinthians 15. It will be at the end of the age, at the "last trumpet" sound (Revelation 11:15-19). We find from passages such as Revelation 19; Zechariah 14; and others that many of the wicked at that same time will be cast into a lake of fire (Rev.19:20; 2 Thess. 1:7-10). This harvest will continue through the 1,000 year reign of Jesus on earth (see Isa. 66:15-24). At the end of the thousand years more harvesting of the righteous from the wicked will take place as we have seen in the "White Throne Judgment" period (see Rev. 20:7-13). Finally all the wicked will be burnt up in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15; Malachi 4:1-3 with 2 Peter 3:8-13), and then will come the new heaven and the new earth wherein dwells only holy perfect righteousness (Rev. 21; 22).

The harvesting of the righteous wheat and the evil weeds will start at the end of this age when the angels are sent forth, at the coming of Jesus again to earth, but the harvesting of the wicked and the righteous will continue until the final earth-wide lake of fire and the new earth and heavens come into being.

Good Seed And Fertile Earth Parable

And He said to them, "The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full

grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mark 4:26-29).

The Kingdom of God will take time to develop and finally be harvested. God's seed, His word, will go forth into all the world. Often people will not even know where and how it is developing, and bringing forth mature grain ready for the harvest, but it will be so. God's word will go forth and it shall not return unto Him void of fruit. When it has accomplished what God desires for His harvest, then as we have seen the sickle or the angels will go forth and the harvest will be gathered in.

The Mustard Seed And The Leaven

And he said, "With what can we compare the Kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown in the soil, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is planted it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade" (Mark 4:30-32).

He told them yet another parable, "The Kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in a large pan of bread flour, till it was all leavened or risen up" (Matt.13:33).

The Kingdom of God and all within it may start out few in number, just a small seed, or a small bit of leaven, but it will grow and grow until the whole world is finally under its shade and filled with it. This will not all come about until Jesus returns to reign on earth for a thousand years. But as the prophets have written, there is coming an age when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea beds.

Jesus Only Used Parables To The Crowds

Matthew and Mark once more make it abundantly clear to us that Jesus only spoke to the crowds of people in parables, but in private He explained what He was meaning in the parables, concisely and clearly to His disciples. Matthew tells us that He did this to fulfil what the prophet Isaiah had spoken, "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world" (Matt.13:34-35; Mark 4:33, 34).

The Hidden Treasure; The Pearl; The Net; Treasures Old And New

"The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy goes and sells all that he has so he can buy that field. Again, the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of a fine pearls, who, on finding even just one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had to buy that pearl. And again, the Kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind, when it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into baskets but threw the bad away. So it will be at the close of this age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into a furnace of fire; and men will indeed weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt.13:44-50).

The Kingdom of God and being a part of it, should be the most valued treasure we have. We should be willing to give up everything, or count everything we have in this physical life as sellable, in order to be in the Kingdom of God. It should be in our eyes as the hidden treasure in a field or the pearl of great price. We should be doing as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, seeking God's Kingdom first and then knowing that all the physical things we are in need of for this lifetime will be given to us from the Father.

And yes, the Kingdom of God will be offered to all people eventually in God's time frame. The ones who accept it and live within its framework will be the righteous who are brought into the Kingdom, starting at the time when the angels are sent forth to gather in the righteous, then the harvest will begin and will continue for one thousand years plus the white throne judgment period (Rev. 20). Then all the bad, the wicked who would not accept the Kingdom and repent and live within its precepts, will be gathered and put into the lake or furnace of fire and will suffer the punishment of the second death (Rev. 20 last few verses).

Jesus looked at His disciples and said to them, "Have you understood all this?" "Oh, yes," answered the disciples. "Then," He replied to them, "every scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his treasure things that are new and things that are old" (Matt. 13:51-52).

The Kingdom of heaven and all it stands for is the whole Word of the Lord, from Genesis to Revelation, the Old and the New Testaments. Those instructed in the Kingdom, who accept it, are to do as Jesus said, live by EVERY WORD of God (Matt. 4:4), live by the Old Testament and live by the New Testament.

More Great Miracles - The Storm Is Calmed

Jesus had worked hard all that day. It was now evening time, and exhausted and weary, He said to His disciples, "Come, pull out and let's go across to the other side of the sea." Other boats of people went with Him for they did not want Him to disappear from their sight.

The wind began to pick up its pace. The waves were splashing pretty hard against the sides of the boat. The wind blew stronger still. Smash, thud, smash, thud, came the sea waves against the boat, with every increasing speed and power. Then the full force of the storm came upon them, waves now higher than the sides of the boat, throwing it around like a rag doll. Now, each time a wave came it not only smashed into the boat with a great thunderous roar but quite a lot of the wave cascaded into the boat itself, and within minutes the boat was filling with water.

The disciples looked around to see where Jesus was, and found Him sleeping contently on a pillow in the back of the boat. He seemed to not have a care in the world as to what was going on all around Him. The boat was now dangerously close to sinking. "Master, master," cried out the disciples into Jesus' ear, "do you not care that we may perish in this storm?"

Jesus awoke from His deep sleep, and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And immediately the wind ceased its violent blow and the sea became quietly very calm.

Looking around at His disciples Jesus said to them, "Why is it you are afraid? Have you not any faith?"

The disciples were awe struck, for a few moments they were speechless with wonder and amazement, and then finally began to say among themselves, "Who then indeed is this man, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:35-41).

Jesus Casts Out Demons And Sends Them Into Pigs

Arriving on the other side of the sea in the country of the Gadarenes, and coming out of the boat, there met Him a wild demonic man from among the tombs (Matthew records that there were two men not just one, but even he goes on to speak in the "singular" not the plural. Mark and Luke speak only in the singular from start to finish. The answer probably is that of the two men one was the leader and maybe the most demon possessed, while the other, though also demon possessed stayed in the background).

Luke tells us that for a long time now he had worn no clothes. Mark tells us that no one could bind him. Some had tried to put chains on him but he just snapped them apart, and not even a number of men could subdue him, he was too strong for them all. He would constantly cry out and bruise himself with stones as he lived among the tombs.

This demoniac sees Jesus coming, even a long way off as yet, but he sees Him and runs to be near Him and begins to worship Him.

"Oh, what have you to do with me, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God," the demoniac cries out with a loud wailing voice. "I implore you by God, do not torment me before the time appointed," the wild man beseeched Jesus, who had commanded the unclean spirit to depart from him.

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is legion," replied the demoniac, "for we are many."

The demons through the man's voice begged Jesus not to send them out of the country into thin air so to speak. Such demons as these were, love to possess live flesh and blood creatures of some kind.

Now there happened to be on the hillside nearby a great herd of swine or pigs. The demons begged Jesus to send them to the pigs so they could at least enter into them. And Jesus complied with their wishes and told them to go to the swine. Many indeed were the demons in this man. The swine numbered about two thousand. They entered the herd, and immediately the herd rushed down into the sea and all of them drowned.

The herdsmen, when they saw what had happened to all the swine they were taking care of, fled as fast as their legs would move. They ran into the city nearby and told the

people all they had seen. And the people came out of the city to see what all the fuss was about. When they arrived they saw the demonic man sitting there, clothed, and in his right mind. People who had been there all the time through all the events, told the ones coming later from the city what had happened to the demonic man and to the herd of pigs.

Such fear fell upon the people of that region that they just wanted Jesus to leave and get away from them and from their land. Jesus obliged them and was getting back into the boat when the man who had the legion of demons cast out of him, came and begged Jesus that he might follow Him, but Jesus refused saying to him, "You go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord God has done for you, and how He has had mercy upon you."

The man went his way and began to do what Jesus said, and in that area called Decapolis the people marvelled greatly at what they saw and heard (Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39).

The question may be asked about a herd of swine, two thousand, being allowed by Jesus to rush down into the sea and drown. This was obviously a cultivated herd of swine because it had herdsman tending it. Swine were created by God to be the wandering garbage cleaners of the land. Pigs are "unclean" as classified in the "clean and unclean" food laws of the Old Testament (Lev. 11 and Deut. 14). They were never intended by the Lord to be cultivated and used for food or animal sacrifices in the Temple. Obviously this herd of swine was for one or both purposes. One or the other or both purposes would have been against the laws and commandments of God. Jesus, hence had no trouble in allowing this herd of pigs to perish in the sea, and so not be used for human food or animal sacrifice.

Did the demons who entered the pigs also drown in the sea? The angel world (and demons are fallen sinful angels) is not subject to physical laws as we are or physical substances such as water. They did not drown in the sea with the swine. The Gospel writers do not tell us what happened to them after the pigs were dead. They probably went hurrying away to find another warm flesh and blood body or bodies to dwell in.

Jairus' Daughter And The Woman With Hemorrhage

Jesus again crossed to the other side in the boat and a crowd welcomed Him, for they were there waiting for Him as they hoped He would return. Then came one of the rulers of the local synagogue, Jairus by name, and he knelt before Jesus at the same time he besought Him saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Please come and lay your hands on her, so that she will be made well and live."

Jesus said He would come and heal his daughter. The huge crowd continued to follow Him, thronging about and sometimes pushing and shoving so that Jesus was often being touched as He walked along.

There was a woman in the crowd who had a flow of blood for twelve years. She had been to many doctors who tried many of their medicines to heal her. She had spent all of her money on these doctors, but they had not been able to help her, and the problem

was just getting worse all the time. She had heard the reports about Jesus and His healing powers from many in the crowd, so she just came up from behind and touched Jesus' garment, for she had said to herself that if she just touched His garment she would be made well and healthy once more. And so it was. Immediately her hemorrhage or blood flow stopped, and she felt in her body that she was indeed healed.

Jesus knew that power had gone from Him and straightaway turned around and asked who had touched Him.

"Master, you see the crowd pressing in on you from all sides, evening pushing you at times, and you ask who was it that touched you," said His disciples with wonderment as to why He would ask such a question. Jesus, said nothing more, but looked here and there in the crowd.

The woman was shocked that He knew someone had touched Him for a special reason. She was fearful and trembling, but she came forward and told Him the whole truth of why and what she did. Jesus looked at her with great love and compassion and said, "Daughter, your mighty faith has made you whole and well. Go in peace, fear and tremble not, and be healed of your disease."

Even while He was still speaking to the lady and telling her to be at peace, there came someone from Jairus' house who said, "I'm sorry to tell you but your daughter is dead. No need to bother the Teacher any more." Jesus, ignoring what was said, simply looked at the ruler of the synagogue and said, "Do not fear, only believe, have faith."

Jesus then instructed that only certain ones were to follow Him. They were Peter and James and John the brother of James. As they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue there was great weeping and wailing, very loud indeed was the moaning of those present there.

"Why do you make such a sorrowful tumult, the child is not dead, but merely sleeping," said Jesus in a calm and reassuring voice. "Oh, what you say is crazy, we know enough about death to know she is indeed very dead," said the people in the house, and they just all started to laugh at Jesus. He told them to all go outside, and with the child's mother and father and those disciples He had brought along to the house, He went in where the child was laying. He took her by the hand and said, "Talitha cuni"; which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And immediately the girl got up and started to walk around, as she was twelve years old.

All five people present (the parents of the girl and the three disciples) were overcome with utter amazement, as they stood there speechless. Jesus told them in a no nonsense and serious tone of voice to make sure they told no one about what they had just seen and witnessed. And then He told the girl's parents to give her something to eat (Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56; Matt. 9:18-26).

Two Blind Men And A Mute Demoniac

As Jesus passed on from there, two blind men started to follow Him, and began to cry aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." Jesus continued to walk on and finally

entered a house. The blind men came up to him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe I am able to do this thing, and give you your sight?" They quickly answered back, "Oh yes Lord, we believe you can." He then touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith be it done to you." And their eyes were opened and they who were blind could see. Jesus sternly told them to tell no one about the miracle. But they could not contain themselves with such a healing that had been bestowed on them, and they spread His fame all over that district.

As they were going away, a mute demoniac (some demons make a person mute, unable to speak) was brought to Him. And Jesus cast out the demon and the man began to speak. The crowd marvelled at what they had seen saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel." But the Pharisees, always tagging along and watching, once more exclaimed, "Oh, he casts out demons by the prince of demons" (Mark 9:27-34). Yes, some people it seems, just never learn, never learn the truth. Paul, years later wrote about some people that "they are always learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7).

Jesus Returns To Nazareth But Is Not Honored

Jesus went from there, after doing all those great miracles, and after the people gave Him such honor and glorified God, and He returned to His home town of Nazareth.

The Sabbath day came and He went to the synagogue and began to teach the words of the Lord to all present. The people were astonished, but not in the way you might think. They said among themselves, "Where did this man get all this from? What University did He go to? Which theologians have instructed Him in this wisdom of theology? What mighty works are wrought by His hands, we do not see them. Is this not just the carpenter's son, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not His sisters also here with us? This fellow is just one of us, really a no body to speak of." They were greatly offended in Him, and could not imagine He was someone special.

Jesus knowing their thoughts and attitude towards Him, said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kindred, and in his own household." And He could do no mighty work there, except lay hands on a very few sick people and heal them. He marvelled greatly because of their unbelief (Matt.13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6).

Sad to say but it is often today the same. People can be honored in their own town for being a great "sportsman" or "musician" or "artist" or "filmstar" etc. but if they come speaking the truth and words of the Lord God, with power and conviction, calling people to repent of their sins, showing what sin is, and what the true ways of God are, people who knew them as a child, or as a neighbor friend, will just not honor them, or take much notice of them. They often cannot bring themselves to realize and accept that God can be working through that individual in a great and mighty way. It is often true as the old proverbs says, "familiarity breeds contempt." Even Jesus found it coming His way, and had it flung in His face. We need to be careful that we never allow familiarity to come into our mind to where we may make the biggest mistake of our lives.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Jesus Instructs And Sends Forth The Twelve

Jesus continued to teach and preach about the Kingdom of God in all the cities and villages, instructing on the word of the Lord in their synagogues. He also continued to heal every disease and every sickness and infirmity that people had.

The crowds grew larger and larger wherever He went. His sorrow and compassion for them also grew larger, because He saw they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He called His disciples and said to them, "Look around you and see how large the harvest is, but the laborers are very few. You need to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest."

He then told the twelve He was going to send them out among the harvest of the people. He would give them authority over evil spirits, to cast them out of individuals, and to heal every disease and sickness that people had (Matt. 9:35 to 10:1). Jesus gave the twelve certain instructions for that specific preaching and healing ministry that He was about to send them upon. He told them:

"Go not to the Gentiles or to the sect of the Samaritans, but go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, your countrymen. As you go, preach, saying, 'The Kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' I want you to heal the sick, even raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying for it, so give freely. You are to take no gold, nor silver, nor money in your wallets. Take no bag for your journey, nor two outer coats, nor two pair of sandals. Do not take a staff or walking stick. The laborer deserves his food. When you enter a town or village, inquire who is worthy there, and stay with them until you depart. As you enter the house, honor it. And if the household is indeed worthy, let your peace of blessing you bring come upon them. But if that household is not worthy, keep your blessing you bring to yourself. If anyone will not receive you or will not listen to your words, then shake off the very dust there from your feet as you leave that household or that town. Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable and merciful on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, than for that town or household" (Matt. 10:5-15).

The words Jesus just spoke were specifically for the twelve disciples at that time and for the commission they were about to undertake. It does not mean all AFTER that particular evangelistic task the twelve were to undertake, must follow exactly the outline Jesus gave them for their journey of teaching the Kingdom of God. This we can clearly see from other parts of the Gospels and especially from the book of Acts and the life and journeys of the great apostle Paul.

The words that Jesus spoke next, from the very context of the words themselves, we can see that Jesus was giving "overall" knowledge and instructions to some who would go forth in any age to preach the truths and word of the Kingdom of God.

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so you need to be as wise as serpents but as harmless as doves. Beware of people; for some will deliver you up to

their theological councils, and may even flog you with the whip in their synagogues and meeting places. You may be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the nations for God's word. When they deliver you up, do not be worried how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour of need; for it is not you who speaks but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver up brother even to be put to death, and the father his child, and children will rise up and be in conflict with their parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I say unto you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes" (Matt.10:16-23).

It is obvious from the above words of Jesus, and Him saying that His disciples will not have covered all the cities of Israel before He returns in glory, that this section of Jesus' discourse is for ALL of this age, from that time then, when He uttered those words, to the time of His second coming to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. It is also interesting to note that the cities and towns of Israel must be way more than the towns that are now within the land area we call the "State of Israel" - the land of Palestine in the Middle East. So numerous would be the towns and cities of Israel that Jesus said they all would not have been covered with the Gospel message before He returned to earth again. The truth of who ALL of Israel is, must be for another time and place to study and discuss.

Continuing with Jesus' words:

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master; it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they malign and call evil those of his household.

"So, have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not finally be revealed, or hidden that will not be finally known. What I tell you in the dark and private, you utter in the blazing light; and what you hear whispered by me in your ears, you proclaim loudly upon the house tops. And do not fear those who can kill the body, but cannot kill the inner life you have in me; rather fear Him who can destroy both your inner life and body in the fires of the second death - hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father taking note of it. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered by God. Fear not therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

"Do NOT THINK that I have come to bring peace on earth at this time; I have not come this first time to bring peace on earth, but indeed a sword. For I have come to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be they even from his own household.

"He who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who is not willing to lay his

life down for my sake, who does not take his cross and is not willing to follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

“He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me, receives the one who sent me, the Father. He who receives a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives to one of these little ones of mine even a cup of cold water because he is my disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward” (Matt. 10:24-42).

Matthew then says that when Jesus had so instructed His twelve disciples, He left and went out to teach and preach in the cities (Matt. 11:1).

What a message Jesus gave to His twelve and to all disciples who would follow afterwards down through the age to His coming again. It might be worth reading over those words again, before continuing with this Bible Story.

There has been many times in the last 2,000 years when those words of Jesus have come to pass. Many have been handed over to authorities to be killed for the sake of the truths and words and ways of Jesus Christ. In some parts of the world even today, being killed for being a true Christian is still a very real threat. It is happening, but seldom does it get the news coverage it should, especially in the Western world.

Men can kill the body, but they cannot kill the inner spiritual life that you have for being a child of the Father. Upon your death that inner life is kept safe by God (Ecc. 12:7) and He is able to restore life immortal to you on that resurrection day, when the last trumpet will sound and the dead in Christ shall rise to meet Jesus in the air, in the clouds, and be with Him for ever more (1 Thes. 4:13-18).

God loves us more than we can imagine. He has a glorious day waiting for us if we endure to the end as Jesus said. We are to spread His word, His Gospel message, knowing it may make enemies even from and within our own flesh and blood family members. But those that receive it, receive you for doing and living God's will, shall be rewarded.

The word of the Lord is to go forth, we can, if we will but accept, be a part of sending forth His word. It will go forth and it will not return to Him void. So the Lord has written and so it shall be.

How John The Baptist Was Killed

It is the Gospel of Mark that informs us with the most detail on why and how John the Baptist was killed by Herod.

Jesus was so busy preaching and healing in the towns and cities that His fame had reached the notice of King Herod. Some were saying John the Baptist had been raised from the dead, and had wonder working powers. Others said it was Elijah come back to life. Still others declared Jesus was a prophet like the prophets of old. But when Herod

heard about this miracle working man he, with somewhat of a trembling voice, said, "Oh, oh, this must be John whom I had beheaded, come back to life."

Herod was deeply troubled in thinking this was John the Baptist, for Herod had sent and seized John, had him bound with chains and cast into prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. John had boldly faced Herod and told him that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife. And so Herodias had a bitter grudge against John and wanted to see him killed, but her desire could not be fulfilled because Herod feared John as he knew John was a righteous and holy man, and Herod made sure John was safe, at least from death. Herod would gladly listen to John but was always troubled, anxious, and worried by his words.

Herodias saw an opportunity one day to have her wish come true. It was Herod's birthday and he gave a large banquet for his court officials and officers and the leading men of Galilee.

Herodias' daughter danced so well and enticing for Herod and all present, that the king said to the girl, "Young lady, you are so beautiful and you are such a fine dancer, you have danced so well, and everyone here is in agreement that you have, making this day and banquet so special, I will give you whatever you ask for, even to half of my kingdom." Herod vowed to her, so showing he meant what he said.

The young lady was surprised and really did not know what to ask for, so she went to her mother. "Mother, this is a shock to me," the daughter said. "King Herod has said he will give me anything I desire, up to half of his kingdom. I haven't a clue what I should ask for."

"I know," replied her mother with a smirk on her face, "you can ask for the head of John the baptist."

The young lady went back to Herod and unashamedly said, "I have decided what I want you to give me. I want the head of John on a plate."

Obviously this young lady was either every much in tune with her mother about certain things where John was making trouble for her mother, or she was one of those young daughters that would do anything a parent said, even to murder and kill someone the parent did not like for whatever reason.

Herod was exceedingly sorry and upset. He realized he had done a silly thing in giving a vow or oath to her in front of his guests, but fearing even more to break his vow, he sent a soldier to John with orders to cut off his head and bring it to him. And indeed that is what happened. John was beheaded while in Herod's prison. His head was brought on a plate, given to the young lady who in turn gave it to her mother.

When John's disciples heard about it they came and recovered his body and laid it in a tomb (Mark 6:14-29).

The Miracle Of Feeding Five Thousand

The twelve apostles went on their journey while Jesus was preaching in the towns, and they then came back telling Him all that they had done and the words they had spoken.

"It has been a busy time for you all and for me, so come with me to a quiet place, and we shall rest a while," said Jesus to the twelve. So busy had it been for all of them that they hardly had any time to eat, for people were coming and going all the time it seemed, from sun up to sun set. They took a boat and went to a town called Bethsaida, on the other side of the sea of Galilee, which was called the sea of Tiberias.

It was not easy to get away from the crowds of people. They saw that Jesus was heading out with the twelve, and they just followed, because they knew He could heal people from all their diseases. Jesus arrived on the other side of Galilee and went with the twelve up into the hills to rest a while. Now it was close to the time of the Passover feast the Gospel of John tells us. Jesus could not get away from the crowds for very long. Soon there was another very large crowd around Him, which Jesus did not mind, He actually welcomed them for it was an opportunity once more to teach them about the Kingdom of God and to heal those who were sick.

It was now getting late on this day, even into the evening, and it was a lonely wilderness type place where they were. The disciples suggested to Jesus that He send the people away into the villages so they could buy food to eat.

"No, I do not think I will send them away. I want you to give them food," said Jesus to the twelve.

Looking at Philip, Jesus said to test him, "How can we buy bread to feed all this mass of people here?"

"Master," Philip replied with astonishment at the very thought of the twelve trying to buy food to feed the people, "Why, even 500 dollars would not be enough money to buy food for all these people," Philip said.

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Jesus, "There is a lad here who does have five barley loaves and two fish, but that is insignificant among such a huge crowd of people."

"Ah, okay, make the people sit down," Jesus said. There was much soft lush grass where they were. The number of people was about five thousand, and they all sat down in orderly groups of hundreds and fifties, at the disciples' instruction.

Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, and looking up to heaven He blessed and gave thanks, and then told the disciples to distribute them among the people. All ate well and enough until they were satisfied. Then Jesus told the disciples to gather up what was left. There was enough food left over to fill 12 baskets.

When the people saw the miracle of 5 loaves and 2 fish feeding 5,000 men (we are not told the number of women and children who were also there), they said among

themselves, "This is indeed THE prophet who was to come into the world!" (Matt.14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14).

Jesus Walks On Water

The crowd, after seeing this miracle, on top of all the other miracles He had done, got more and more excited, like a tidal wave of water the excitement grew until they had determined to come and take Him by force if necessary, and make him King. Jesus quickly withdrew Himself and went up into the hills by Himself alone to pray and meditate.

When evening time had come and it was now dark, the disciples went down to the sea shore and boarded the boat once more to cross the sea and go back to Capernaum. Jesus had not yet come back to them so they were without Him as they started to cross the sea.

The wind was blowing hard and right into them, a head wind as they say. It was a rowing boat they had, not a sail boat, hence it was very hard work to row into such a heavy wind. The "fourth watch" came, which meant it was sometime between 3 am and 6 am. Looking up, what did they see but Jesus coming towards them and getting closer, but not in another boat. They were amazed, had to blink twice, but it was true, Jesus was coming towards them WALKING ON TOP OF THE WATER!

When the reality of what they saw sank in, they became very frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost, not really the literal flesh and blood body of Jesus. They of course had never seen such a sight before or ever heard of such a thing being done by a human being, as literally walking on top of a sea of water. Such frightful panic gripped them that they cried out in fear. Jesus heard their fearful cries and said, "Take heart, it is really I, be not afraid."

But Peter still not quite sure if this was the real Jesus, shouted out, "Well Lord, if it is really you, bid me that I may come to you walking on the water also."

"Come on then, " said Jesus.

So Peter jumped out of the boat and started towards Jesus also WALKING ON the water! The wind was still howling away and blowing very strongly. Peter realizing the situation of being in a wind storm, started to be afraid once more and with that fear he began to sink into the water. Seeing he was possibly going to drown he cried out, "Please Lord, save me."

Jesus immediately reached out and took him by the hand saying to him at the same time, "O man of little faith, why did you start to doubt?"

Both Jesus and Peter got into the boat and instantly the wind ceased to blow. The disciples had already forgotten about the miracle of the loaves and fish, their hearts were still somewhat hardened even after all the signs and wonders they had seen Jesus perform, so the Gospel of Mark tells us. But once more after this miracle they fell to their knees and worshipped Him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Another part of this miraculous event is that after Jesus entered the boat out on the sea, the boat was immediately, in an instant, at the land where they were headed.

The next day, the huge crowd of people that was left behind came to understand that the disciples had departed in a boat but not with Jesus, and that the boat they left in was the only one around in that area. They knew Jesus was not still there. They knew another miracle had been done by Jesus.

It happened that some boats from Tiberias came along to the place where Jesus had fed the five thousand. The people quickly jumped into the boats and set out for Capernaum to seek Jesus. They somehow thought He would be at that city. But Jesus and the disciples landed at Gennesaret, a town to the south of Capernaum.

Soon it was head around that Jesus was in their region. People of course recognized Him and soon they began bringing all the sick to Him for healing. Whatever town or village He was at they came bringing the sick, even laying them down in the market places. The sick pleaded with Him that they might simply touch His garment to be healed, and it was so, as many as touched His clothes were made healthy and well (Matt.14:22-36; Mark 6:45-56; John 6:15-24).

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Real Bread Of Life And False Traditions

Jesus Speaks About Himself And Many Fall Away

The people who had come across the sea of Galilee, mostly the ones from the five thousand whom had been miraculously fed, finally did locate Jesus and said to Him, "Teacher, when did you arrive here, we've been searching for you."

"Truly, it is indeed so very true, you do not come here to me because of the signs and miracles and teaching that I do, but because you ate your fill of the food I provided for you from the loaves. You should not be working so hard for the food that is physical and soon is gone, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which I the Son of man can give you, for on Him, that is me, God the Father has set His seal of approval."

At hearing this the people answered, "Well alright then, what must we specifically do to be doing the work of God?"

"This is the work of God, that you BELIEVE IN Him whom He has sent," replied Jesus to them.

"Well, what sign can you give us that we can see and believe in you?" they quickly answered Jesus, and continued, "What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' "

In answer to this Jesus said, "Of a truth, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives to you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world."

"Great," the crowd said, "then Lord, give us this bread for all times."

Jesus looked at them, knowing they hadn't understood what He was meaning, and said, "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE; he who will come to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I've told you already, you have seen me and yet you still do not believe in me."

These people were indeed pretty dumb, as "dumb as a fence post" as the saying goes. They had been witness to miracle after miracle, and had been witness to the five loaves and two fish that Jesus had blessed and how it had fed five thousand men, till they were all full and satisfied. They were still looking for some "sign" or something from Jesus to back up what He was saying. They just did not see the light. And part of why they did not Jesus goes on to tell us.

"All that the Father gives me will come to me; and he that comes to me I will certainly not turn them away. For I have come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him who has sent me. And this is the will of Him who has sent me, that I

should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but will resurrect them all at the last day. For this is also the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life; and I will raise them up to life eternal at the last day."

Yes, it is the Father that must call people, take away their blindness as we have seen, draw them to Himself through and by the means of His Holy Spirit. All that the Father calls to Christ Jesus, the Father wants to see in the resurrection, wants to give eternal life to in the resurrection at the last day of this age, when Jesus returns at the sound of the last trumpet, to establish the literal Kingdom of God upon earth for a 1,000 years and then for all eternity as Revelation chapters 19 through 22 show us.

The Jews now began to snicker, then they murmured at Jesus because He had said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." They went even further and said among themselves, "Why is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? Is not this man, just a man like all others born of a father and mother, how does He know and declare to us that He has come down from heaven?"

Jesus knew what they were saying and told them, "Do not talk and discuss among yourselves these things that you cannot understand. For no one can come to me UNLESS the Father DRAWS him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' So, every one who had heard and learned from the Father does come to me. I do not mean that people have seen the Father who have learned from Him. Only those who have come from where God is have seen the Father. But it is truth, very real truth, that he who believes has eternal life. I AM the BREAD of LIFE!"

We have seen in the previous recent chapters, and we shall see again in coming chapters, and we do see here in clear words, that the Father has a PLAN of SALVATION. It is His plan to teach every human who has ever been created to know about Himself and Christ Jesus. All people will sooner or later be taught of God, but for some it is not in this first physical lifetime. ONLY those who are drawn and called by the Father can come to Christ. The rest are left in spiritual blindness, for another time, another day of salvation, when they will be raised to physical life and the prophecy of the last verses of Revelation chapter 20 will be a reality.

Back to the words of Jesus:

"Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, that a person may eat it and not die. I am the LIVING bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

On hearing these last words the Jews disputed among themselves saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" They were confused and bewildered at what Jesus was saying, so Jesus went on to confuse and puzzle them even more with these words, "Of truth I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you. He who eat my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the

living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the person who eats me will live because of me. This is the true bread that comes down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died. He who eats this true bread will live forever."

Now, Jesus said all these words to the general public that was in the synagogue, as He taught at the city of Capernaum.

These words even puzzled some of Jesus' disciples like as never before. Some said among themselves, "These are words hard to understand, who can listen to them?"

Jesus knew that even some of His disciples murmured at the words He had spoken. He knew what was going on in their minds, so He spoke to them saying, "Are you offended by the words I've just spoken? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where He was before? Here is the meaning of my words. It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is not important, it will not help; the WORDS that I have spoken to you in all my teachings, they are spirit and they are life. But some of you I know, do not believe."

Jesus knew all along who really did not believe and who would betray and go against Him. So He said to them, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me UNLESS it is GRANTED to them by the Father."

In one sense Jesus may have had in mind His followers partaking in the NT Passover by "eating His flesh" (the bread) and "drinking His blood" (the fruit of the vine), but only in symbol form, not in any literal sense as the bread and wine becoming His literal body when eaten, as the largest "Christian" church on earth teaches. Here we again see (covered in chapter 15) the ones who believed only ON the surface with Jesus, and ones who believed in a deeper IN or INTO Jesus. The only "on" Jesus believers, thought He was fine and good as long as He performed to their wishes and desires, as long as He spoke words that were not too far out in left field, to their minds.

Believing ON Jesus is just a surface thing, it doesn't go down very deep. Many can believe that Jesus did live as a human being, that He was a mighty instrument in preaching words about God...why most of Islam teaches that Jesus was "A" prophet of God, but it goes no further than that. That kind of belief is ON Jesus, as acknowledging He lived, preached, and died. Believing IN Jesus, means you believe INTO, or WITHIN, Jesus. It is a DEEP belief that not only believes Christ existed, but believes He existed as God in the flesh, that He was the VERY SON of God the Father, a human that was sinless, that lived a life FAR above what ANY other human being has ever lived. And it is a belief in Jesus that transforms the very mind, thoughts, words, and actions, of the one so believing.

For further expounding on this DEEP INWARD belief I refer you back to chapter 15 and the sub-heading "Jesus Remembers Those Who Did Believe And Repent."

After all these words from Jesus, it was just too much for some of His own disciples, and they drew back, packed their bags so to speak, and departed from Him, no longer wanting to be a part of those who went about the towns and villages with Him.

Seeing this, the departing of some of His disciples, He looked at the chosen twelve and said, "Will you also go away and stop following me?" Simon Peter was the one to answer for the twelve, "Lord, to whom shall we go? It is only you that has the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One sent by God."

Looking intently at the twelve Jesus then said, "Was it not I that chose you, the twelve, yet one of you is a devil." Jesus was thinking of and referring to Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for it was he, one of the twelve, who would later betray Him to the religious authorities, who would desire to have Him put to death (John 6:25-71).

If we notice carefully the words Jesus said here, we can see clearly that He taught very plainly that He came from heaven, from the Father. He taught that He existed in heaven with the Father before He came to earth as a flesh and blood human being.

We see that Jesus was not meaning to say people should try to literally eat and drink His blood. But some thought that was exactly what He was meaning, or they just found it so hard to now understand His words, and so kind of revolting, they just walked away from Him, and no longer were counted among His disciples. But, it was all as Jesus had said, only those called by the Father, only those who were being led by the Holy Spirit, having their minds opened to the truths of God, that could come to Jesus and stay with Him in any case.

And for them the words He taught and who would make those words a part of their lives, it was like was eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Believing IN Jesus as well as believing ON Jesus, would mean they had eternal life, and would in the last day be resurrected to immortal glory in life eternal.

False Traditions Condemned By Jesus

As usual the scribes and Pharisees were not too far away from Jesus at all times. The Pharisees were in every community, they were the "religious party of the people" but the scribes were mainly found in Jerusalem. When some of the scribes came from Jerusalem they banded together with the local Pharisees. They happened one day to see Jesus' disciples eating food with unwashed hands, and they called this sort of thing "defiled hands."

The Pharisees had taught the people to wash their hands before eating, but this washing of hands was not what we may do before we eat. It was a ceremonial type of washing, a ritual process, washing all the way up to the elbow. When they came from the marketplace, before eating, they would go through a ritual of purifying themselves with water. It was a somewhat elaborate washing system. There were many other purifying and washing rites that they did with various cups and pots and pans and vessels of bronze, even tables and beds. Well, it was all traditions that the Pharisees and scribes had added to the religious system for the people. It was way and far beyond what God had ever instructed in the Old Testament. It was all man made rules and regulations, but passed off as something God had decreed to be done. Of course God had decreed no such practices. It was all false traditions that had no bearing on true holiness with God.

The pompous scribes and Pharisees, believing their traditions were God sanctioned, came to Jesus and said, "We see here that your disciples eat with unwashed hands. Why do they do this and eat with defiled hands? Why do they not follow the traditions of the elders?"

Jesus answered with some exasperation, and a little anger, "Oh, it is of a truth that Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, religious pretenders, when he wrote, 'This people honor and worship me with their lips, but their heart is FAR from me. In VAIN do they worship me, teaching as doctrines of God what is merely the precepts and invented ideas of men.' And what do you do as a way of life? You leave off doing the commandments of God, while you hold fast to the traditions of men."

He further went on to say, "You sure do have a fine way of rejecting the commandments of God, in order to keep your own man made traditions. For Moses wrote, 'Honor your father and mother'; and 'He who speaks evil of his father or mother, let him surely die'; but you say, 'If a man tells his father or mother, what you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God) - then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, so you make void the commandments of God through your traditions which you hand on to people. And many such like things you do to cast away what God has command."

What does this thing about "Corban" mean, and how did it void the commandment of God about honoring your parents? This is how it went. If someone had say \$10,000 or maybe a \$100,000 they could "dedicate" it to the "church" - which in this case was the Pharisee religious synagogue or "religious work" of the Pharisees. They did not have to give it over to them at the time it was dedicated to them, it could be dedicated to them any number of years in advance to the actual handing it to them. Maybe it was dedicated with the stipulation they would not receive the money (land, house, etc. that could be sold for money) till they died. If then, their father or mother became in need of physical help, the child could say, "Well I cannot give you any of my money, or sell the land for money to help you, because I've dedicated it to the 'church'" (the Pharisee church in this specific case of our Gospel story).

And so with this clever move on part of the Pharisees, based upon man made rules and "theology" traditions, they had people disobeying the very clear commands of God, by following their self made religious traditions. And that was only one example Jesus gave. He said that they did many other such things with their invented traditions, which also had people disobeying other commandments of God.

Jesus called the people to Him and said, "Listen and understand, it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but it is what comes out of his mouth that defiles him."

His disciples came to Him and told him how the Pharisees were offended by what He had spoken. Jesus simply replied, "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Just let them alone, let them be, they are blind leaders, and if a blind man should try and lead another blind man, they will both fall into the ditch or into a pit."

Sometimes to teach and uphold the commandments of God, either by word or by action, and to reveal the falsehoods of a so-called "religion" towards God, it will offend some people. Sometimes there is no way around it, the truth often cuts people and they may get offended, even if the truth is presented in the kindest way possible, though I doubt Jesus was trying to be gentle and kind here with the Pharisees. He was probably stone faced and very upset in the tone of His voice, as He uttered these words to the Pharisees. They were after all pretending to be "godly religious leaders" and Jesus knew how false and damaging was much of their theology. This was not the first time the Pharisees accused Jesus of not being truly and correctly "religious." Now, on Jesus' part it was time to call a spade a spade, and as they say, "to let them have it between the eyes."

Sometimes in life, situations arise when it can be no other way. This was one of those times. But, even the disciples were puzzled again by the parable, not offended as the Pharisees were, but still puzzled, and they asked Jesus to explain clearly what He was meaning.

"Are you still without understanding?" Jesus said as He was answering their bewilderment. "Do you not see that whatsoever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and so passes on and out? But that which comes out of the mouth, really comes from the heart and mind, and this defiles the person. For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, hate, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander, coveting, deceit, pride, an evil eye, silly foolishness. These and other such things are what defiles a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a person" (Matt. 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23).

We need to note here that the whole context is talking about "washed hands" or "unwashed hands" as we eat food. It has nothing whatsoever to do with God's clean and unclean foods laws. The context is clearly the Pharisees disputing with Jesus over His disciples not washing their hands, in their special ritual way, before eating food. The Pharisees put more importance on making sure there was not one speck of dirt on the hands before eating food, than some of the commandments of God. Jesus was showing where the real priority should be.

Some translations at the end of Mark 7:19 say, "Thus he declared all foods clean." The translators want you to think this is part of the original Greek, and that Jesus was making void the clean and unclean foods laws that God gave in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. But such words are not found in the original Greek. The Greek reads, "...but into the belly, and into the waste-bowl goes out, purging all the foods."

Yes, of course, if some dirt is on your hands and you eat without washing them, some dirt may get on the food and into your mouth, but the body's automatic cleaning system will take care of the matter and clean it out through the bowels. Some dirt in the bowels from food does not defile what comes out of the mouth via the thoughts and intent of the heart and mind. Again, the whole context here is concerning washing the hands or not washing the hands before eating food with your hands, and has nothing to do with God's clean and unclean food laws.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

More Miracles And The Leaven Of The Pharisees And The Sadducees

Canaanite Woman's Daughter Healed

Jesus thought it was time to move away from the Jewish people as a whole, for a short time, and go to the towns of Tyre and Sidon up on the north-west of the coast of Palestine. Arriving there He entered a house in order to be alone for a while, but a Canaanite Greek woman by race, knowing of Him, and hearing that He was there among them, came running to Him crying out as she fell down at His feet, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon." She begged Jesus to cast out the demon from her little girl.

But Jesus said not one word. He just seemed to ignore what she said, and didn't even seem to recognize that she was present. She persisted in her request, until finally the disciples asked Jesus to send her away because of her anguished crying.

Finally Jesus spoke:

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

The woman was unrelenting and not shaken. She came again and knelt before Him saying, "Lord, help me!"

Jesus replied, "The children should be fed first. It is not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs."

"Yes, Lord," the woman said, "but even the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs."

"O woman," Jesus said on hearing this, "GREAT is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire. You may go your way, the demon has left your daughter."

Matthew says in his Gospel that the child was healed instantly, and when the woman went home she found her child lying in bed and the demon gone, adds Mark in his Gospel (Matt.15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30).

What a fine example this woman is for us. She used persistence and logical wisdom in asking for the Lord Jesus to help her child. She had true faith that has works (James chapter 2). Faith without works is a dead faith the apostle James was inspired to tell us. Jesus was impressed and it is recorded for all mankind to ever read, that He said this woman had GREAT faith. This is the SECOND recorded GENTILE (non-Israelite) person who is said to have outstanding faith, according to Jesus. The first we read about earlier was the "centurion" - I hope you remember that story that we have already covered.

Jesus Heals A Deaf Mute And Many Others

It was not long after this incident of the Greek woman's daughter having a demon cast out, that Jesus left that area and returned to the sea of Galilee. He went up into the hills there, but great crowds of people soon came to Him bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and so many others with sicknesses and afflictions. They put those sick folk at His feet and He healed all of them. When they saw all the sick being healed the people praised and glorified the God of Israel.

One healing at this time is especially recorded for us by Mark. Some people brought before Jesus a man who was not only deaf, but who also had a speech impediment.

Jesus took the man aside from the multitudes. He wanted this healing to be a private matter. We are not told why, but Jesus wanted this healing to be more private than open before all the multitude of people present. He took His fingers and placed them in the deaf man's ears. And He spat and touched his tongue, and looking up to heaven Jesus sighed and said, "Eph-phatha," that is, "Be opened." And the man's ears were opened and he could hear, and his tongue was released from the speech impediment and he spoke plainly.

Jesus, as He often did, told those who knew the man before he was healed, to tell no one, but the more He told them not to tell, the more it seemed they did the opposite and zealously proclaimed all that He did. The people were astonished beyond measure, saying among themselves and to others, "This Jesus has done all things well; He even makes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak" (Matt.15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37).

The Miraculous Feeding Of Four Thousand Plus

Once more the crowd had enlarged to a very great number. They had been with Jesus for a full THREE DAYS, and they had nothing at all to eat in those three days. Jesus called together His twelve disciples and said to them, "I feel compassion on the crowd, because they have had nothing to eat over these last three days they have been with me. If I send them away to their homes hungry, they will surely faint on the way, and some I know have come a long way."

"Well Master," the disciples said, "how can it be possible to feed all these people with food in a wilderness place like this?"

"How many loaves of bread do you have?" asked Jesus.

"We have seven loaves and a few small fish," the disciples replied.

Jesus took the seven loaves and the few fish, blessed them and told His disciples to distribute them among the people. This the disciples did and all the people ate till they were full and satisfied. And after all had eaten the disciples took up seven baskets of left over food.

The number of men only was about four thousand, and besides the men there were women and also children. So the total crowd of people could have been well around 6,000 or maybe even more. Stop and think about this. Of course Jesus worked another great miracle, but I'm thinking about the zeal, the dedication, the high enthusiasm all these people, including children, must have had to go for three days without food, in order to be around Jesus as He taught and worked healing miracles. They were certainly zealous, at least in a physical way.

After all had eaten Jesus sent them away, back to their homes. He then immediately got into boat with His disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha or Magadan (Matt.15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10).

Jesus Reveals What The Leaven Of The Pharisees And Sadducees Is

The two main groups of religious leaders (the Pharisees and the Sadducees) were never far behind Jesus, always tagging along even if they just observed from a distance. But sometimes they came close to ask Jesus questions, often trying to test or trip Him up to smash His credibility with the people. This was another one of those times. They came wanting to argue with Him and specifically wanted Him to give them a sign from heaven. They just could not accept that He really was who He said He was, the Son of God, coming from heaven, being sent by the Father.

Jesus sighed a great sigh literally and within His mind. He said, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather; for the sky is red.' And you say in the morning, 'It will be stormy weather, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the face of the heavens, but you just cannot interpret the signs of the times all around you."

The signs the Pharisees and Sadducees had seen coming from Jesus were so many they were countless, and still they were not satisfied, but wanted an extra super-doooper sign from out of the heavens. I suspect that if Jesus had given it to them, they would still have said to the crowds that He did it by the prince of demons, the Devil, and would have continued in their unbelief, still denying that He was the Son of God.

Jesus continued: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but I've told you already, no sign will be given to you except the sign of Jonah."

We saw in a previous chapter that that sign Jesus would give was that He would be three days and three nights in the grave as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish.

Jesus had enough of all this argumentative unbelief from those religious leaders, and with His disciples He got into a boat and once more crossed to the other side of the sea of Galilee.

When they got to the other side, the disciples realized they had not brought with them any bread except for one loaf. Jesus used the opportunity of the conversation about physical bread to tell and teach them about a much more serious leaven and bread they needed to be very aware of.

"Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees," said Jesus.

The disciples discussed among themselves what Jesus was meaning, as they had brought no bread but one loaf, and the Pharisees and Sadducees were not near them on this occasion.

Jesus, knowing they did not understand Him, said to them, "O men of little faith, why is it that you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? Do you not yet understand. Does not your hearts perceive? Having eyes do you not see? Do you not remember the five loaves and the five thousand and how many baskets of food you gathered up after they ate? Do you not remember the seven loaves and the four thousand and more people who ate, and how many baskets of food you gathered up after they ate? How is it that you fail to perceive that I was not talking about physical bread? I said to you that you should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."

Ah, the penny finally dropped as we say, and they understood then that He was not talking about the leaven of physical bread, but of the TEACHINGS and the PRACTICES of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matt. 16:1-12; Mark 8:11-21).

Oh yes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees had SOME things "technically" correct. They upheld the keeping of the weekly Sabbath, and the observing of the Feasts of the Lord, they observed the clean and unclean food laws. They did not bow down to idols of wood or stone as many of the pagan nations around them did. They kept many other commandments of God, but on the overall view of things theologically, they had many errors, many false ideas, many incorrect practices, and many traditions that they observed while nullifying the commands of God as we have seen.

Jesus, told His disciples to be very careful and very much on guard, when it came to the theological practices and teachings of the two main religious groups in Judea. Both groups were full of leaven, and leaven is often used in the Bible to represent SIN and UNRIGHTEOUSNESS and WICKEDNESS (see 1 Cor. 5).

Healing A Blind Man Near Bethsaida

Jesus and His disciples moved on to the town of Bethsaida. It was here that some people brought to Jesus a blind man and begged Him to touch and heal this man. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town, and when He had spit on his eyes and laid hands upon him, He asked the man, "Do you see anything?" And the man looked up at Jesus and said, "Well, I see men; but they look like trees walking." After hearing this, Jesus once more laid hands upon his eyes. The man looked intently and his vision was restored perfectly, and he could see everything clearly and as it should be.

Jesus sent him away to his home, telling him not to enter the town, but go straight home. He knew that if the man entered the town and the people saw that he had his vision restored, all the people in the town would be flocking around Him, and at this time Jesus did not want a large crowd of people following Him.

We are not given the reason WHY Jesus did this healing of the blind man this particular way. Some things may seem strange to us, the spitting on the eyes, the man first seeing people walking but looking like trees (perhaps they still looked blurry), Jesus re-touching him, and then the healing all taking place. Jesus could have just said the word and the blind man would have had his sight restored. So it may seem a little puzzling to us as to why Jesus did it all this way, and we are not given any explanation.

We can only contemplate as to the why of it all. Maybe Jesus was giving us a lesson that some physical things need to be done in having healing. It is not wrong to use whatever is good of the physical world to help restore our health. And then, maybe it is a lesson for us to remember that God heals in His time, maybe not all at once, maybe in part we are helped and healed, and we need to keep on looking to Him for complete healing. Maybe we have to remember that complete healing is in God's time frame, when He decides that He will fully and completely heal us.

Those are some of the things we may learn from this recorded healing. There may be more things to learn, as we meditate upon it.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Jesus Speaks Of Building His Church

It was time for Jesus to visit the villages of the district of Caesarea Philippi, about 120 miles north of Jerusalem, and about 30 miles inland east from Tyre (on the coast north of Palestine). On the way Jesus stopped to pray for a while and then asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

"Well Master," the disciples began to say, "some say you are John the Baptist, others say you are Elijah, and still others say you are Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"Now who do you say that I am," Jesus asked them.

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," replied Peter with assurance in his voice.

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona!" replied Jesus, "for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter (Greek - Petros, small stone), and on THIS ROCK (Greek - Petra, huge boulder) I will build my church, and the powers of death will not kill it out. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then He told the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ (Matt.16:13-20).

Jesus' fame was large enough and the people flocking to see Him was overwhelming at times, without His disciples making a direct effort to pronounce that Jesus was the promised Messiah to come.

Many have been puzzled over this section of teaching by Jesus. But when you understand the Greek language it was written in, all the difficulties should solve themselves. Jesus was not saying that the Church of God would be built upon the man Peter as some claim. The New Testament shows that Jesus is the "chief corner stone" and it is upon Jesus as the head of the Church, that the Church of God is built. Jesus is the "petra" - the huge massive crag of a stone, while Peter the man was "petros", the small stone.

Concerning the authority to "bind and loose" and have it bound or loosed in heaven, this also has given thought and even with some, established a kind of "divine authority for ministers" doctrine. Some think that at times a "priest" or "minister/s" can make God bind or loose decisions they make for other people or for their "church flock."

Again, understanding the Greek, and the tense it was written in, can answer our questions we may have. In the translation of the New Testament by B.J. Phillips there is a comment among the appendix footnotes, telling us the tense of the Greek and that it is more probable that the translation of this section should have been something like this: "And whatsoever you bind on earth must be what is already bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth must be what is already loosed in heaven."

Jesus then was telling Peter and all the disciples that they could have authority to bind and loose, but they better make sure it was within the laws and will of God in heaven, and that they need to keep in mind that the Church of God is founded upon Jesus, not any human man.

Now, if we do not want to bother with the Greek language, and we stay only with the KJV English translation, we can still make a case for understanding what Jesus said here without putting it into the sanction of "divine human authority" bracket. There are certain times within the Churches of Christ that binding or loosing decisions must be made to safeguard the Church. An example of this is found in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Here is a case of an unrepentant sinner (large sins of a wrong life style), and the apostle Paul telling the church at Corinth to disfellowship the man, to put him out of the local church congregation, so such sins as he was practicing would not be multiplied and practiced by others in the church. This was a decision that had qualities of binding and loosing.

Yet, even this was something that was within all the laws and commandments of God, where God's truth and way on the matter was very clear. The congregation in that instant that Paul was addressing were upholding the laws of God. Binding and loosing in the context of 1 Corinthians 5 is a context of living within and upholding, the commandments of God.

Binding and loosing for the disciples of Christ has nothing to do with that which God has allowed and permitted as "freedom of choice" for each individual in the body of Christ. A group of disciples cannot tell you to only wear one certain color of dress or suit in attending church services, for example. Such things God does not have a law for, so no human person or persons can bind or loose on such a matter.

At another time in Jesus' ministry He said to His disciples, "Whoever sins you remit or cancel, they shall be cancelled, and whoever sins you retain, they shall be retained (John 20:23). This would again be a situation as Paul was addressing in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. It could also apply to a disciple or disciples leading someone to baptism. Some only want to be baptized because their friend was baptized, or their wife or husband was baptized, or because their parents want them to be baptized. It is not a genuine personal repentance to baptism. And so discriminating disciples of Jesus would in all baptism cases decide if it is truly from a genuine heart, that the person wants to be baptized. If it is genuine, then baptism can be performed and the individual's sins can be cancelled. If it is not genuine then no baptism should be performed and hence the individuals sins are retained, until the day of true heartfelt repentance.

So, there is a certain amount of authority given by Jesus to His disciples, in binding and loosing, within His church, but that binding and loosing must always be within the laws and commandments of God.

Also of course, any organization, such as a church congregation of an area, must make "administrative" decisions. The place to meet, the time of the day to meet, how long the service or meeting will last, and a hundred and one other like things. This must be done by a body of people within that organization that have been given authority by the whole organization to make such decisions, or by a vote of the congregation as a whole. Such

decisions must be made for a smooth operation of an organization made up of many people. And needless to say, all such decisions will not please everyone all the time.

Jesus Foretells His Death And Resurrection

From the time of Jesus' visit to the region of Caesarea Philippi He began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, but on the third day be raised to life once more.

This news hit Peter like a bolt out of the blue, as if struck by lightning. With dismay he said to Jesus, "God forbid Lord! This shall never happen to you!" Peter was meaning that he and all the disciples would do whatever it took to make sure He would not die by the hands of the elders and religious leaders of their day.

"Get behind me Satan," Jesus, with severe and grim tones to His voice, quickly replied, "You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God but of men." And with those words all went silent, no one venturing to say anything more about the subject. But, many of the disciples kept what Jesus had said in their hearts, meditating on what they could possibly mean, for none wanted to believe Jesus would die, being so young and so popular among the people. They just could not imagine that the elders and priests could have enough power to have Jesus put to death.

At that time, Judea being under the overall rule of the Roman Empire, only by the authority of the Roman government could any citizen of Judea be put to death. The disciples, at that time, could not in their wildest dreams, imagine what was to come, but Jesus knew, and knew it was the Father's will that it should be as the prophets of old had foretold (Matt. 16:21-23).

What It Takes To Follow Christ

Jesus then called all the multitude to Himself as well as His disciples, and said, "If any person would follow me and be my disciple, they must deny themselves and take up their cross of burden and imitate me. For whoever would save their life shall lose it; but whosoever loses his life for me and the Gospel's sake, will save it. What does it profit a person if they should gain the whole world, yet lose their life. For what can a man give in exchange for his life? Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Jesus was speaking of the life a person can have in Him, the inner Holy Spirit life, that leads to eternal life at the resurrection day. You could gain the whole world, be head of the physical Empire that rules the whole world, you could be the richest person in the world, you could have the fame of the whole world, like some Hollywood movies stars have, but if you are not raised to eternal life one day in the resurrection when Jesus returns in glory, then what have you really gained?

In the long run you will have gained nothing lasting, certainly way less, very much less than those who will have gained that resurrection. They may have had to deny themselves many things in this lifetime (great wealth, fame, splendid comfort, prominent

and illustrious jobs or positions on the human scale of things) to follow and imitate Christ Jesus, to stand up and not be ashamed of belonging to Christ, and obeying His commandments. The end result will be everlasting glory in the Kingdom of God.

And then Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste of death before they see a sight of the Kingdom of God, with glory and power" (Mark 8:34 to 9:1)

Jesus was speaking about a soon transfiguration event that some of His disciples would witness.

Jesus' Transfiguration And The Elijah To Come

Matthew and Mark state that "after six days" while Luke is somewhat more specific in stating "about eight days after these sayings." It would seem by all the accounts it was around eight days later, that Jesus took with Him, Peter, James and John his brother, up into a high mountain. There was just the four of them.

The disciples must have been wondering what was going to happen if anything at all special was going to happen. They did not have to wait long for the answer. Suddenly there was "light" but light like they had never seen before. In their eyes Jesus had CHANGED! His face had become like the sun for brightness and glory, and all His clothes were whiter than any bleach could make them white. It was brighter than their eyes could look at, but somehow they were able to see it all in its fully splendid powerful GLORY!

Then something else happened that shocked the socks off them as we say. There stood Moses and the prophet Elijah, talking to Jesus. Obviously at this time in history there was enough physical information that had been handed down through the centuries, as to the physical appearance of Moses and Elijah. They knew it was Moses and they knew it was Elijah that were having a conversation with Jesus.

"Lord!", exclaimed Peter, "It is good that we are here, if you wish I will make three booths here; one for YOU and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Peter was still speaking when a bright cloud over-shadowed them, and then they heard this voice from the cloud saying, "This is my beloved Son, with Him I am well pleased; listen to Him."

At the sound of this voice the three disciples fell on their faces and were filled with great awe and fear, realizing they were witnessing the very glory and presence of God, as well as the future event of the resurrection that Jesus had so often by now spoken about. The resurrection to glory of all the children of God at the coming of Christ in glory, at the end of the age, when the Kingdom of God would be a literal reality on the earth.

The disciples were still fallen down on their faces when Jesus came and touched them and said, "Rise up, and have no fears." And when they lifted up their heads and looked, they saw no one but Jesus only.

They were on their way down the mountain when Jesus commanded them, "I want you to tell not a single soul about the VISION you have seen today. Do not tell anyone until I am raised again to life from death."

At this request and command the disciples said, "Then why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must first come?"

They thought that they had the proof and the golden opportunity now to really declare that Jesus was the promised Messiah, because they had seen Elijah come, and the very scribes of their nation were saying that Elijah had to come first before the Messiah would come on the scene.

"Oh, Elijah shall come," replied Jesus, "and shall restore all things, but at this present time Elijah has indeed already come, and they did not know or recognize him, but did and said evil and whatever they liked about him from their darkened hearts. So they will also do to the Son of man, who will also suffer from their hands."

Then, it became clear, they knew He was speaking to them about John the Baptist (Matt. 17:1-13).

The three disciples had witnessed a foretaste of the resurrection in glory at the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, when Jesus will return in power and glory. So it was as Jesus had said some days earlier, that some would not taste of death until they saw the Son of man coming in power and glory.

You will notice that Matthew says it was a VISION the three disciples saw. A vision is in the mind's eye, not something that is a literal happening per se. Moses and Elijah died, they are still dead to this very day. They, like all who have lived, are in the grave waiting that blessed resurrection day. When the last trumpet, the voice of the archangel, will sound, and the dead in Christ shall rise first and then we which are alive, shall be changed, in the twinkling of an eye, and we shall all be gathered by the angels to rise and meet Jesus in the clouds, in the air, and so be with Him for ever more (2 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15; Matt. 24:29-31).

The prophecy concerning the coming of Elijah before the Messiah, is found in Malachi chapter 4.

Here Christ makes it clear that it is not the literal first Elijah that lived centuries earlier, that is meant, but someone who will come in the power and might of Elijah, someone who will speak the words and truth of the Almighty God as Elijah did in his day. Christ also makes it clear that this prophecy has a DUAL prophetic fulfilment - one fulfilment at the first coming of Christ, and another yet future fulfilment just before the second coming of Christ. The context of Malachi is just before the prophetic "day of the Lord" - just before "the Lord's day" that most of the book of Revelation is all about. Jesus makes it clear that another Elijah man (as John the Baptist was before Christ's first ministry on earth) "shall come" (future tense) as Jesus said, and shall "restore all things."

This also tells us that by and near the end of this age, the truths of the word of God will have been so distorted and bent out of shape, that a "restoring of all things" will be greatly needed. The Elijah to come will restore all things to its purity.

As before when John the Baptist fulfilled that prophecy, most did not recognize him as the Elijah to come. So it probably will be at the end of this age, most, even many within the very true Church of God, will not recognize or know who the end time Elijah is. It will only be those who have their nose in the Bible, who are searching the Scriptures, who are willing to be corrected, who desire to grow in grace and knowledge, that shall understand who the end time Elijah is. May you and I be among those who will recognize the Elijah to come, should he appear in our lifetime.

An Epileptic Boy Is Healed

The next day when coming down from the mountain, as they approached the other disciples, they saw a great crowd about them and scribes arguing with them. Immediately the crowd when seeing Jesus ran up to him. Jesus looked at them all and said, "What are you discussing with the scribes?"

One person spoke up and replied, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, but you were gone. Well, I brought him for healing, because he has a dumb spirit, an evil spirit takes and seizes him and dashes him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to cast out the spirit, when I saw you were not among them, but they could not cast it out."

Jesus answered, "O faithless generation, how long do I have to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son to me."

They brought the boy forward towards Jesus, and when the evil spirit saw Him it took the boy and convulsed him, and he fell to the ground rolling about and foaming at the mouth.

"How long has the boy been like this?" Jesus asked the father. "From childhood," the father replied, "and it has often cast him into the fire and into water, trying to destroy him. But if you can do anything at all to heal him, please have pity on us and help us."

Jesus said to the man, "If you can! Why, all things are possible to him that believes."

Then the father of the child with a loud cry and anguish said, "I believe Lord, I believe, please help my unbelief!"

As a large crowd was gathering about Him, Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again."

The evil spirit was not about to give up without some sort of a fight. He took hold of the boy once more and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was lying there like a corpse; so that most of the people there said among themselves that the boy was dead.

But Jesus leaned over and took the boy by the hand and he arose, perfectly well and healthy, free from any evil spirit.

Later, in private, the disciples asked Jesus why they had not been able to cast out the spirit. Jesus said to them, "Because of your little faith. Truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move over to another place,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. Then again, such healing can only be done by much prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29).

We see here that it is faith that is required to do such mighty healing miracles, and we also see that Jesus taught that faith comes by and through much prayer and fasting. Prayer and fasting draws us close to God, and it is by being close to God that faith grows and is made strong.

Moving mountains in a literal way (unless for some specific reason such would be required) was an analogy that Jesus was giving to show that through faith miracles can be done. To do this type of healing that Jesus did (which is as great a miracle as literally moving a mountain to a different location), took as much faith as if for some reason a mountain had to be moved to save life or avert continual pain, grief, and sorrow. Jesus was simply pointing out that through faith nothing is impossible with God. For He has power over all the spirits of the unseen world and all the physical laws of this planet and universe.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Childlikeness And Forgiveness

Jesus Foretells His Death A Second Time

Once more Jesus and His disciples are back in the Galilee area. For a little while He did not want anyone to know they were there, for He had some important private teachings to do. For the second time He instructed His disciples concerning His death, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He is killed, after three days He will rise again."

For the second time the disciples were perplexed and did not understand what He was saying, although He said it to them in pretty plain words. They just could not imagine that such a thing could happen to such a mighty miracle working man as Jesus. They also did not understand all the Old Testament writings of the Messiah and His first coming to earth, and what the prophets of old had been inspired to write about what would happen to Him.

And, like before, although they were puzzled by His words, they were afraid to ask Him about them, to inquire any further (Mark 9:30-32).

The Temple Tax And The Fish

When they arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel Temple tax came up to Peter and inquired of him, saying, "Does your teacher pay the tax?"

A tax imposed on the Jewish people for the upkeep of the Temple in Jerusalem. It was not a part of the laws of the Old Testament, yet not wrong either, certain physical things of God like the then Temple, did need physical maintenance at times, and God did not issue laws for everything that needed to be taken care of. Some things were left to the leaders of the people to figure out how best to keep things in good repair and order.

"Well...yes, of course He does," replied Peter, with a little hesitation in his voice. Peter really was not sure, as it had never come up before and had never been talked about with Jesus.

Jesus later that day said to Peter, "What do you think, Simon? From who do the kings of the earth take taxes? From their sons or from others?"

"O, it is from others Master," replied Peter.

"Then the sons are free, yes, indeed that is so." Jesus said, and continued with, "However, not to give offense to them, I want you to go to the sea and cast a fishing line and hook. Take the first fish that bites, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel; take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."

The Temple in Jerusalem belonged to God, and all the services done there, all that the Levites and priests performed there as under the laws of the Old Testament, were from God and towards God in worship. He owned it all. Jesus as the Son of God, had part ownership in the Temple and all things performed there. He really did not have to pay taxes on what belonged to Him. Kings of the earth collected taxes from others, not from their own children. God, as King of the earth, and hence the Temple in Jerusalem, did not have to collect a tax from His own Son.

But, Jesus did not want to offend them, the tax collectors, or those who were keepers of the Temple. They did not understand who He was, did not believe who He was. Their minds were still in blindness to a large extent, hence Jesus would not offend them. He worked a miracle and told Peter to pay the Temple tax.

Sometimes in life there are many situations where we may be free to do or not do something that's within the righteousness of God, and sometimes in order to not offend people, we should do it, if not doing it would offend them. You may be able to think of such circumstances and if reading this Bible Story with more persons than yourself, you might like to discuss such situations.

This is a life example that Jesus gives us to not offend people if it is within your power to not offend them.

Who is the Greatest and Childlikeness

They had been out in the town of Capernaum and were now on the way to the house they always stayed in when in that town (some have speculated that it was a house Jesus had built earlier in His life as it is always designated as "the house"), and arriving Jesus asked them, "What were you discussing on the way here?" They were silent for a while, for on the way they had been discussing who was the greatest among them (apart from Jesus of course). "Well, Master," they began in their reply, "we were wondering who was the greatest among us. And so Lord, who is it, who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?"

It was now Jesus' turn to be silent for a while. He sat down, and called the twelve over to Him, and said, "If any one would be first, he must put himself last of all and put himself servant of all." Then calling for a child to come over to Him, He put the child in the midst of the disciples, and put His arms around him, and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and receiving me actually is receiving not me so much as receiving the One who sent me, my Father. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble and sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Entering the Kingdom of God, being a part of it now in this lifetime, to Jesus was not about trying to be the greatest among other believers, trying to "out do" in speech, works, power, or whatever else humans think about in putting themselves greater than others. To Jesus, the greatest ones were those who were humble like a child and who

served others, who did not even think of themselves as anything great. Then if some, as they do, think that riding rough-shod over others is being powerfully great, and would cause little ones in Christ to stumble and sin, so they gave up on salvation and remaining faithful to the end, then it would have been better for that person who so causes such to stumble, if they had been drowned in the sea, or we may say today, "never been born." Being great for the Kingdom of God is nothing like what the world thinks about "being great" is. Greatness to God is being humble minded and serving others and making sure little ones in Christ grow and stay faithful to the end.

As Jesus was speaking about all this, John broke in and said, "Master, teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we told him to stop doing such things because he did not belong to our company of disciples."

Why did John bring this up at this particular time? Maybe it was because John thought this man was trying to be great by doing such works. Greater than they were, as we saw earlier that the disciples could not cast out the demon from the child that the father brought to them to have his son healed. Maybe seeing this man casting out demons in Jesus' name caused them to start thinking about who was the greatest among them, for surely they were greater than this man, they probably thought, as he did not even belong to their group of disciples that Jesus had personally chosen Himself.

Jesus replied to John and all present, "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us. For truly I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear my name, will not lose his reward."

Jesus was showing them that God works in many ways. He is not bound by a certain "club" or "church group." He was showing them that those who work for Him in a certain time and way, are not necessarily "the only ones" on the circuit of His work. And others could be doing huge things in His name or even very small simple things for Him and for others who believe in Him. Even those doing small things like giving a cup of water in His name to others who also believe in His name, will not be forgotten by God. The man the disciples had seen casting out demons was believing in Jesus, doing it in His name, and those coming to him were also believing in Jesus, not the man doing the work, but believing in the power that was in the name of Jesus. God will remember those who have the simple attitude of wanting to serve others through Him, they will have their reward.

The disciples by their action and words of telling the man to "stop" because he was not part of "the gang that walked around with Jesus," could have offended him where he would have given up his personal conviction of Jesus, been as we say, "turned right off" and Jesus wanted to make sure His disciples knew the seriousness of offending people, so He went on to expound with words very similar to what He had said to them in a previous teaching. He also did not want them to offend each other by trying to figure out who was the greatest among themselves.

"Woe unto the world because of offenses! For offenses must come; but woe to the person by whom the offense comes! Therefore if your hand or your foot cause you to offend, cut them off, and cast them from you, for it is better for you to enter into life with

one hand or one foot than to have two hands or two feet to be cast into the fire that shall destroy forever. The same goes for your eyes, if one should cause you to offend, better cast it off and enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the fire of Gehenna.

"Take heed, pay close attention, that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is there in heaven. The Son of man has come to save the lost, that is His main aim, not to destroy but to save."

Jesus was making it as clear and as plain as possible, that He and those who follow Him, are to put away anything in their lives, that which would cause people to be offended and to be lost. He was in the business of SAVING not destroying lives. As we saw before when Jesus uttered similar words, of cutting off a hand or foot or plucking out an eye, He was not talking of doing this literally to your body, for it is really the mind that offends, the hand or foot or eye follows what the mind tells it. Jesus is using an analogy again, whatever is precious and close to you, if it is wrong and leads to you offending people, better own up to it and get rid of it.

And we notice in passing that it would seem that believers, as a whole, have what some have called "guardian angels" over them. Jesus here refers to them as "their angels in heaven."

To show the disciples still further that He was in the work force that was busy searching and seeking for the lost, to save them, He went on to say:

"Think about this. If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them gets lost, does he not leave the ninety and nine and does he not go out into the mountains or wherever, to seek for the one that has got lost? And if he manages to find it, does he not rejoice more over that sheep, than over the ninety and nine which did not go astray or wander off and get lost? Even so it is not the will of your Father in heaven, that ONE of these little ones should perish.

Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you give its saltiness back? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another" (Matt.18:1-14; Mark 9:33-50).

We are to be the "salt of the earth" as Jesus once told His followers. We are to be salt not poison to people. We are to be humble like a child who knows he/she is not self-sufficient. We are to not think about being great in the eyes of other human beings, but think about how we can serve mankind. And we are to do all we can not to offend others, so they and us can be saved and not lost.

Forgiveness - A Key To Salvation

This was a good time for Jesus to speak about the very important subject of "forgiveness" and He did:

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. but if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he still refuses to listen, even to those who have come with you, then tell it to the church; and if he refuses to even listen to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and tax collector."

Non-Israelites (Gentiles) and tax collectors back then were viewed as outsiders and not associated with on any social activities, they were the black sheep of the family so to speak. Here Jesus gives the basic formula for righting wrongs that people do to each other within the family and church of God. It is really pretty clear and straightforward enough, yet few observe it as Jesus instructed.

You first must go to the person who has wronged and in the right manner "have it out with them" - or "clear the air between the two of you." In most cases most problems can be solved between the two parties involved. If not, then you are to take along two or three others as witnesses, maybe even as intercessors, as third party mediators. Once more at this level the problem can usually be rectified. But in a few cases it may not be solved at this second level of "problem confrontation" and it will need have to go to the "church."

The important thing here is that it is the "church" that has the final say. And the "church" is not the minister or board of deacons, it is the "church" - the whole body of Christ for that locality. They then must hear the problem and rule as to the right and wrong of the matter, and who is right and who is wrong and the means to correct the situation, with repentance and whatever else is needed to correct the matter. If that person will not hear the "church" then the church is to put them out of their fellowship. It is then the rule and principle of what Paul and the church at Corinth was into as we read 1 Corinthians chapter 5.

We need in all of this last ditch circumstance to also remember Galatians 6:1-3 and 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15.

The "church" must make a ruling and a decision on matters that cannot be solved with the first two approaches, and as a collective decision by the members in whom is the Holy Spirit, God will back that decision of who is right and who is wrong and what should be done.

Jesus showed this by going on to say, "It is truth that I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the middle of them."

The context here about binding and loosing even with a small number agreeing together, is the context of "church problems" and the third part of trying to solve them having to be applied. Far too many have taken these words out of context and tried to apply them to far too many things, including setting rules and regulations that are

directly at odds and against the unmoveable laws and commandments of God (Psalm 111: 7, 8).

As Jesus was talking about problems and sins that brother has with brother, Peter naturally had a question come to his mind and he wanted Jesus to answer it, "Lord, how often shall I forgive my brother if he sins against me? As many as seven times?" Peter thought there must be after all a limit to forgiving your brother. Probably all the other disciples thought so also, but to the surprise of everyone Jesus replied, "I do not say to seven times, but you must forgive to seventy times seven."

They all knew that by Jesus using the phrase "seventy times seven" He was meaning you must be willing to forgive to never ending, there was no limit to forgiveness. And to illustrate the importance of forgiveness that knows no end, Jesus gave them this parable or story illustration:

"The Kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He could not pay, so the king ordered that he and his wife, and his children, and all that he had should be sold to pay back the debt. On hearing this the man fell down before the king and begged him, 'Oh, king, please be patient with me, and I will pay it all back.'

"The king was filled with pity and compassion for him, and he released him and forgave him of the huge debt he owed. But, when the man left the king, he immediately went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant re-payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time, 'Be patient please, and I will pay back what I owe you,' he pleaded. But his creditor would have none of it, would have no mercy or patience at all. He had the man arrested and jailed until the debt could be paid back in full.

"When some of the other servants saw this, they were very angry and upset. They went to the king and told him what had happened. The king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You unthankful and evil servant! I forgave you the huge debt you owed me because you pleaded with me for patience and mercy. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the outraged and indignant king sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny he owed him.

"That's what my Father in heaven will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters the sins and trespasses they commit against you" (Matt.18:15-35).

Jesus made it quite a simple matter, if you want God to forgive you your sins and mistakes that really amount to a great number in a lifetime, then you had better be forgiving towards other fellow human beings, of the relatively less in number, sins and trespasses they might commit against you in a lifetime.

Forgiveness - having it towards others is a vital key to obtain salvation and eternal life in the Kingdom of our Father who is in heaven.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Jesus At The Feast Of Tabernacles

It was the fall of the year, the harvest of the barley and wheat grains had been gathered in (the end of March to late June), the fruits had been gathered in (July/August - some grape gathering started, figs, walnuts, olives, etc.), and the main harvest of grapes, as well as dourra, maize, cotton, pomegranates, were all gathered in and harvested.

By this time in Jesus' ministry some leaders of the Jews had got to the point of hating Him so much they were ready to find a way to kill Him, so He did not want to openly, on a long term basis, travel around the district of Judea (Jerusalem area), hence He went about the Galilee townships, far to the north of Jerusalem.

As it was the fall of the year the Feast of Tabernacles that God had given to the Jews and Israelites under Moses, was close at hand to being observed in Jerusalem especially, as this was still the appointed place to observe the Feasts of the Lord as prescribed under the Old Testament. Jesus' literal brothers (half brothers we would say today) came to Him and said, "You should leave here and go to Jerusalem and Judea, that your disciples may see the works that you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known for doing the work of God. So go and do these things, show yourself to the world." His brothers did not as yet believe in Him as the Son of God.

Jesus answered them, "My time has not yet come, that all things that are written about me must happen, but your time to see and do God's will, is always here. The world does not hate you, but it does hate me, because I testify to its face that its works are evil. You go up to the feast; I won't go up just yet to the feast, for the time to do what I must do is not going to come as quickly as you might like to see it come."

His brothers shrugged their shoulders in complete disbelief and packed up their things and headed out south to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus stayed on in Galilee for a number of days, then in a private way He also departed for Jerusalem and the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. It was the greatest rejoicing time of the year, when for seven days all that came to Jerusalem would sing, worship, present animal sacrifices, eat and drink to their hearts content (within the law of God of course, after all this was still a "religious" festival observance), and just praise God for all the ingathered harvests of the year.

Three People Thought They Could Be Disciples

The days were fast drawing near for Him to offer Himself up for the sins of the world. It was time to go up to the city of Jerusalem. He would be going through the area of the Samaritans, and sent messengers ahead to people in a certain village where He thought He would pass through on His way to Jerusalem, but they would not receive Him because He was only passing through and not stopping with them. They were hoping He would stop and teach and work the works of God among them, but because

He was setting His mind on going to Jerusalem, they got offended and would not allow Him and His disciples to stay overnight in their village.

James and John, when they heard about this from the returning messengers, said to Jesus, with righteous indignation in their voices, "Lord, how about us calling for fire from heaven, to come down and consume them?" Jesus rebuked them for such evil thoughts and words. And they went to another village that was happy to receive them all for whatever length of time.

As they were making their way to this village and walking the dusty road, a man came up to Jesus and said, "I will follow you wherever you go." He was probably taken up with way too much emotion and not enough thinking about the cold facts of reality as to what his words to follow Jesus anywhere, would really mean. Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has no permanent home. Often He does not know where He is going to lay His head down to sleep. It is a life of wandering around, always on the go."

The account does not say if the man continued to follow Jesus after he heard those words.

Then, Jesus Himself said to another man, "Follow me," but the man replied, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father who has just died."

"Oh, you need to let the dead bury the dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God," was Christ's answer to the man. We are not told if he listened and obeyed Jesus' directives to him. There are times when we need to let the unconverted, spiritual dead, take care of physical matters, and we need to be about doing God's work, if God calls and if God has other priorities He thinks we should be doing first, other than running around over physical matters.

Then yet another fellow along the way, said to Jesus, "I will surely follow you, but let me first say farewell to those at my home."

The reply Jesus gave may not have sat too well with him. "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God."

Jesus knew the heart of this man. It was not that it is always wrong to say "good bye" to loved ones before going off to do the work of God, that is not wrong of itself, or under certain situations. Yet it is obvious Jesus thought there were some situations where it would only be used as an excuse to procrastinate, to put off, and to reject, the calling of God. If you are called to go and do the work of God as a special disciple of Christ (as these three men were called to be and to do), then no physical thing should be allowed to stand in your way.

This calling is not for everyone, but it is a reminder from Jesus that with such a calling, He and God's work must come first, and physical things are to come second, even sometimes having to leave off some physical things that are not wrong in and of themselves, under a different situation. Jesus reminds those so called in this special

way for His work, that it is not always easy to follow, as far as the physical is concerned (Luke 9:51-62).

Confrontation With The Jews

The Jews, were looking for Him at the feast (knowing Jesus always observed the Festivals of the Lord and would so be in Jerusalem somewhere). "Where is He?" Many of the Jews asked among themselves. Some muttered to each other that He was a "good man," while others conversed that He was leading the people astray and was up to no good thing. All this conversational talk was done in a very hush-hush way, not openly and loudly for the people feared the Jewish leaders and what anger it might provoke in them if they knew the people were asking for and talking about Jesus.

It was about half way through the eight day festival and Jesus finally showed Himself and went up into the Temple and started to teach the people. The Jews there could not believe how He was teaching with such wisdom, knowledge and authority. They even said to one another, "How can this man teach like this when he has never been to or attended any of our schools of Theology or Universities of learning?" (John 7:1-15).

And of course they were, on this point correct. Jesus had never attended or had any certificate of accomplishment from any of their Theology schools or any other school of "higher learning" in their land. It was a complete mystery to them that He could speak so mightily about the Scriptures and things pertaining to the Almighty God.

Jesus knew exactly what was going through their minds, and said, "My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me: if any person will do His will, they shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority and my own ideas. He who speaks on his own authority seeks to simply glorify himself; but he who seek the glory of the one who sent him is true, and in that person there is no falsehood. Did not Moses hand down to you the law that was given to him from God, for you all to observe? Yes, but yet none of you observe it! Why to you seek to kill me?"

"You are crazy," replied the people, "who seeks to kill you? You are possessed by a demon," they continued to shout at Christ.

Jesus knew the inner most thoughts and attitude of their hearts, they really were more than upset at Him, the scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees had been doing a pretty good number on them, in teaching them that He had broken the Sabbath (which they held in such high regard, but as we have seen, mainly with their false traditions and man made rules and regulations) and other commandments of God.

Jesus answered them on this by saying, "I did one miracle on the Sabbath. Think about this, Moses gave you the commandment of circumcision, not that it was from Moses but really it was from the fathers before Moses time. Yet it was a part of the laws of Moses, given to you. And so you circumcise a child upon the Sabbath, so if you circumcise a child on the Sabbath so the laws of Moses will not be broken, why are you so angry at me because I healed a man on the Sabbath day? You need to judge not according to outward appearance, but you need to judge righteous judgment" (John 7:16-24).

Ah yes, here we see that judging between right and wrong, judging the actions and works, and deeds, and life practices, of people, is not necessarily wrong to do at all! Jesus here did not say they were never to judge between matters, but He did say that people were to judge with righteousness, judge in the correct way with the results then being that which would be favorable in the sight of God, where God would agree with the judgment decided upon. In this case the Jews were so off track, they were so wrong in their judgment of the law of God and how to apply it, that they were taking something small and trivial in comparison, saying it should be done even on the Sabbath, but they could not see or understand that to heal a person from sickness or a demon on the Sabbath, was a much greater work, and so much more pleasing to God to see someone do on the Sabbath day, than circumcising a baby.

There were others there who had their "pet thoughts" about this fellow Jesus, knowing that some Jews sought to kill Him. They didn't believe Jesus either, but came at Him from a different angle. They spoke up and said, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And look, here He is, as bold as brass, speaking openly, and they do nothing to him! Ah, maybe the authorities really do know and think that this is the Christ? Yet, we know this man and where he comes from; we know his brothers and sisters and his home town. He's just a man only. The Christ, when he comes, no one will know where he comes from."

In response to this Jesus said, "You think you know me and know where I come from, but I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and you just do not know Him. I know Him, for I came from where He is and He sent me."

The Jews were now really mad at Jesus, and thought to send for the temple guards to arrest Him, but it was not Jesus' time yet for all that, it would come but it was not to happen yet, so no one laid any hands on Him.

There were many Jews there who did believe in Him, for they said , "When the Christ appears as it is written he will, shall he do more miracles than what this man has done?"

The Pharisees and chief priests were not too far away during all this, as usual, and they soon heard the crowd muttering against Him, and thought it would be a good time to have officers sent and to arrest this Jesus. He knew this was in their mind and declared, "I shall be with you a little longer, and then I will go to Him who sent me. You will seek me, but you will not find me. And where I shall be you cannot come."

The Jews were scratching their heads saying to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we shall not be able to find him? Does he intend to go to our fellow Israelites who are dispersed in the various countries of the Roman Empire, and maybe teach also the Greeks? What on earth does he mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and, 'Where I shall be you cannot come'?" (John 7:25-36).

All, or most of the people anyway, were left in confused bewilderment. It was not yet time for Jesus to be arrested and put to death, so the people at large and the Pharisees and chief priests walked away from Him and went about doing other things in the Temple area.

The rest of the feast passed and now it was getting close to the last day of this seven day feast.

The Last Great Day Of The Feast Of Tabernacles

It is written in John 7:37 as, "On the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out....."

Many among today's church organizations that do observe the Feast of Tabernacles (and there are indeed many around the world) have taught or still do teach, that this last, great day, is NOT the 7th day of the feast of Tabernacles, but the 8th day that follows the feast of Tabernacles. And many have called this last Sabbath day (which comes after the feast of Tabernacles - see Lev.23) "The Last Great Day" thinking that it was on this 8th day that Jesus stood up and proclaimed the words we find in John 7: 37, 38.

This is not what Jewish recorded history tells us. It was not on this 8th day that Jesus uttered these words but it was on the LAST DAY of the feast of Tabernacles - the SEVENTH day of the feast, or the last day of this feast, which was called in Jewish traditional usage, "the great day of the feast."

The Jewish Christian scholar Albert Edersheim in his well known book "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah" chapter 7, pages 156-160, gives us the true meaning and symbolism that took place in and around the Temple on this 7th and last day of the feast of Tabernacles.

"It was 'the last, the great day of the Feast,' and Jesus was once more in the Temple. We can scarcely doubt that it was the concluding day of the Feast, and NOT, as most modern writers suppose, its OCTAVE, which in Rabbinic language, was regarded as 'a festival by itself.' But such solemn interest attaches itself to the Feast, and this occurrence on its last day, that we must try to realize the scene....

"Not only did all the priestly families minister during that week, but it has been calculated that not fewer than 446 Priests, with, of course, a corresponding number of Levites, were required for its sacrificial worship. In general the services were the same every day, EXCEPT that the number of bullocks offered decreased daily from thirteen on the first, to seven on the seventh day....

"But 'the last, the Great Day of the Feast,' was marked by special observances. Let us suppose ourselves in the number of worshippers, who on 'the last, the Great Day of the Feast,' are leaving their 'booths' at daybreak to take part in the service. The pilgrims are all in festive array...the festive multitude would divide into three bands. some would remain in the Temple to attend the preparation of the Morning sacrifice. Another band would go in procession 'below Jerusalem' to a place called Moza, the 'Kolonias' of the Jerusalem Talmud....

"At Moza they cut down willow-branches, with which, amidst the blasts of the Priests' trumpets, they adorned the altar, forming a leafy canopy above it. Yet a third company were taking part in a still more interesting service. To the sound of music a

PRECESSION started from the Temple. It followed a Priest who bore a golden pitcher, capable of holding a LOG (rather more than two pints). Onward it passed, probably through Ophel....to the very verge of Siloam, down the edge of the Tyropoeon Valley, where it merges into that of the Kedron....

“Here was the so-called 'Fountain-Gate,' and still within the City-wall 'the Pool of Siloam,' the overflow of which fed the lower pool....The Pool of Siloam was fed by the LIVING spring farther up in the narrowest part of the Kidron Valley....

“When the Temple-procession had reached the Pool of Siloam, the Priest filled his golden pitcher from its waters (except on the Sabbath, and on the first day of the Feast. On these occasions it had been provided the day before). Then they went back to the Temple, so timing it, that they should arrive just as they were laying the pieces of the sacrifice on the great Altar of Burnt-offering, towards the close of the ordinary Morning sacrifice service. A threefold blast of the Priests' trumpet welcomed the arrival of the Priest, as he entered through the 'Water-gate' (one of the gates that opened from 'the terrace' on the south side of the Temple), which obtained its name from this ceremony, and passed straight into the Court of the Priests. Here he was joined by another Priest, who carried the wine for the drink-offering. The two Priests ascended 'the rise' of the altar, and turned to the left.

“There were two silver funnels here, with narrow openings, leading down to the base of the altar. Into that at the east, which was somewhat wider, the wine was poured, and, at the same time, the water into the western and narrower opening, the people shouted to the Priest to raise his hand, so as to make sure that he poured the water into the funnel. For, although it was held that the WATER-POURING was an ordinance instituted by Moses, 'a Halakhah of Moses from Sinai,' this was another of the points disputed by the Sadducees....

“Immediately after 'the pouring of water,' the great 'hallel,' consisting of Psalms 113 to 118 (inclusive) was chanted antiphonally, or rather, with responses, to the accompaniment of the flute....

The festive morning-service was followed by the offering of the special sacrifice of the day, with their drink-offerings, and by the Psalm of the day, which on the 'last, Great Day of the Feast,' was Psalm 82 from verse 5....

“As the people left the Temple, they saluted the altar with words of thanks, and on the last day of the Feast they shook off the leaves on the willow-branches round the altar, and beat their palm-branches to pieces. On the same AFTERNOON the 'booths' were DISMANTLED, and the Feast ended.

“We can have little difficulty in determining at what part of the service of 'the last, the Great Day of the Feast,' Jesus stood and cried, 'If any one thirst, let Him come unto ME and drink!' It must have been with special reference to the ceremony of the OUTPOURING OF THE WATER, which, as we have seen, was considered the CENTRAL PART of the service.

“Moreover, all would UNDERSTAND that His words must refer to the HOLY SPIRIT, since the rite was UNIVERSALLY regarded as SYMBOLICAL of his outpouring. The forth-pouring of the water was immediately followed by the chanting of the HALLE. But AFTER that there must have been a SHORT PAUSE to PREPARE for the festive sacrifice (the Musaph).

“It was THEN, immediately after the symbolic rite of the water-poring, immediately after the people had responded by repeating those lines from Psalm 118 - given thanks, and prayed that Jehovah would send salvation and prosperity, and had shaken their Lulabh towards the altar, thus praising 'with heart, and mouth, and hands,' and THEN SILENCE had fallen upon them - that there rose, so loud as to be heard throughout the Temple, the VOICE of Jesus. He interrupted NOT the services, for they had for the MOMENT CEASED. He INTERPRETED, and He FULFILLED them.

“But yesterday they had been divided about Him, and the authorities had given directions to take Him; today He is not only in the temple, but, at the close of the most solemn rites of the Feast, asserting, within the hearing of all, His claim to be regarded as the fulfilment of all, and the true Messiah....

“So then, it was nothing new, only the happy fulfilment of the old, when He thus 'spoke of the Holy Spirit, which they who believed on Him should receive'...." End of quote from Edersheim (capitals are mine for emphasis).

Yes, Jesus took the water ceremony on that last great day of the Feast of Tabernacles, and gave the people its true symbolic meaning. It was all to do with HIM and the Holy Spirit that would be given, poured out upon and into, to flow out of, all those who would believe in Him. John writes that the Holy Spirit was not yet given at that time because Jesus was not yet glorified.

We need to remember that John in saying that, was speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in a new and special way, people having the Holy Spirit united with their spirit to beget them as Jesus in the flesh was begotten of the Father. Before that time the people of God had the Holy Spirit "with" them but not "in" them as it would be when given and poured out upon people AFTER Jesus was glorified in His resurrection glory, and on the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2), which we shall come to later in our Bible Story.

People Confused About Jesus

After the service of that last great day of the Feast, and people had heard and seen Jesus speaking and teaching during the Feast and now hearing Him say He was the way to living waters of the Spirit, some shouted out, "Oh, indeed, look at what this man has done and taught, He must be THE prophet." Others cried out in response, "Yes, he has proved himself to be the promised Messiah." But still others lifted up their voices and said, But how can he be the Messiah. Will the Messiah come from the Galilee area as this man comes from? The Scriptures teach clearly that the Messiah will be born of the royal line of David, in Bethlehem, the town where King David was born."

The people who declared this, were of course correct in understanding the Scriptures but they just did not know Jesus in His birth had indeed fulfilled them. They did not know what you have read about in the early chapters of this New Testament Bible Story.

So the crowd was divided and confused in their opinions about Christ. And some still wanted Him arrested, but there was no one who dared touch Him. The Temple guards who had been sent to arrest Him returned to the leading Priests and Pharisees.

"Why have you not arrested and brought him in?" they demanded to know from them.

"Have you also been led astray?" the Pharisees mocked with an evil smirch of a smile. "Can you find a single Pharisee or any one among the rulers of the people, who believe in him? Many of these silly ignorant people do, but what do they know about spiritual matters and who is from God? A curse on them anyway!"

Well, there was one among those Pharisees and rulers, who had met with Jesus secretly a while back, as we saw in an earlier chapter. You remember? He was Nicodemus. He had kept it a secret that he felt this Jesus fellow was from God and had God with Him. Now he spoke up in Jesus' defense, well somewhat in His defence, "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" he asked.

They cynically and quickly replied, "Hu, are you from Galilee too? Are you wanting to stick-up for this fellow who works by the prince of the demons? Search the Scriptures and see for yourself - no prophet from God has ever come from Galilee!"

Nicodemus was correct, the law of the Jews prohibited any one from being condemned without a legal hearing, but those leaders by this time were so filled with hate for Jesus they were willing to turn a blind eye to any of their laws of proper justice. They were now filled with one thing in their hearts and minds, how they could have Jesus killed. Nicodemus, was out numbered by far, and was silenced by their mocking words in reply to his statement.

Everyone had enough of the whole scene and confused opinions about this man called Jesus Christ. They dispersed and all went to their respective homes for the evening and the night (John 7:37-53).

The Eighth Day - The Last Great Feast

Jesus spent the night on the Mount of Olives, in prayer and meditation. He knew there was much to happen the next day. He was back at the Temple very early after spending the night in spiritual refreshment and physical rest. He was back in the Temple to teach because it was the EIGHTH day, the day AFTER the Feast of Tabernacles. Many have missed this very important understanding because of their wrong understanding of John 7:37 and the day on which that took place.

We are now at the NEXT DAY AFTER the seven day Feast of Tabernacles. It is called the "eighth" day in the book of Leviticus, chapter 23. It was an ANNUAL SABBATH day. It was in reality the LAST FEAST of a total of SEVEN Feasts of the Lord as outlined in Leviticus 23.

As Alfred Edersheim has mentioned above, it was regarded as a SEPARATE FEAST to the Lord. It was NOT a part of the Feast of Tabernacles. As we have seen from Edersheim, the "booths" for the Feast of Tabernacles were dismantled on the AFTERNOON of the 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles. On the OCTAVE DAY, the 8th day, a Sabbath day, there were different SPECIAL sacrifices offered as prescribed in the law of Moses, besides the regular daily sacrifices.

Jesus was back in the Temple to teach on this LAST GREAT FEAST DAY! As He was teaching the crowd that had gathered about Him, the teachers of the religious law and Pharisees brought a woman they had literally caught in the act of adultery (sleeping with another man other than her husband). They put her in front of the crowd that was listening to Jesus.

"Teacher," they said to Him, "this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her to death for such a sin and violation of God's law. What do you say about the matter?"

They were once more trying to trap Him into saying something they could use against Him, and hence make Him look foolish and inept on the matter of religious law, in front of the general populace of the people gathered around Him. Jesus said not a word. He stooped down and wrote in the dust with His finger. The religious leaders still demanded an answer from Him. He stood up and said to them, "All right, stone her, but let those who have never sinned throw the first stone at her!" He then stooped down again and wrote in the dust more words.

When the accusers heard this and saw what Jesus had written, they started to slip silently away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left of the religious teachers, and the woman. Jesus then stood up once more and said to her, "Where are your accusers? Wasn't there a group of them here? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

"No, Lord," she answered.

"Very well, then neither do I condemn you. Go your way, but remember, sin no more" Jesus told her, and she departed with thanksgiving in her heart for God's mercy.

One thing we see immediately from this account. To commit the physical act of adultery takes TWO people, a MAN as well as a woman. These religious leaders said they caught the woman in the very act of adultery. They brought the woman to Jesus, but they did not bring the man. We must ask, why did they not? Even if we assume the man was too powerful and strong and broke away from them and ran for his life, Jesus did not ask where the man was. He did not fall into the trap of getting into all that question.

He knew their hearts and what their mind was trying to accomplish by bringing the woman before Him. It was not for any kind of mercy, if the woman was repentant, but just to see what Jesus would do about the letter of the law of Moses. As well as to try and have Him break the law of the Romans who, though allowing just about all freedom to the Jews to practice and teach their religion, DID NOT allow the Jews to put anyone

to death without authority from the Roman Government via its representative in Palestine.

The words of Jesus that anyone among them who had never sinned should throw the first stone, and whatever words He wrote in the dust, it got to the heart of each of those religious teachers, and they clearly knew they had sinned, and did not want to go any further with the matter. It was a bad enough embarrassment to each of them as it was, without having Jesus do any more public declaring of "their sins" that no doubt also carried the death penalty with them under the letter of the law of Moses.

Although a number of the laws of Moses carried the death penalty if violated, that did not mean the death penalty was automatically inflicted upon people, without the matter being righteously judged by the court and judges of the land of Israel. Mercy could be allocated to the offender if deep repentance could be shown by the guilty party. God has always been a God of mercy when mercy was deserved. The classic and outstanding example of that under the Old Testament was God's mercy upon the great King David. He also was guilty of adultery and more. When it was brought to his attention he repented DEEPLY, Psalm 51 is attributed to David as his repentance poem and prayer to God for MERCY. He was punished (by loosing his son in death when sickness befell him, which was covered in the Bible Story of the Old Testament) but God did have mercy upon him by not demanding the death penalty be applied to him.

Jesus was also having mercy upon the woman caught in the act of adultery. But we also need to notice Jesus told her to "go, but sin no more." Mercy is not a license to sin at one's pleasure (John 7:53 - 8:1-11).

Jesus' Straight Talk To The Pharisees

After the woman left Jesus turned to the people and said, "I am the LIGHT of the world. If you follow me, you will not stumble through the darkness, because you will have the LIGHT that leads to LIFE."

Some of the Pharisees still there who were not part of the departing group, said, "You are making outrageous and false claims about yourself!"

Jesus answered them, "No, these claims are valid even though I make them about myself. For I KNOW where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know this about me. You judge me from all your human limitations, but I am not judging anyone. And if I did, my judgment would be correct in every way because I am not alone - I have with me the Father who sent me. Even in your own law you can read that if two people agree about something, their witness is accepted as true and factual. I am one witness, and my Father who sent me is the other witness."

"Who and where is your Father," they asked.

"Since you do not know who I am, you also do not know who my Father is," Jesus replied, "and if you knew me, you would know my Father too."

John the apostles tells us that Jesus made these statements in the part of the Temple called the Treasury. And He was not arrested because it was not yet the time for that event to happen.

Later that day Jesus said to them again, "I am going away. You will search for me but will not find me, and you will die in your sins. You cannot come where I am going."

The Jewish leaders had baffled and perplexed looks on their faces, and some among them said, "Is he planning to commit suicide? What does he mean, 'You cannot come where I am going'?"

Jesus continued, "You are from below, this world; I am from above. You are of this world, I am not. That is why I said you would die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am who I say I am, you will die in your sins."

"Tell us who you are," they demanded.

Jesus replied to them, "I am the ONE who I have always claimed to be. I have much to say about you and much to condemn, but I will not, for I say only what I hear from the one who sent me, and He is very true."

They still did not understand that He was talking to them about His Father in heaven. Many times Jesus had made it pretty clear to those religious leaders that His Father was the ONE God who was in heaven, and that He came from Him and was sent by Him, but no matter how He put it to them, it was like water running off a duck's back, they just didn't get it.

Once more Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will realize that I am He and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak what the Father has taught me. And the one who sent me is with me - He has not deserted me. For I always do those things that are pleasing to Him."

Jesus was referring to His being lifted up on the cross when He said those words about "When you have lifted up the Son of man" - but they also did not understand what He was meaning about that either.

With all that Jesus had spoken during the Feast of Tabernacles and now what He had so far spoken on this Last Great Feast Day, John records in his Gospel that "many who heard Him say these things believed in Him" (John 8:21-30).

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Continuation Of The Last Great Feast Day

True Sons Of Abraham

To those Jews who now believed in Jesus He said, "If you continue and endure in following my word, then you will truly be my disciples, and the truth you shall know, and what is more the truth will make you FREE!"

Many other Jews were standing and listening to Him, and when they hear these words about being "free" they answered with some disgust in their voices, "We are Abraham's offspring, and were never in bondage to any man: why then do you say, 'You shall be made free'?"

Jesus answered them saying, "It is the truth I'm saying unto you. Whoever practices a life of sin, just flowing along with it, is the slave and servant of sin. And the servant does not abide in his master's house forever, but the Son of the master does abide there forever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

Jesus was talking about Himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. With faith in His death, shed blood on the cross, and His risen immortal life, we can have freedom from being a slave to sin. The Jews were once more not getting it, and were horrified to think He was telling them that they were slaves. They had a large amount of self-righteous "religious" canopy over them as a people who had been chosen by God as "His special favored people" of all the peoples on the earth. Mentally, they never thought they were in bondage to anyone or anything.

Jesus continued: "I know that you are Abraham's offspring; but I also know many of you seek to KILL me, because you cannot understand my word, it's just going in one ear and out the other ear. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and you speak what you have seen with your father."

"You are talking ridiculously, how can we have been speaking with Abraham who has been dead for centuries, as he is our father," the Jews retorted again.

"If you really were Abraham's children in attitude of mind and spiritual maturity, you would be living and doing the works of Abraham," Jesus replied to them. "But now many of you seek to kill me, a man who has told what the truth is, which I received from God. Abraham did not do what I've done. But you indeed do the deeds of your father, the one who is not Abraham."

Oh, these words from Jesus really got them as mad as a wild snorting bull ready to charge. They knew there was some question about His birth, and that Mary His mother was "with child" before she was married to Joseph, so using this "crept out knowledge" from ones who knew Mary and Joseph before they were married, they flung back these

words at Jesus, "Well...we are not born from fornication (sexual relations before marriage). We have ONE father, even God."

Now, they changed from claiming Abraham as their father to what they certainly felt was an answer that Jesus would not be able to penetrate - that the one Almighty God was their father.

But Jesus answered them, "If God was really in your heart and mind your Father, you would love me; for I have come from God; and I did not come of my own will and mind, but God Himself sent me. You do not understand my words, because you cannot comprehend in your mind what they are saying to you."

Then, looking straight at them with piercing eyes, Jesus spoke words that must have cut them like a sharp two-edged knife, right between the ribs and into the heart. They were the plainest words He ever spoke to any of His enemies up to this point in time, "You are of YOUR FATHER THE DEVIL, and the lusts of your father you keep doing. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from what he is, for he is a liar, and he is the father and originator of lies. And because I tell you the truth, you do not like to hear it, and so do not believe me.

"Tell me if you can, which one of you convinces me of sin? None of you, for it is the other way around, it is I that tells you the truth, and convinces you of sin. So why then do you not believe me? I will tell you. He that has a heart and mind that God loves and can communicate with, they can hear and understand God's word. But you hear not and do not understand because you are not of the same mindset as God. You are not His children!"

Many Jews had in the past openly thought, said, and taught others, that this Jesus Christ man was from the Devil, doing all He did by the power given to Him from the Devil himself. Jesus had now laid it down also openly and plainly, that He taught it was THEY not Him who was from the Devil. Once more they shouted back to Jesus and all within hearing range, their old theme about Him, "We have said well and correctly, that you are from the Samaritan sect and that you have a demon in you."

The Samaritans were a Jewish sect just to the north of Judea. In going to Galilee from Jerusalem, as Jesus and His disciples often did, they would frequently have passed through this area called Samaria (not the land area of the Old Testament Samaria, but only a small portion of land, see a Bible Atlas on the four Gospel period). The Samaritans were hated by the Jews of Judea because they had their own "temple" and "Jewish worship system" apart from and separate from, the Jews of the rest of Palestine. To say that you were a Samaritan and had a demon possessing you, was about the lowest, and dirtiest language of the time, that a Jew could rail at anyone.

Jesus was not about to back down this time around, "I have not a demon; but I honor my Father, and you, by your words and mental attitude, dishonor me. I do not seek my own glory. There is ONE that seeks and judges, He knows my heart and your hearts. I'm telling you the truth, if any person will obey my saying, live by what I teach, he shall not die."

"Oh, now we know for sure, " the Jews replied, "now we know you have a demon in you. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and you stand here and tell us that if anyone keeps your words, they shall not taste of death. Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? Are you greater than the prophets, who are dead also? Who do you think you are? What are you saying about yourself?"

Jesus was not saying to them that people who lived by His words would never taste of physical death, but somehow keep right on living. He was saying (as we have seen before in other chapters) that people who follow Him, would have eternal life within them, and would one day inherit the Kingdom of God. They would not die forever, but be raised to immortal life in a resurrection. In some translations from the Greek, it is rendered this way, as Jesus actually saying, "If a man keep my sayings he shall not die forever."

But, the Jews took it to mean Jesus was teaching that those who followed Him would never die in this physical life. They knew that great men of God like Abraham, was not still alive. They knew such men did not have an immortal soul that kept on thinking, and talking, and walking around, in some "other world" - be it heaven or wherever. So they naturally wanted to know who He thought He was that could have followers who would live and never die.

Jesus was not about to lose the opportunity to now be pretty plain and frank about who He was and that He had lived in the ages past.

"If I honor myself, my honor is then nothing, just ones man's talk and idea. It is my Father that honors me; of whom you are claiming He is your God, and that you are His children. Yet, you do not know Him, you just think you do. But I know Him, if I should say that I did not, I would simply be a liar, and so be like all of you. But I do know Him, and I keep His word and teachings. Your father Abraham rejoiced TO SEE MY DAY, and he did SEE IT, and was overjoyed."

The Jews knew exactly what Jesus was meaning by these last words especially. They were not blinded at all to what Jesus was now telling them. He was telling them that He lived in the days of Abraham. They knew He was saying this for with amazement they replied to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, no where near that age, and you are telling us that you lived when Abraham lived and that you saw Abraham when he lived on this earth. Is not that what you are telling us?"

With truth at His side, Jesus replied to them, "It is true, very true, I'm saying to you that before Abraham was ever born, the I AM was me."

The letters "I AM" in the English translations as found in the book of Exodus. The God that talked to Moses at the burning bush, the God who told Moses to tell the people, if they asked who had sent him to them, to tell them His name was I AM. It means "Eternal, self-existent one." All religious Jews of Christ's time knew very well that the "I AM" of the Old Testament was none other than God Almighty. They did not know there were two person in the one God or Godhead, and that both had the same names, just as it sometimes is with a father and son who have the same names (but with us we

usually call the son, John Junior, and the father as just John). They did not know that fact, and to them it would not have mattered anyway. All they knew for sure was that this Jesus man, was now clearly claiming to be their God, the I AM, the eternal one of Moses' time.

For anyone to claim such a title, to claim they were God, was, in Jewish eyes complete and utter blasphemy! Such blasphemy of sin was punishable by death. They knew Roman law forbade them to put anyone to death without consent from the Roman authorities, but they were so filled with outrage at what they now knew Jesus was saying about Himself, that they forgot about any Roman law and immediately picked up stones to throw at Him and to kill Him on the spot. But Jesus walked through the midst of them. It was not yet His time to be put to death (John 8:31-59).

Healing The Man Born Blind

Jesus leaves the Temple and as He is walking along He sees a blind man, and it is known by the disciples that this man was born blind. They asked Him, "Master, tell us, who was it that sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Before we see how Jesus answered them, we need to note that in this question we find that there are physical sins we or others can commit, and in so doing there could very well be a physical penalty to carry with us for the rest of our lives. The disciples knew this truth and so asked their question to Jesus.

He replied, "It was not this man that sinned, nor was it his parents that sinned, but it was so ordained that he be born blind so the works of God could be manifested in him by his healing." This answer may at first seem somewhat harsh. Why would God ordain that a person be born blind and have to wait many years before God would heal him of that blindness? All I can give you for the answer to that question is to read Romans 9:14-23 in a modern translation.

Jesus continued to answer them, "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night comes, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the LIGHT of the world."

Jesus was relatively soon going to be arrested and finally put to death on the cross. In that sense it would be night. Then He was going to be resurrected and return to the Father in heaven. So, now He was in the world in person, and now it was day and light and time to work the works of God.

After He had spoken these words, He spat on the ground and made some clay of the spittle. He then anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said to him, "Go and wash your face in the pool of Siloam (which word means - Sent). He did as Jesus commanded and washed, and he was healed from his blindness and came among the people seeing clearly.

Why did Jesus make clay from spittle and anoint the blind man's eyes with it, and tell him to go and wash? Why not just say "the word" and heal him? Possibly the answer is that sometimes in being healed from our sicknesses and afflictions, we must do our part

in doing whatever needs to be done on the physical side, a "getting in harmony with nature" some like to call it. Our body is a very intricate machine and we must keep all parts in balance and good working order to have and maintain good health. The physical laws of food, water, sleep, exercise, proper mental and emotional health, must all be kept in balance and correct function within God's physical laws, to be healthy.

Then again, Jesus making clay and anointing his eyes might just have been an example to us that God heals in different ways, at different times, with different people.

As the man went among the people now being healed, many who had known that he was born blind began to talk among themselves. "Is this not the man that we know was born blind and sat and begged?" some asked with amazement. "Yes, it is indeed him!" replied others, but then some said, "No, I do not think so, it is someone who just looks like him." But the man himself, on hearing all this, spoke up and said, "It is I, I am the man who was born blind, but now I can see like the rest of you."

"Well, this is fantastic," some shouted out, "so please tell us who performed this miracle on you?"

"A man they call Jesus. He made some clay, anointed my eyes with it, and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Shiloam and wash,' so I did, and I received sight in my eyes," replied the man with great happiness and excitement in his voice.

"Where is this man,?" they asked him.

"Well....he is....hummm, I don't know," he answered them.

Some individuals brought the man to the Pharisees. John the apostle tells us, as it is in the original Greek, "it was Sabbath when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes." Yes, it was the same day as Jesus was teaching in the Temple earlier, which was the day AFTER the seven day Feast of Tabernacles. It was the EIGHTH day (as Leviticus chapter 23 calls it). It was a Sabbath, not THE SABBATH, which is used in the Gospels to indicate the SEVENTH DAY Sabbath of the fourth commandment. The word "THE" is not in the Greek. The Greek reads, "It was Sabbath...." And the context makes it clear that it was Sabbath of the EIGHTH DAY FEAST, the LAST GREAT FEAST of God's festivals as outlined in Leviticus 23.

Some knew the Pharisees would be very interested in this man and who had healed him ON a Sabbath day. They would deem it as breaking the Sabbath, especially when going to the work of making clay. Such was their interpretations and man made rules of "not working on a Sabbath" as we saw earlier, and as we can find in written history by orthodox Jews even to this day.

Now it was the turn of the Pharisees to ask the man how he received his sight. He answered them as he did the people before who asked the same question.

Sure enough, when the Pharisees heard the man's reply as to how he was healed, some said, "The man who did this healing is not of God, because he has broken the law of Sabbath keeping." But to this some replied, "How can such a man you claim is a

sinner, do such mighty miracles?" So once again there was division among them concerning Jesus.

They then turned to the man himself who had been healed and said, "Well, what do you think about this man that opened your eyes so you can now see? Do you think he is from God?"

"I think he must be a prophet from God, yes, I think he must be," the man answered them.

Now, the Pharisees, began to doubt that the man had ever been born blind in the first place. They decided they wanted to hear from his parents if such was really true. They called for the parents to be found and to coming to them, they asked, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? If so, then how do you suppose he can now see?"

"Yes, he certainly is our son, and yes, he was indeed born blind, this we know being his parents. But we have no clue as to the means by which his eyes were opened to be able to see. He is an adult, he can speak for himself. Ask him," responded the man's parents.

The apostle John tells us that the reply by these parents was precipitated because they feared the Pharisees and their supporters, as they had agreed among themselves to put out of the synagogue's fellowship, anyone who confessed that Jesus was the Christ. So the parents turned it back to their son to answer this question of how he was healed from blindness.

The man who could now see was called again to appear before the Jewish leaders. They confronted him with, "You should give God all the praise, for we know the man who did this to you is a great sinner."

"If he be a sinner or not a sinner, I do not know. I only know this one thing, whereas I was blind, I can now see," answered the man.

"Very well, but what did he do to you, how did he go about healing you and restoring your sight?" asked the leaders.

"I've already told you, I've answered you before on this question. Why are you asking me again the same question? Is it because you want to be his disciples?" the man replied with some sarcasm in his voice, knowing they had no such intention in being disciples of Jesus.

Did this reply ever make them upset, and with anger they told him, "We are Moses' disciples, but we bet that you are a disciple of this man Jesus. We know God spoke to Moses face to face, but as to this fellow who healed you from blindness, we don't know where he is from or who has sent him."

With a gasp of amazement the man answered, "Well, this is surely quite something, what a marvel, you do not know even from where he comes, yet he opened my eyes. We know it is a fact that God does not hear gross sinners, and we also know that if

someone be a worshipper of God in sincerity and truth, and obeys Him, then God will hear that person. Then, it is also a fact that since the world began, no one has ever heard of anyone opening the eyes of a person born blind. If this man Jesus is not from God, he could not do anything like this miracle."

Getting even hotter under the collar, the leaders screamed back, "You were born in sins, you are from the gutter of society, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they cast him out and away from their company.

It was reported to Jesus that the man had been cast out by the Jewish leaders, and He went searching for him. Finding him Jesus said, "Do you believe on the Son of God?"

"Who is He, Lord, that I might believe?" the man asked.

"You have seen Him, and He is the person now talking to you," Jesus answered.

"Oh yes, Lord, I do believe," the man replied with praise in his voice, and he fell down and worshipped Him.

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

Some of the Pharisees standing nearby and hearing these words, said, "Are we blind also?" They knew what Jesus was meaning, and they knew the truth of what had been going on this whole day. They knew the truth as to what Jesus was saying and the miracles He was performing, that it was all from God. Deep in their hearts they knew the truth.

Jesus knew they knew and so responded to their question with these words, "If you were blind, you should have no sin; but now you admit, 'We see'; therefore your sin remains."

When you are ignorantly blind there can be a good reason to say "we have no sin" for you do not know or understand that you have sin, but when you know better, and say "Are we also blind?" meaning that you are not blind to the truth, then you are in a position to repent of sin. These Pharisees knew the truth, but would not repent, hence their sins still remained on the books so to speak, and could not be blotted out by mercy through believing in Christ.

The giving of sight to the man born blind was done on a Sabbath day, the one after the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the eighth day, the last great Feast Day of the religious festivals outlined in Leviticus 23. The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the 1,000 years reign of Christ on the earth, the millennium as it is commonly called today (see Zechariah 14).

The Last Great Feast Day pictures the second judgment resurrection, when millions who were spiritually blinded in their physical life, who died in that blindness, will be raised to physical life once more, and will be given the book of life and a chance to have that spiritual blindness removed. They will be given an opportunity to be healed from

sin, and to accept Jesus as Savior, as the Son of God, and to worship Him, just as the man born blind was given his physical sight and an opportunity to know who the Son of God was, and to worship Him.

It was and is a wonderful example of what is to happen in the future when this Last Great Feast Day becomes a reality, as the plan of God for the salvation of all who have ever lived, is unfolded for all to see. For most they will accept sight, but for some, their sins will remain, and sadly they may reject knowing the very Son of God (John 9:1- 41).

More Last Feast Day Truth

Jesus taught more fitting truths on this Sabbath Feast Day, saying:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he that enters not by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that enters in through the door is the shepherd of the sheep. And to him the gatekeeper opens; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. And when he leads out his own sheep he goes before them leading the way, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but will actually flee from him; for they do not know the voice of strangers."

Again, most of the people did not understand what Jesus was talking about. They could not gather that He was talking about Himself being THE shepherd and only through Him could you enter the Kingdom of God. Salvation could not be obtained by being a "good"whatever....Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist, Communist, native in some tribe in dark Africa or anything else, WITHOUT Christ as your Lord and Savior. Jesus is the ONLY door, the only shepherd of the sheep (Acts 4:12). Those that are His sheep will know Him and know His voice. This is why there needs to be a day, an age, when millions who have never known the only shepherd and door to the Kingdom, will be raised to life again, so they can have blindness removed and the book of life opened to them (Rev.20: 11-15).

Jesus continued and explained, "Truly, it is very true, that I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; by me if any person enters in, they shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture."

Yes, all other forms of religion, or self-help, or "new age" philosophy or whatever else is out there to teach people they can find eternal life through belief in them, are simply thieves and robbers. They just don't cut it as we might say.

Jesus went on talking about the thief and Himself as the good shepherd:

"The thief comes, but only to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they might have life, and that people might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But he that is only hired as a stand in for the shepherd, is not the shepherd, and the sheep do not belong to him. When he sees the wolf coming, he doesn't care about the sheep, and runs off. The wolf then breaks in, catches some, and scatters the rest of the sheep. The hired hand flees, because he is

only a hired hand, and doesn't really have personal concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and they know me.

As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And there are other sheep I have which are not of this fold of Judah: them I must also bring into the my sheep-fold, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be ONE fold, and ONE shepherd. Therefore my Father loves me, because I will lay down my life, that I might take it up again. No man takes it from me, but I willingly will lay it down. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. This commandment I have received from my Father."

Jesus' life was "in his own hands" we would say. It was the Father's wish, directive, that He lay it down for the sheep, and in so doing He had the knowledge that it would be taken up again. His life would be resurrected from the dead. Jesus was a willing sacrifice for the sheep, and so the Father loved Him greatly. Also the sheep-fold of Jesus was more than just the people of Judea, even more than all the people of Israel. It would include people from all nations of the world eventually, as we shall see when we come to the Bible Story in the book of Acts. But being made up of many from all nations it would still be ONE sheep-fold, belonging to Christ, and He would still be the only shepherd of that fold, the only door for the sheep to enter to obtain eternal life.

After Jesus ended this teaching, there was once more disagreement and division among the Jews about Him for all that He taught. Some again said He had a demon, that He was mad, and not to listen to Him. Others said, "No, these are not the words of him that has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" (John 10:1-21).

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Many Important Things From The Gospel Of Luke

Seventy Are Sent Out To Do God's Work

Jesus called seventy of His disciples together and sent them out two by two to every town and village that He was planning to go visit. They were to go ahead of Him and teach the Kingdom of God and heal the sick. This was very much like what He had told the twelve to do earlier. Luke records and mentions a few things that was either not recorded or not specified when He sent out the twelve in an earlier Gospel preaching mission.

They were not to go "from house to house." If people received them, they were receiving Him, and in turn receiving the Father. Again, it was a woe to the cities that did not receive them.

Then the seventy returned with joy, telling Jesus how even the demons were subject to them through His name. He then told them that He saw Satan one day in the distant past, fall from heaven like lightning. This was probably at the time Satan rebelled and took one third of the angels with him in that rebellion, to fight God in heaven, but was defeated and cast down to the earth (see Revelation chapter 12). All of that took place before mankind was created, for when we read Genesis chapters one and two, Satan or the Devil, is already there in the garden of Eden, ready to tempt Adam and Eve. Two other parts of the Scriptures that talk about who Satan was at the beginning and what entered his heart, are found in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.

Jesus had given the seventy authority over serpents, and scorpions, over the powers of the enemy, so that nothing was to hurt them. But He told them that they needed to rejoice not in having such authority and power of the evil one and danger, but that they should rejoice that their names were written in the book of life in heaven. And that is the important thing, for this authority Jesus had given them was for that particular time and event He sent them out on. Later times showed that Christ's disciples did not always have protection from harm or danger or losing their lives in His service. The book of Acts will show us all this when we go through it.

The important thing is as Jesus said, to know that whatever this physical life may hand out to us in a physical way, we have our names written in heaven, that we are God's children, and will be in His family Kingdom.

Jesus at that time when the seventy returned to Him, gave thanks to the Father in heaven, that these wonderful truths had been revealed to them by Him, that they had been hid from many of the wise and prudent of this world, and revealed to babes so to speak, ones who had simple belief and faith.

He reminded them again that they were blessed for many prophets of old had desired to see these days that they were seeing and to hear the words they were hearing (Luke 10:1-24).

Way To Life And Good Samaritan Parable

A lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test. He asked Him this question, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus answered, "What is written in the law? how do you understand it?"

The lawyer answered, "I understand it as saying, that you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your life, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and you are to love your neighbor as yourself."

"You have answered correctly, do this, and you shall live," Jesus told him.

But, the lawyer was not fully satisfied, he then asked Jesus who his neighbor was, and Jesus gave this reply:

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho [Jerusalem is on a higher ground level than Jericho], and robbers beat him up and stole his money, leaving him half-dead. Now by chance a priest came along the same road; and when he saw him, he just passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him lying there, he passed by also on the other side.

"Then a Samaritan as he journeyed by, came upon the man lying there half-dead, but when he saw him he had compassion upon him. He went over to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he sat him upon his own beast of burden and brought him to an Inn, and took care of him there. The next day he took out of his pocket his own money and gave it to the Inn-keeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you need to heal his recovery, spend it on him, and when I come back this way on my return home, I will repay you.' Now, which of these three do you think proved to be neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?"

The lawyer answered, "Why, of course, the one who showed kindness and mercy to the man."

"Yes, indeed. Go and do you likewise to anyone," Jesus told him and all who were present there.

Being a neighbor in the full sense of the overall law of God as taught by the whole Old Testament, is doing unto any other, no matter what race, religion, education etc. what you would like them to do to you, especially if in dire circumstances as the man in Jesus' parable. That is what God teaches and expects, for one half of the conditions to receiving and inheriting eternal life. The other half is to love God with everything you have, your mind, your life, your all. This we have seen explained and amplified in Jesus' Gospel work and teaching, in past chapters.

Putting Priorities In The Right Place At The Right Time

Jesus and His disciples had over the time they had been travelling up and down the country-side, preaching and healing, made many friends in many towns and villages. They were coming to such a village where lived two sisters, Mary and Martha. They received them into their house. Mary sat at Jesus' feet hanging on to every word He spoke, listening intently. But Martha was working her fingers to the bone in the kitchen, just consumed with all the material things that she thought needed to be done to look after the physical needs of them all. She finally had had enough of doing it all by herself. "Lord, do you not care that my sister Mary has left me alone to do all this physical work?" she said to Jesus with some exasperation in her voice.

But the Lord answered her saying, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful at this time from you. Mary has chosen the correct good priority here, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10:38-42).

Under this situation where Jesus was wanting to teach and expound the truths of the Kingdom of God, it was the correct thing to do, as Mary was doing, to sit and listen and drink in the spiritual truths being taught. The physical could wait, when it was time for the physical then it was time, and many would then pitch in and help look after that physical need. But at this moment the priority was to listen to the Son of God teaching the word of God.

So it is with us, we have to develop the sense and ability to know what priorities must come first and when they should come first.

Teaching On Prayer

Jesus was praying in a certain place and after He had finished one of His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray even as John taught his disciples to pray.

He then took the opportunity once more to repeat much of what He had taught early on in His ministry, which we covered under the chapters on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus did add something new this time:

"Which of you who has a friend and will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, please lend me three loaves of bread, for another friend of mine had arrived on a long journey, and I have no bread to offer him'; and he will answer, 'Do not bother me; the door is shut, and my children and I have gone to bed; I cannot get up and give anything to you.' I tell you, though in his mind he does not want to get up and give him anything, he will rise and give him whatever he desires, because of his continual importunity, asking and asking, and not giving up."

Jesus was teaching us that we also must ask, keep on asking, and not give up until our Father in heaven answers us.

Doing God's Work Through The Devil?

Once again when casting out a demon Jesus was accused of doing it by the prince of demons. It was a repeat of a similar incident that occurred earlier and that we have covered. A woman did this time cry out from the crowd, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you have sucked!" Jesus once more took the opportunity to tell people what was really blessed and important, "Blessed rather are those that hear the word of God and obey and keep it!"

He again told the people that in the main this was an evil generation that they all lived in, and the only sign He would give them was the sign of Jonah to the men of Nineveh. He at this time, did not go into the part about the three days and three nights He would be in the grave.

He told them that many from the past who were not given salvation and offered repentance, would rise in the great judgment period with many of that generation who could see all that He was doing, and would condemn it to shame, for they will readily repent while those around Him at that time, were hard-hearted and unbelieving.

He went through again the parable about the body, making sure that it was full of light, and setting that light upon a stand that all would see the light of your life.

Plain Talk While Dinning With A Pharisee

And while He was speaking and teaching, a certain Pharisee pleaded with him to come to his home and dine with him. So Jesus went and sat down to eat. The Pharisee marvelled that He had not washed before sitting to eat.

Jesus knew of course what the Pharisees taught and practiced as a ritual before eating any meal, and we covered all that before. It was time for Jesus to lay the cards on the table and be very frank about this and other such things that were relatively small, but what the Pharisees made into a huge production of "spiritual importance." Jesus said:

"Now, you Pharisees make clean to a fault, the outside of the cup and the plate; but your inward parts and motives and attitudes are full of extortions and wickedness. You fools, is it not that He which made the outside made also the inside? But give to the needy what you greedily possess, and you will be clean all over. But it will be terrible for you.

"Woe to you Pharisees! For you are so careful to tithe even the tiniest part of your income and produce, but you completely forget and ignore true justice and the love of God. You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things. Woe to you Pharisees! For how you revel in respectful greetings from everyone as you walk through the market place, and how you love to have the seats of honor in the synagogues. Yes, how terrible it will be for you all. For you are like the hidden graves in a field. People walk over them without knowing the clandestine corruption they are stepping into and getting involved in."

"Well Teacher," spoke up an expert in religious law, "you have insulted us, too, in what you have said."

"Yes," replied Jesus, "that is very true. Woe to you also, you lawyers of religious law. For you burden and crush people under impossible religious demands, and you never lift a finger to ease their burden. It will be terrible for you also, for you build graves and tombs for the very prophets your ancestors killed ages ago, so sanctioning them and their deeds.

"Murderers! You are then actually agreeing with your ancestors that what they did was correct. You would have done the same if you had been in their boots so long ago. And this is what God had said in His wisdom about you, 'I will send prophets and apostles to them, and they will kill some, and persecute the others.' And you of this generation will be held responsible for the murder of all God's prophets from the creation of the world - from the murder of Abel to the murder of Zechariah who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary (2 Chron. 24:20,21). Yes, because your attitude is the same as past murderers, it will surely be charged against you. Yes, woe to you experts in religious law! For you hide the keys to true knowledge from the people. You will not enter the Kingdom yourselves, and you prevent others from also entering."

The attitude of mind for many of these so-called "religious lawyers" or experts of the law of the Old Testament was no different that the mindset of others who had in the past, even from the beginning, killed God's honest and faithful people. So in that respect they accumulated all their sins into their minds. Jesus had shown them that their deeds with the people was like killing them, ruling and governing them in such a heavy handed way that they might just as well have taken a sword and killed them. The power that religious leaders have used over the centuries to burden and chain up people, emotionally, spiritually, and even sometimes physically, is all over the history books for all centuries of the past ages.

Such people who have ruled others in this religious way, are ones who have found the many clever and deceitful ways to lock away the true keys of knowledge and are able to keep others under a kind of spell, we might say. They are what is known today as "cult" leaders. They often exhibit profound technical "letter of the law" knowledge of God's word, being able to remember and recite whole chapters of the Bible. And because it has been and still is so prevalent in the 20th century, many books have been written on either escaping from cults or how not to get involved with them in the first place. It is not only the cults we need to be careful with, even many in so-called "orthodox" Christianity, with their PhD's in religion, have it wrong and have entrapped millions with their false theology. They also are guilty of not lifting a finger to undo the chains from the people. They also are guilty of keeping the keys of the Kingdom locked away from the common person in the darkness of false ideas and false traditions.

But the bottom line is always "buyer beware" - it is up to the individual to obey Isaiah 8:20, no matter who comes to you in religious clothes, even if they are recognized by the world of Christian religion as "experts in their field" because their field may be full of weeds and thistles.

As Jesus spoke these things the Pharisees and teachers of the religious law were furious. And from that time on they continued to hound Him with hostile questions, trying to trap Him, and hoping He would say something they could use against Him, in the eyes of the people and the governing secular authorities of the land (Luke 11:37-54).

Trust And Watchfulness

The crowds of people were so multiplied that they were falling over each other and even trampling on one another under foot. It was a good time for Jesus to warn His disciples about the "leaven of the Pharisees" which He had done on an earlier occasion. This time He used a slightly different metaphor, saying, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy, mere play acting, pretending to be godly when they are anything but. Nothing is covered up that will not be finally revealed and shown to be what it really is, or hidden away from people that will not be seen openly. Whatever you have said in the dark and behind closed doors will be heard in broad daylight, and what you have whispered in private rooms behind closed doors, shall be proclaimed upon the housetops with loud speakers."

The truth can be known. People do not have to "pull the wool over your eyes" or keep you brain washed from the truthful reality and righteousness of the Lord. Jesus had said in His Sermon on the Mount that they who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled. Those in Acts 17 who heard Paul preach and teach the word of God, did not allow themselves to be psychologically manipulated to where they stopped thinking, reasoning, and searching the Scriptures daily, for themselves, to see if what Paul taught was from the word of God, or just his own man made ideas.

It is the responsibility of each individual to prove all things and to hold fast to that which is good, as the apostle Paul taught should be done by each person for themselves (1 Thes. 5:21).

Jesus went on to tell His followers once more who they should really fear. Not men who cannot kill you forever, but Him who can destroy you forever in the fires of the second death. He told them again that they were dearly beloved of the Father. And that everyone who would stand tall and strong in not denying Him before men, would not be denied by Him. He told them once more about the unpardonable sin, a refusal to repent when the Holy Spirit was leading you to acknowledge sin and to turn from it. And finished this discourse with not worrying about what words to speak if brought before the courts of men because of your religious faith in Him and the Father. He promised that the Holy Spirit would, at that time, inspire you to speak what you would need to say.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

More Important Teachings From The Gospel Of Luke

The Foolish Rich Man

One from the multitude of people around Jesus one day asked, "Teacher, I would like you to tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

"I have come to teach and preach the Kingdom of God, not to be a lawyer or judge of such matter between you and your brother," replied Jesus.

He could see there was more behind this question than what most standing there could perceive. Jesus could see the man's heart and intent of wanting more physical wealth and goods. So He went on to say:

"You need to take heed and beware of COVETOUSNESS; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of how many possessions he has. Let me tell you about a rich man who brought forth plentiful in his daily work and business transaction. He thought within himself, 'What am I going to do, for I have no more space to store all my crops and physical goods? Ah, I know what I'll do, I will pull down my old barns and build larger ones, and in them I will store all my grains and goods. And I will further say to my soul, life, you have ample goods laid up in storage for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry, have a blast.' But God said to him, 'Foolish man! This night your life is required, you will die, and all the things you have set your mind upon and coveted in your heart, to lay up for yourself, now who will they belong to?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is NOT RICH TOWARDS God" (Luke 12:13-21).

We have seen, and the word of God teaches with many examples, such as Abraham, Solomon, King David, and Job, among others, that it is not wrong to have physical wealth. It is wrong when your mind and the way you live is all wrapped up in your material possessions and the money you have in the bank, to the point where you have no time for God, and giving to others. With physical wealth comes great responsibility. If you are blessed with such wealth you need to use it to do God's service, to do His work, which yes, includes spreading the Gospel so others can be saved into God's family, but it also includes helping those in need, giving to charities, helping the genuinely poor and needy.

I may have mentioned the man in Vancouver, B.C. who some years ago sold his land and found himself with 20 million dollars. He was elderly, had done well in business, and he and his wife and children (all now grown and doing well physically for themselves) were living comfortably. He said he did not need 95% of the 20 million dollars, and so was having a ball, getting high we might say, in giving it all away to needy individuals and charities.

This is what Jesus was getting at, not setting your heart on more and more physical goods and possessions and money, but if having it all in abundance, to use it to do

good for God's work and to help the poor and those good organizations we today call "charities."

We shall come later to where Jesus clearly shows us His concern for the legitimate "poor" and needy of the land, in what he tells a young rich man to do with his great wealth, because it was a stumbling block to him in being in the Kingdom of God.

Trust In God And The Little Flock

This was the time and opportunity to once more reiterate what He had said in his Sermon on the Mount. People needed to NOT be anxious and overly worried, and all consumed with the material things of life. They needed to seek God's Kingdom first and then know with confidence that God would provide all the necessities of this life. They needed to have FAITH!

He did add one important thing this time, concerning the SIZE of His church, the number of members that would be His flock. He said, "Fear not LITTLE flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

The Greek for "little flock" is a DOUBLE diminutive, and in English we would say something like, "Fear not VERY LITTLE flock" or "Fear not LITTLE LITTLE flock." The true church of Christ, the church of God, would never be the large in number "Christian" church among those who use the name "Christian." It would always be relatively very small, just the very little flock.

Then to them, the little flock, Jesus finished this teaching of His, by saying, "So sell your possessions, and give away much of what you have, if you have great material goods; provide for yourselves purses that do not grow old, with treasures in heaven that do not fail you, where no thief can break in and steal from you, and moths cannot eat and destroy. For where your treasure is, there will your HEART be also" (Luke 12:22-34).

Jesus was saying that we need to have the right priorities. If you have an abundance of physical wealth make sure you use it in a godly way.

Parable Of The Watchful Servant

Jesus knew something that they then did not know, and we today still do not know. They and us do not know when exactly the Lord will return from heaven to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. They then, and us today, do not know when it is our last day in this physical life. We hear and see the news each day of people who went to do their daily work one day, as the day before (think of those who were in the two trade buildings in New York on September the 11th 2001), and did not know it was going to be their last day to live for them in this lifetime. This parable is very important for everyone in all ages. Jesus said:

"Let your clothes be on and your lamps be burning, and be like people who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so they may open the door for him when he comes and knocks. Blessed indeed are those servants who are awake and alert when their master comes. Truly, he will be so pleased that he will put on the

servants uniform and have them sit at the table and he will serve them the meal. If he comes in the second watch or in the third [anywhere from 9 pm to 3 am], and finds them so watching for him, they are blessed indeed.

Now this, that if the house-owner had known the hour that the thief was coming, he would have been awake and ready, so his house would not have been broken into. You also must be READY; for I tell you, the Son of man is coming again at an hour and time you least expect Him to come."

"Lord," said Peter, "are you telling this parable to just us or to all people?"

"Jesus answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master will set over his household goods, to give his family their portion of food at the correct time? Blessed is that servant who is doing their work when their master comes. Truly I tell you, he will give even more responsibilities to that servant in handling his possessions. But, if that servant says within his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the men servants and maid servants under him, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he least expects him to come, and in an hour that he is not looking for him to come, and will punish him and put him with the unfaithful.

"And that servant who KNEW his master's will, but did not make himself ready nor did according to his will, shall receive a SEVERE punishment. But he who did NOT know, and did what deserved a punishment, shall receive a lighter punishment.

"Every one to whom MUCH is given, of him will much be required; and to the person to whom people give more responsibilities they will demand more in fulfilling those responsibilities" (Luke 12:35-48).

If God has given us knowledge of Himself, His plan of salvation, the understanding of His basic truths, then we are to use them wisely and carefully. We are to appreciate them, to keep them, to do His will in our lives all the time. We are not to slack off, get complacent, or fall into wrong ideas of theology, such as thinking we or others, know the year (or even the day as some have proclaimed in just about every age over the last 2,000 years) of Christ's return. We are not to give up because we think Jesus is delaying His coming again, and so delude ourselves into thinking we can, eat, drink, be merry, or as the saying goes, have our, "wine, women, and song." We are to always be vigilant, watchful, careful, doing our Master's will, and be ready for His coming, for His coming is as soon as our last day of life on this earth, and most of us never know when exactly that day may come.

Interpreting The Signs Of The Times

Jesus again talked about the fact that He had not come this time to bring peace on earth, but that people in household families would be divided over Him, and some would despise others who followed Him. He talked again about being able to interpret the signs of the sky, when it was going to rain etc. but that they could not discern the present time which proved the Messiah was among them. He talked about how they should judge what was correct and if they were in the wrong they better settle out of

court with their adversary, or they would find themselves in much deeper trouble with the courts (Luke 12:49-59).

Repentance Is A Key To Salvation

There were some present who asked Him about the individuals that Pilate had killed while they were sacrificing and mingled their blood with that of the blood of the sacrifices.

It might be interesting to know a few things about Pilate. He was not a Roman by nationality, but by citizenship. He was born a Spaniard and educated in Spain as far as the schools of that country could take him. Then he went to Britain to study in the universities of that country under the administration of the Druids. It was Pilate's ambition to become a Roman lawyer and the future governor of Palestine. He studied long enough in Britain to achieve not only his ambition but to absorb the Druidic philosophy rather than the Greek and Roman. Vide Pilate's question to our Lord as they were walking out the Praetorium, "What is Truth?" This was the question which the Druids were ever accustomed to debate.

The people were wanting to know if those Pilate killed were "great" sinners because this happened to them. The Roman Government usually left the Jews alone to worship in freedom. We are not told why Pilate in this case had them killed.

Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered so? I tell you, NO; but unless you REPENT you will all likewise PERISH. Or, those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders and sinners than all others who dwelt in Jerusalem and/or worked on constructing buildings? I tell you, NO; but unless you REPENT you will likewise PERISH!"

And He told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came one day seeking fruit on it and found none. So he said to his gardener, 'I have come these last three years seeking fruit from this fig tree, and I have found none. I want you to cut it down; why should it use up good valuable ground?' And he answered him, 'I think you should leave it stand, sir, till I dig around it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, then I shall cut it down' " (Luke 13:1-9).

Jesus was, in all this explanation, talking about having life eternal, or being cut down, destroyed, perishing, and never gaining eternal life. There are few things to note. One, is that God is willing to be patient with people to a point. He will work with them, trying to nurture them and bring them along to what is required for His grace and love, but there comes a day when if no fruit is produced by the individual, He will have no choice but to let them perish. We also note, that REPENTANCE is an absolute requirement if you are going to live forever and not perish. And we also note, that just because some people die in terrible natural calamities and even by the hands of other human beings, does not mean they are sinners above other people, and that God is handing out severe punishment upon them.

The MAIN point Jesus was wanting to get across was for people to think about sin in relation to salvation, not so much about trying to tie horrible events in an individuals physical life to sin. As the subject was to do with "sin" He was pointing out that people have to REPENT or they will one day perish fully and for ever, never to live again.

Healing On The Sabbath Meets With Criticism

It was a Sabbath day and Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and there was present a woman who had an infirmity for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten herself. When Jesus saw her He called her to come to Him and said to her, "Lady, you are freed from your infirmity." He laid hands on her and she was immediately healed and stood up straight. With joyous and uplifted voice she praised God.

But the ruler of the synagogue (they were usually Pharisees) became very indignant because Jesus had done this healing on the Sabbath day. He turned and said to the people assembled there, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; he healed on those days, but not on the Sabbath day."

The Lord Jesus answered him, "You HYPOCRITES! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his horse from the manger, and lead it away to water it? So should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

When Jesus put it to them this way, all His adversaries got red in the face and were put to shame. The general people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by Him (Luke 13:10-17).

Are Only Few Saved?

Jesus and His disciples still had not yet arrived in Jerusalem. They were passing through many towns and villages. An individual came to him and asked, "Lord, will those who are saved be few in number?"

And He said, "You must strive to enter by the NARROW door, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the householder had risen up and closed the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us.' He will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then they will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from, you are strangers to me, depart from me, all you workers of lawlessness!' I tell you, you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. And men will come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and sit in fellowship together in the Kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some first who will be last" (Luke 13:22-30).

Some of the words of Jesus are VERY SOBERING! Some of His words are pretty PLAIN also. When Jesus comes again in glory, when the resurrection takes place, when Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, are raised to life in that resurrection, when the prophets are

raised, and many others from the four quarters of the earth, there will be many who thought they were "Christians" - who thought they knew Jesus, thought they ate and drank with Him, were "church" going people, and took it for granted they would be with Jesus in His Kingdom. But they will not be in that first resurrection at His coming again. And the reason as to the WHY, Jesus gives....they were workers of lawlessness! Lawlessness is the breaking of God's holy and righteous commandments, the Ten commandments being the basic foundation.

Many people will not be in that first resurrection who thought they would be. They will have to wait for the general white throne judgment resurrection, at the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth, that we have talked about in past chapters of this Gospel story.

Some near the end of this age, shortly before Jesus comes, will be converted, will acknowledge sin, will repent, will turn from lawlessness to walk in righteousness, and be in the first resurrection, be in the Kingdom of God. They will be some of the very last ones to find true repentance and conversion since the time of Adam and Eve. So, it will be as Jesus said, the first (long time ago could have found the true way of God and followed it) will be some of the very last to enter the Kingdom, while some of the last of this age will find true repentance and enter the Kingdom first (Rev. 7), at the time of Christ's coming again.

Then again, some of those first to have salvation offered to them, who even thought they had it in their pocket so to speak, but who would not turn fully from lawlessness (think about the 4th commandment, and how many Christians really observe and obey it), will not even be in the Kingdom period! They will be weeping and gnashing their teeth. There will be many "Christians" when Jesus returns who will be standing in their flesh, thinking they should be changed from mortal to immortal (1 Cor. 15), thinking they should rise to meet the Lord in the clouds and be with Him (1 Thes. 4) and THEY WILL NOT! They will be outside looking in. There will indeed be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

We need to be sure we are not among that crowd. We need to be DOING the law, and not be lawless.

Jesus' Answer To Herod And His Weeping Over Jerusalem

At that moment when Jesus was just finishing answering the question about many or few being saved, some friendlier Pharisees came running up to Him saying, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

The word Herod was actually the surname of a family, from the great and famous "Herod the Great" (37 B.C. to 4 B.C.) There were a number of male descendants from this "great Herod." This one here that the Pharisees were talking about was Herod Antipas (A.D. 6 to A.D. 39). He ended up (because his father determined it be so) only being governor over the region of Galilee and Perea, which embraced one fourth of the original territory he would have liked to have had kingship rule over. It was this Herod that John the Baptist denounced for marrying his brother Philip's wife. His rule over the

territory he did govern was marked with cunning and crime. He was, history tells us, intensely selfish and utterly destitute of principles.

This Herod Antipas wanted to see Jesus dead, but Jesus told the Pharisees to "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the next day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from the city of Jerusalem.' "

Jesus was talking in proverbial language to Herod Antipas. He was in plain language saying, "Look, you fox, you cannot do anything against me today, or tomorrow or any day, until I've done the work God wants me to do. And even then I could not die outside of Jerusalem, for so it is ordained, and there is nothing you can do about it!"

As Jesus was thinking about the city of Jerusalem as the only place where He could be put to death, the city itself came before His mind, and its history of being a city where many of God's prophets were killed. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, guilty of killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not let me do it! You refused me! So, behold, your house is forsaken! And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' " (Luke 13:31-35).

It was to be yet a while before Jesus would enter the city of Jerusalem. He was making His way there, but He would not arrive for sometime. When He did the people would be greeting Him with "Hosanna to the son of David, blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord." This we shall see when we get to that part of our story.

Feast Of Dedication In The Winter

A few months or more had past and it was the heart of the winter in Palestine. The word used by John in his gospel implies that it was cold and inclement.

Jesus was again in Jerusalem, this time for the feast of "Dedication" or as more literal a translation "feast of renewing" or "feast of renovation." Why it was so called will be seen from the following history of how this feast came into being in the Jewish calendar.

"The feast was instituted by Judaeus Maccabeus, in the year 164 before the birth of Christ. The Temple and city were taken over by Antiochus Epiphanies in the year 167 B.C. He slew 40 000 inhabitants, and sold 40 000 more as slaves. In addition to this, he sacrificed a sow on the altar of burnt-offerings, and a broth being made of this he sprinkled it all over the Temple. The city and Temple were brought back into Jewish hands and domain three years later by Judaeus Maccabeus, and the Temple was purified with great pomp and solemnity. The ceremony of purification continued through 8 days, during which Judaeus presented animal sacrifices, and celebrated the praise of God with hymns and psalms (Josephus, Antiquities, book 12, c.11).

"They decked also the forefront of the Temple with crowns of gold, and with shields, and the gates and the chambers they RENEWED, and hanged doors upon them," 1 Mac.

4:52-59. On this account it was called the feast of RENOVATION or Dedication. Then it is also known as the "feast of lights." Josephus the Jewish Pharisee historian of the first century A.D. calls it such and says the city of Jerusalem was illuminated, as expressive of joy. The feast began on the 15th day of Chisleu, answering to about the 15th day of December. The festival continued for 8 days with festive joy" (see Barnes' Notes on the NT, page 316, One volume edition).

This Jewish feast then can be known as "dedication" because the Temple was re-dedicated to God in 164 B.C. It can be known as the feast of "renovation" or "renewal" because much repair was done to the Temple. And it can be known as the "feast of lights" because Jerusalem was ablaze with many lights and great joy when the rededicating of the Temple took place after Judaeus Maccabeus and his men defeated the pagan armies in 164 B.C. and retook the Temple and Jerusalem for Jewish domain once more. The feast is also commonly known as Hanukkah.

Jesus was walking through the porch of Solomon when the Jews gathered around Him and asked, "Just how long are you going to keep us in suspense by the way you talk? If you are the Christ to come, then just tell us plainly." Jesus replied, "Look, I've already told you with some plain words, but you will not believe them. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness as to who I am, but you do not believe because you are not a part of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me; and I give to them eternal life, and they will never perish forever, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, He is greater than everyone, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. And what is more, I and my Father are ONE."

Once more the Jews knew exactly what He was meaning by saying that He and the Father were one. They knew He was meaning that He was God. They picked up stones again, ready to throw at Him. Jesus then said, "I have shown you many good works from the Father: for which of these good works do you stone me?"

"Oh, it's not for any works that you have done, that we are ready to stone you to death, but because you are just a man, yet you make yourself to be God," the Jews answered.

"Well, look at your own law! Is it not written in the law of Moses, 'I said, you are gods'? (Psalm 82:6). So, if He called them 'gods' unto whom the word of God was given, unto the people in general (and the Scripture cannot be broken, it is ever true), why do you say to Him that the Father has sent into this world, that I blaspheme because I have said 'I am the Son of God'?"

When Jesus was saying that He was God, He was not telling them that He was the God being who was still in heaven at the time, the one He referred to as the Father. He was not saying that He was the supreme God being, but that being a Son of God, He carried the same name, and attributes - He was Jesus God, we might say, and the one in heaven was the Father God. Jesus showed that their Old Testament Scriptures clearly taught that those human being who had received the word of God - the Israelites, could be literal sons and daughters of God Almighty, and hence they also could carry the name of God.

Jesus was answering them from the very word of God itself and what the Lord had said, that He Himself called those who had been given His word - gods. It was part of the plan of God to create more offspring from Himself, people who belonged to God, so were God's children, and so would also carry God's name.

Jesus continued, "If I do not the works of my Father, then you have a right not to believe me. But, on the other hand, if I do God's works, then although you don't believe the words that I speak about the matter, believe the works: that you might know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in Him."

All this made the Jews more angry, and were more determined to stone Him, but it was not time for Jesus to be killed, not yet, so He escaped out of their hands. He went for a while beyond Jordan into the place where John the Baptist first baptized, and He abode there for a while. Many people came to Him there because they said, "John did not perform one single miracle; but all that he ever spoke about this man has been the truth." It was while in this area that many more believed on Jesus (John 10:22-42).

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Humility and More Parables

Man With Dropsy Healed

It was another weekly Sabbath, and Jesus was dining at a house of a ruler who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. And the members of that sect were once more watching Him. There was present a man who had "dropsy." This does not mean he kept dropping things. The word "dropsy" is an old English word, it is not used today for the disease that this man had. The man had arms and legs that were swollen all the time.

Jesus said to the Pharisees and the experts of religious law, "So, is it permitted in the law to heal people on the Sabbath day, or not?"

They refused to answer Him. Jesus seeing that they refused to say a word in response to His question, touched the sick man and healed him, then turning to the people said, "Which of you does not work on the Sabbath? If your donkey or cow falls into a pit, don't you proceed at once to get it out?" (Luke 14:1-6). Again no one answered Him.

Being Humble

When Jesus noticed that all who had been invited to the dinner were trying to sit near the head of the table, He gave this advice:

"If you are invited to a wedding feast, don't always head for the best seat. What if someone more respected and well-known than you has been invited? The host will say, 'Let this person sit here instead.' Then you will be embarrassed and will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table! Do this instead - sit at the foot of the table. Then when your host sees you he will come and say, 'Friend, we have a better place for you!' Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. For the proud will be humbled and the humble will be honored."

Turning now to the host of this dinner, Jesus said, "When you put on a luncheon or a dinner, don't just invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will repay you by inviting you to their dinners. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then at the resurrection God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you" (Luke 14:7-14).

Jesus was telling people that those who are "unknown" and really "no-bodies" in the eyes of the world would be very wise to stay humble in their dealings and practices with certain physical meetings the world may sponsor. They should not try to be as we say "pushy" - trying to put themselves into the lime-light or notice of people attending such functions, because of some vanity and self-important mindset. For it is better to be asked to "step up" than be embarrassed by being publicly "put-down" a step or two.

The Banquet In The Kingdom

A man spoke up and said, "What a privilege it would be to eat and share a fellowship meal in the Kingdom of God."

A privilege indeed, but one that many in that day who were invited, will miss out on. Jesus gave this parable in response to the man's statement.

"A man prepared a great feast meal and sent out many invitations to people he knew and ones close to him. When all was ready he sent his servants out to notify the guests that they should come. But they all began to make excuses. One said he had just bought a field and wanted to inspect it, so he asked to be excused. Another said he had just bought five pair of oxen and wanted to see how they worked together pulling his plow. Another said he had just married and could not leave his wife.

"The servant returned and told his master what they had said. The master was angry and said, 'Go quickly into the streets and the alleys of the cities and towns and invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.'

"After the servant had done this, he reported to his master that there was still room for more people to attend the feast. So, his master told him, 'Go then into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone to come, so that my house will be full. For none of those I invited first will get even the smallest taste of what I had prepared for them" (Luke 14:15-24).

God first gave the invitation to come into His Kingdom to the Israelites, and specifically in the time Jesus was teaching and preaching, to the people of the House of Judah (who consisted of those from the tribes of Judah, Levi, and Benjamin, with a few from some of the other tribes who had escaped the Assyrian captivity and deportation from 745 to 718 B.C. and had fled to the House of Judah in the south).

In the main, those people to whom the invitation was first given, REJECTED the invitation, made excuse after excuse, and just would not listen and turned away from entering the Kingdom of God. Many were invited that were educated and experts in the law of God, they were the ones who should have been the closest to God, knowing His word, but they also rejected the true way into the feast dinner of the Kingdom of God.

So, the invitation to enter was sent out and given to the lowly and often uneducated of the land, to the poor, to the crippled, to the blind. The invitation would also go to those outside the fold of Judah, into the countries of other nations. God will make sure His banquet feast at the coming of His Kingdom, will be full. But those to whom the invitation was first given would be left outside at that time.

We need to be careful NOT to turn down our invitation to be in God's Kingdom when Jesus Christ returns to this earth to establish it as the world ruling government for all nations.

Count The Cost Of Being A Disciple Of Christ

Great crowds were following Him around, looking like they wanted to be His disciples, but they really did not understand what it meant to be a follower of His way, so He turned and said to them, "If you really want to be my follower you must LOVE me MORE than your own father, or mother, wife, children, brothers or sisters - yes, more even than your own life. Otherwise you cannot be my disciples. And you cannot be my disciples if you will not carry your own cross, particular problems, trials, tests, that come in being my disciple.

"But you better not begin until you COUNT THE COST. For who would begin to construct a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if there is enough money to pay the bills as they would come in? Otherwise you might complete the foundation only, and then find you have not enough money to finish the project. How everyone would then laugh at you. They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and ran out of money before they could finish it!'

"Or, what king would ever dream of going to war without first sitting down with his counsellors and military leaders to discuss whether his army of ten thousand is strong enough to defeat the twenty thousand soldiers who are marching to fight against him? If he is not able, then while the enemy is still a long way off, he will send a delegation of people from his government to discuss terms of peace. So no one can become my disciple without giving up everything for me and knowing what it will cost them.

"Salt is good for seasoning. But if it loses its flavor, how do you make it salty again? Flavorless salt is good neither for the soil nor for fertilizer. It is just thrown away. Anyone who is willing to hear, should indeed listen and understand!" (Luke 14:25-35).

Yes, you do not become a follower and disciple of Christ's JUST on an emotional experience. Some form of emotion should be felt in full REPENTANCE towards being saved and entering the Kingdom through Christ, but it should never stand alone. There should be also a practical no nonsense, serious contemplation, meditation, and mental thought on what it will mean to be a true "Christian." For wanting to be a real disciple of Jesus means HE comes FIRST. His way of life, and His practices, must be first in your life, above any other person, or any other thing. There is a price tag on having God's grace and salvation, not that you can ever earn it by any of your works, but you must be wanting to have it more than anything else in your entire life.

As Jesus taught us in His Sermon on the Mount, we must first of all seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness, if we want to be in it on the resurrection day, when Jesus returns in glory.

Story Of The Lost Sheep

The hated tax collectors and other notorious sinners from the other side of the tracks, from the parts of towns most people did not enter, often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and the "experts in religious law" complain that He was

associating with the sum of the earth and the lowest of the "despicable people." So Jesus used again an illustration like He had done before:

"If you had 100 sheep, and one of them strayed away, and got lost in the wilderness, would you not leave the 99 others and go searching for the one that was lost? Yes, you would. And when you found it you would carry it home on your shoulders. When you arrived home you would call your friends and your neighbors to come and rejoice with you because the sheep that was lost is now found. In the same way, heaven will be happier over the one sinner that repents and turns to God, than over 99 others who are righteous and haven't strayed away and got lost!" (Luke 15:1-7).

The Silver Coin Lost

Jesus also illustrated the same with this story:

"Or suppose a woman has ten valuable silver coins and loses one. Will she not light a lamp and look in every corner of the house, and sweep every nook and cranny and corner until she finds it? Yes, she will! And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her because she has found the coin she lost. In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels over even one sinner that repents" (Luke 15:8-10)

Story Of The Lost Son

And with one more further illustration and story, Jesus brought home the importance of one sinner repenting:

"There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father one day, 'Father, give me my share of my inheritance now, not later.' And the father did so, dividing his working profit between the two sons. Not long afterwards the younger son packed his belongings, gathered all he had together, and departed into a far away country, and there he squandered away his inheritance in loose living. After spending everything he had, there came a great famine in the land he was living in, and he began to be in physical need to keep himself from starving. So he went out and found a citizen who needed someone to feed his pigs. He was so desperate because no one would give him anything, he fed on the pods that he was feeding to the swine.

"He finally thought to himself, 'How many of my father's servants are starving to death, like I am? I will arise and go to my father and say to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and before you also; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.' And so he arose and came to his father. But while still a long way off his father saw him and felt compassion towards him. The father ran and embraced him, and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best set of clothes, and put them on him; and put a ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet; and bring out the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be joyful; for this my son who was as good as dead, is alive; he was lost, but now is found.' And they all began to have a party of rejoicing.

“Now his elder son was in the field; and as he approached near to the house, he heard music and dancing and merriment. He called one of the servants and asked what was going on and what all this happy noise was all about. 'Oh, your brother has come home,' the servant replied, 'and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has him back safe and sound.' But the elder brother was angry and refused to go into the house. His father came out and tried to entreat him, but he answered his father, 'All these years I have served you, and never did anything against your wishes and desires; yet you never gave me a kid that I might have a party with my friends. But when this son of yours comes back, who has thrown away and foolishly spent your money you gave him, on prostitutes and lavish living, you turn right around and kill the fatted calf and put on a celebration for him. I just do not understand what you are thinking!'

“And the father said, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours all the time. It was fitting to have this celebration party and to rejoice, for this your brother who was as good as dead, is alive; he was lost, but now he is found' (Luke 15:11-32)

Indeed, it is a time to greatly rejoice over even one sinner who truly REPENTS and accepts Jesus as personal Savior and who will love God the Father with all his heart and life and mind. We who have been with the heaven Father for some time, who have His love and all the blessing He gives to us each day, we who know His ways, and have walked in them, and have so been able to receive the blessing from so doing, each and every day, we need to be able to greatly rejoice over even one sinner who has been lost in sin, but who has now found the way to our Father in heaven.

Jesus was trying to get through to certain ones of His time that were so self-righteous in their approach to "religion" that they could not see where it was all at, what the bottom line was that God was doing with mankind on this earth. They could not see that God was wanting sinners to REPENT and to become His literal sons and daughters. They could not see that God and the angels in heaven were greatly rejoicing over just one single sinner that found the way to salvation.

We need to always be of the mindset of our heavenly Father, and our brother Christ Jesus, in that we also rejoice with them over the lost sinner coming to repentance and salvation.

The Faithful Steward Being Wise

Jesus thought it was needed that His disciples be taught that it was fine to be wise in physical ways with the world, which might someday pay off when needing some help, so He said:

"There was a rich man who had a servant, and charges were brought to him that the servant was wasting his goods. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I am hearing about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be a servant in charge of my goods.' And the servant said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking this stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig ditches and I'm ashamed to beg. Ah, I know what I'll do, so that people may receive me into their favor and houses when I'm put out of my stewardship with this rich man.'

So, summoning his master's debtors to come to him, one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' The man replied, 'I owe a hundred jars of oil.' And the servant said, 'Alright, take your account and write down that you owe 50 jars of oil.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe my master?' The man answered, 'It owe a hundred sacks of wheat.' The servant said to him, 'Take your bill and write that you owe eighty sacks.'

The master found out what the servant had done, but actually commended the dishonest servant because of his prudence, discerning rational and farsighted thoughts.

The sons of this world are sometimes wiser than the sons of light. So, I tell you, make friends for yourselves in the physical substance of material dealings with people, use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends, so that when the physical things of money and goods fail you, you will have friends to help you on your way in this life as you move forward to eternal life" (Luke 16:1-9).

Jesus was not endorsing that His disciples be dishonest or cheats. That was not the main point of the parable. The main point was that Jesus said it was wise, to be wise in the use of your material resources, gifts, talents etc. so you could have friends who were not disciples of Jesus. In so doing, there might come a time when those friends would help you in physical ways, if you run into hard times in this life.

Very interesting and revealing indeed, for Jesus was teaching that sometimes friends outside of the Church of God, are fine to have, and that they may be the ones to help you better and faster than your friends in "the church" when hard physical times come your way.

Being Faithful With What You Have

Jesus continued with more instructions of being a wise and faithful steward of what God gives you:

"He who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much; and he who is unfaithful in very little is unfaithful in much. If you have not been faithful with the physical material goods and money you have, who is going to entrust to you greater riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?"

God expects us to be good stewards of all the physical goods we have, to use them wisely and in the service of others. If we do that then He will give us more to use and be faithful in, especially so in the Kingdom. If you are not faithful and wise in using material goods here and now, then people will not entrust you to have more responsibility. We certainly find this in the working sector of society. A boss is not going to entrust you with great responsibilities if you cannot handle wisely the little responsibilities you have now. And often if you have not handled correctly duties and material goods that you do not naturally or shall we say, "fall into sink with" (taking more effort and work on your part) immediately, then even that which does come easy to you, and that you are naturally talented with, will be with-held from you. Life and work is not always doing what comes natural or easy to us, sometimes we must do and be faithful in things that task our body

and mind. But we shall be rewarded, often in this lifetime, but certainly in the next one in God's Kingdom.

Not Allowing The Physical To Dominate

Jesus did not want anyone to misunderstand what He was teaching. Some listening would no doubt have thought He was saying that we needed to be consumed, as on a drug, with the material things of this life, making what we do with goods and money and our talents, the number one priority in life, and sad to say, many, from morning to night, are doing just that.

I was talking to a lady who has a daughter, unmarried, but works at two jobs, one an office job, all day, and then goes to work in a casino till 2 a.m. in the morning. She has bought a house but must have two others living there also as roommates. She has to do all this just to make ends meet.

Then of course there are others who do such things as the daughter above simply to get more and more money in the bank. Their "god" is money and material goods.

Jesus was not wanting anyone to think He was teaching that people should be all consumed with the material things in life, so He said, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and the physical world."

Jesus wants us to do our faithful part while in this physical world with the material things we have responsibility over, but not to the point it becomes our every breath of life. He wants us to make sure God and His way come first, but not to let slip our physical obligations with what has been given to us either by God or man or both.

The Pharisees, who loved "money" heard all this and just laughed and scoffed at Him. Jesus said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:10-15).

The Pharisees, to uphold their life style, their greed for money, their love of being noticed on the street and at banquets, would justify all they did as easy as blinking an eye. They had all kinds of ways to justify, make it sound correct and righteous, how they lived and acted to gain more and more. Jesus told them they were only fooling themselves and maybe some people walking the streets or in the market place, but they were not fooling God, for He knew what was in their hearts. And what was in their hearts was an abomination to God.

New Testament Teaching Since John

Jesus wanted to also make it very clear that the New Testament or New Covenant had arrived and was being taught FROM the days of John the Baptist. He said, "The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the Kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it by striving forcefully with great determination. But it is

easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one dot of the law to become void" (Luke 16:16-17).

These few verses are very important verses, not understood by many. There is much argument today over the Old and the New Covenants, and exactly WHEN the New one took effect, was it when Jesus died, or when He was resurrected, was it on the day of Pentecost?

The truth of the matter is that the New Covenant took effect at the coming and preaching and ministry of John the Baptist. Then it was no longer JUST the law and the prophets, the Old Testament books, but the "spirit" of the New Covenant that was now in effect. Jesus and John were teaching and preaching the New Covenant, this of course we can see plainly from Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount." And those who wanted into the New Covenant, into the Kingdom of God, had to strive hard, be determined in their mind, to walk the straight and narrow path to eternal life, as Jesus had already before taught and instructed.

Then He was also making it clear that just because the New Covenant and the Kingdom of God had arrived to be preached and entered, did not mean the old books of the Old Testament or Covenant were done away with. On the contrary, He said, it would be easier for heaven to roll away than for one word of those books to perish.

Jesus was saying once more what He plainly taught in Matthew 4:4, that people are to live by EVERY WORD OF GOD, all that is contained in the Old and the New Testaments, what today we know as the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Marriage Bond Tightened Up

Jesus was still hammering at the Pharisees, it was they who were laughing at Him for what He was teaching, so they needed to be hit a little more. Jesus knew that the main school of the Pharisees taught that people could get divorced for just about any little reason, sometimes out and out silly and trivial reasons, like divorcing your wife because she didn't iron your clothes with the pleats in just the right place. Jesus here recorded by Luke does not go into details, but the Pharisees would have known exactly what He was aiming at. He said, "Every one who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."

Later, Jesus gets into this subject once again with the Pharisees and goes into more detail on the matter. We shall see this when we come to chapter 19 of the Gospel of Matthew.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Lazarus And The Rich Man

Parable Of Lazarus

Jesus said, looking at the Pharisees, "There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom."

Using the Bible to interpret itself, we know that death is a sleep, that people do not continue to think, talk, walk around, anywhere after they die. This poor man Lazarus was dead, asleep, but one day is taken by the angels into Abraham's bosom, into a loving embrace and close fellowship with Abraham. This happens when Abraham will rise from the dead, when both Lazarus and Abraham will rise in a resurrection, the angels being present (Matthew 24:29-31) and all saints in close bosom fellowship one with the other. So, this part of Jesus' parable brings us to the FIRST resurrection, the resurrection of the saints, at the coming of Christ in glory, to meet the Jesus in the clouds of the air (1 Thes. 4:13-18), and the change from mortal to immortal for the children of God as Paul spoke about in 1 Corinthians 15.

Jesus continued, "The rich man died and was also buried; and in the grave, he lifted up his eyes, and was in torment, seeing Abraham far off and Lazarus in close bosom fellowship. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger into water and come and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish seeing this flame.' "

First we notice the rich man dies, he is also asleep, until he is resurrected back to life. But this resurrection for him is not until AFTER the first resurrection and AFTER the 1,000 years period spoken about in Revelation 20. Of course in this parable it is clear that Lazarus is a saint or child of God, while the rich man is one of the unrepentant wicked.

This wicked rich man comes up in a resurrection at the end of the 1,000 year period, and what does he see? Well, already in the Kingdom of God there is Abraham and Lazarus, who were resurrected 1,000 years earlier. Then as we are near the very end of all time and ages leading up to the cleansing of the earth by FIRE (2 Peter 3:8-13 and Malachi 4) and destruction of all the wicked, and the coming of the new heavens and new earth, it is only fitting that the rich man SEES the FIRE!

He is in utter anguish! The Greek here for this word "anguish" mainly means "anguish of the mind and emotions." It does not mean he is feeling physical pain from being in some kind of never ending burning hell-fire, where he was thrown when he died.

Notice he asks for Abraham to send Lazarus, to do what? Does he ask him to get a fire engine and hose pipe and shoot torrents of water over him and the area to put out the

fire that some say he is living in, and has been in for thousands of years? No! he asks that Lazarus come over to put his wet finger in the tip of his tongue. When you are in such mental anguish your mouth dries up and you become "hot under the collar" as the saying goes.

This man could see the flames that were coming on the earth to fulfil the prophecies we have quoted above. You bet he was in anguish. He realized what fate awaited him.

Jesus said furthermore, "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between you and us is a great wide chasm, so that those who would like to pass from your side to this side, cannot do so."

Jesus was hitting the Pharisees right between the eyes with a two by four. He was telling them that such people as they, had had their physical comfort and luxury during their lifetime, while not caring for the poor and needy, while not even giving them some crumbs from their table. He was telling them that people like Lazarus, who had none of the material goods they had, in their physical life, but were true children of God (while they only pretended to be religious), would have their comfort and reward. They would be inside the Kingdom looking out at such fellows who would be in anguish at not being in the Kingdom and who would be waiting their fate in the fires at the end of time.

The great gulf or chasm that could not be crossed was the chasm of "immortality." The chasm of eternal life as opposed to mortal life. Lazarus now had eternal life, the rich man was raised to mortal life. The rich man was representing those who had refused to repent and enter God's Kingdom. It was now too late for the rich man, his day of salvation had already come and gone. He had thrown it away, he had refused to listen to God's calling and God's WORD!

Listening to the word of God, living by every word of God, is vital, as we have seen Jesus already expounding to us in earlier parts of His ministry. This is again brought to the forefront by Jesus' last words in this parable, "The rich man said, 'Then I beg you, father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of anguish.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear what they have to say.' And he said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' Abraham replied to him, 'Ah, if they will not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they hear and be convinced and repent if some one should rise from the dead' " (Luke 16:19-31).

True repentance to salvation has little if anything to do with "miracles." Physical miracles, seeing them, is not the way to find repentance into the Kingdom of God. Satan with his powers can work miracles. Paul tells us that he sometimes comes as if he is an "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:13-15). True repentance and being a child of God comes from a personal relationship with Christ and God the Father, and from studying and living by every word of God. When Jesus said you must listen to Moses and the prophets, all in His day knew that meant all of the books from Genesis to Malachi.

Yes, there were to be more books added to God's word, what we today know as the New Testament, but Jesus, as we've seen, said not one "dot" of the Old Testament would fade away. We have seen He said it was easier for heaven to pass away than one small letter to pass from the law and the prophets - the Old Testament.

It was still true then, and it is still true today, that to be a Lazarus, to be in the Kingdom of God, one would have to hear and live by ALL the Bible. That way is the only way to repentance and salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

When using the Bible to interpret itself, this somewhat famous parable, is not even close to proving that people have an immortal soul that either goes to heaven at death if you are "good" or to an ever burning hell-fire if you are "bad."

The parable clearly teaches the truth about RESURRECTIONS, a resurrection to eternal glory if you are a true repentant child of God, and a resurrection to be burnt up in the fires that will engulf the earth to destroy all unrepentant sinners, and then will come the new heavens and the new earth where in only dwells righteousness. So it is written in the last three chapters of the book of Revelation.

Increasing Faith

Jesus went on to talk again to His disciples about the fact that people will cause others to sin and be offended to the point where they will seriously think about giving up on God. He told them once more that people who do such offenses it would have been better for them to have had a stone around their neck and have been cast into the sea. He said that to cause a little one coming to Him to be offended and give up was a very serious matter indeed.

And as He was talking about sin and repentance He said, "Take note of this and of yourself; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in a day, and turns to you and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

We understand this as meaning true repentance, not a deliberate play act, just to lead you on and take advantage of your mercy. Jesus knew there were play actors in religion, He called the Pharisees and Sadducees and those skilled in "religious law" hypocrites and play actors, most of them were, and certainly Jesus was not meaning your kindness and mercy should be taken for a ride by the likes of those (Luke 17:1-4).

The apostles then asked Jesus to increase their faith. We would think they may have been thinking He would wave His hand, utter a prayer and "presto" a greater supply of the Spirit would have tingled up and down their spine. But what He said was the way to increase ones faith:

"If you have faith even as small as a grain of mustard seed you could say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you, it would come to pass as you desired. Then again, will any one of you who has a servant plowing your field or watching over your sheep, say to him when he comes in from outside, 'Please, sit down at once at the table?' Will he not rather say, 'I want you to

prepare supper for me, and when I've eaten then you can eat commandments?' Does he thank that servant for doing the things that he is commanded to do? So you also, when you have done those things which are commanded of you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have done only that which was our duty to do' " (Luke 17:5-10).

Do you remember when the disciples could not cast out a demon from a father's son? Jesus did the casting out, and was disappointed with the disciples. They asked Him why they could not cast out the demon. Do you remember what Jesus said in reply to them? He said such a miracle could only be done through much prayer and fasting!

We draw close to God through prayer and fasting. We gain more faith to do greater works for God. Jesus here was saying that even with a little faith, a small part of faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could do great things, but if you wanted still yet more faith, you had to go above and beyond just obeying the written commandments of the Lord. Doing those commandments was part of your duty as a servant and child of God. Increased faith would come about by going beyond the call of duty.

It reminds me of what John said in 1 John 3:22. There are things that are pleasing to God that we should be doing also. They may not be written down as laws and commandments per se, but there are things that God is pleased with even if He has not spelled them out to us in His written word.

Doing all of this, the written commandments and the unwritten will of the Lord, draw us closer and closer to Him, and in so living this way, we can add to our faith, or increase our faith. It was probably not the answer that the disciples were looking for or expecting, but Jesus gave it as the sure way to increase a person's faith.

There is also a very sobering connection here with Jesus saying that after we have done all that is commanded of us that we are to say we are "unprofitable servants." For, if we now take those words and put them with Matthew 25:14-30....well, very revealing it is. How the Bible can interpret itself, brings us to stark reality sometimes.

The parable of the unprofitable servant in Matthew 25 can also be applied to our daily everyday lives. God gives us gifts, talents, abilities; He often gives us the opportunity to learn things in ways of skill, such as music, or art, and a host of other skills or abilities. We should with whatever talents we have, use them for the betterment of others around us. Just stop and think for a moment of all the people you know, all the other children in your school or particular club you may belong to, and all the different abilities and skills that they have. God gives all these talents, some natural, just born with, others may be learnt, whichever it may be, the point is that if all are using them to serve and help and give to others, think what a pleasant and nice world it would be, at least in your corner of the world. We often hear of doctors especially skilled in certain surgical work going to serve people in far away countries, very poor counties, serving them for free because those people have not the means nor the money for such skilled work as they or their children may need.

Our Father in heaven wants us be profitable servants, to use, and to increase what we have been given, even in the physical things that we have. Jesus said elsewhere that He came to SERVE not to be served, so we also should then use all that we have to

serve others, and if we are so doing, we will increase and will not be unprofitable servants.

Ten Lepers Healed

Jesus was still headed for Jerusalem. He was now passing along between Galilee and Samaria. He entered a village and was met by ten lepers. The disease of leprosy is very contagious so people in those days with the disease were isolated from everyone else. And they themselves stood back from others so not to pass on their leprosy. The disease is a whitish swollen bumpy formation in the skin, very contagious as I've just said, and so you really did become an "outcast" from the rest of society.

Well, ten people with leprosy stood far back from Jesus but shouted out to Him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us." Hearing them He said, "You all go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they left they were all healed.

It was the law of Moses that when you were healed from leprosy you were required to show your proof of healing to the priests.

It was one leper who seeing that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice of praise to God, fell at the feet of Jesus, also giving Him thanks. This man was a Samaritan, one from the hated sect that the Jews of Judea despised. "Was there not ten of you cleansed," said Jesus, "where are the other nine? Was no one but this Samaritan found who returned and praised God?"

The other nine we suppose were from Judea, being Jews who thought they knew who the true God was, after all they had the true Temple of God in Jerusalem, and had preserved all the books of the Old Testament inspired Scripture, but they did not return to thank God. Only this man, a Samaritan, that most Jews in Palestine loathed and thought was the scum of the lake, only he returned to praise God and thank Jesus. Jesus told him to stand up and go his way, for his faith had made him well and healthy.

The Kingdom Within And When It Also Comes

One day the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the Kingdom of God come?" And Jesus, knowing that they could not see the signs of the present time, and that He was the promised Messiah, knowing they could not see the prophecies, or simply chose to ignore them, about His first coming, knowing that all they cared about was the prophecies of the Messiah coming in power and glory to establish the Kingdom of God on earth (even then they had a distorted idea about how all that would play out, they thought Judah would become some kind of power over all the other nations of the earth, with the Messiah being their leader to defeat their enemies and establish a Jewish super world ruling government).

Jesus knew the Pharisees were only interested in the prophecies regarding the Messiah's coming in glory and power, so He deliberately did not answer their specific question about those prophecies or the time setting as to when those prophecies would come to pass. Jesus went straight to the Kingdom of God as it was for the THEN

present, as it was for each individual to find and have for the NOW, for themselves personally, which the Pharisees were far from finding.

Jesus answered them, "The Kingdom of God isn't only ushered in with visible signs. You will not be able to say, 'Oh, look over in this place, for there it is,' or 'It's over there, over in that nation.' For the Kingdom of God is WITHIN you" (Luke 17:20-21).

The Greek word for "within" means just that, within. Some have objected that the Kingdom of God cannot be inside you, but Paul clearly uses it in that sense in Colossians 1:14, where he says that Christians have been "translated" or "moved over" into the Kingdom of the Son of the Father. Christ's Kingdom is the Father's Kingdom, which after He has ruled with that Kingdom on this earth for a thousand years (Revelation 19, 20), He will hand over to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-26 with Rev. 20, 21). Yet, NOW, at this present time, there is a reality to the Kingdom of God. Christians are moved over into it when they repent, accept Jesus as Savior, are baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit. This for them, is a moving from the kingdom of Satan, sin, and the unconverted world, into the Kingdom of God, here and now, in this physical lifetime. You are already IN the Kingdom of God when you become His literal Spirit led child.

Some object to this explanation, saying that Jesus could not possibly be meaning the Kingdom of God was "within" those Pharisees, to whom He was addressing His answer. But, they fail to take into account the MANY "figures of speech" that is often used in the Bible, by many people, just as we today in our conversation often use figures of speech.

It is true that Jesus certainly did not mean those hypocritical Pharisees had the Kingdom of God within themselves. But using a figure of speech "the Kingdom of God is within you" Jesus was saying and telling them that as far as they should be concerned with, they needed to get the reality of the Kingdom of God as it pertains to the present, as it pertains to having the Kingdom within themselves, being a part of it NOW in the spiritual sense, and not just looking to when it would come in the literal sense, as ruling over the world. And in that first sense, the Kingdom of God could not be physically located as in some specific area of the planet we call earth.

As I've stated, Jesus did not answer their specific question, concerning the literal coming aspect of the Kingdom of God. He chose to go rather to the more important state of things for those Pharisees; being concerned with having in their lives now, within themselves, the Kingdom of God.

Then, turning to His disciples He does tell them about the last days, or more specifically THE very day upon which He would return and establish the literal aspect of the Kingdom of God on the earth. Keeping the CONTEXT in view at all times is the key. We shall then clearly see Jesus was talking about THE LITERAL day when He would come again in glory and power, and the basic state of the world at large.

Jesus said: "The days are coming when you will very much desire to see ONE of the days of the Son of man, and YOU will not see it. Many will come along and say, 'Look here!' or 'Look, there it is!' or 'Behold He comes on this or that year and date.' Do NOT believe them, do not get on their band wagon. For as the lightning flashes and lights up

the sky from one side to the other, SO will be the Son of man in His day. But first He must be rejected and suffer many things by the hands of this generation."

As Jesus taught elsewhere, He was going on a long journey back to heaven for a long time, before He would return in glory to establish the Kingdom. The disciples of His day would later LONG to see that one day of His return, so would many others down through the centuries, but they would not. They would rest in the sleep of death, waiting the resurrection at Christ's coming.

I grew up as a child and teenager in England. I can remember many a day when out on the field playing soccer with the school class, that it just stormed on us like it is hard to imagine. Big black clouds, rolling thunder, raining like there would be no tomorrow, and LIGHTNING that would make a fourth of July fireworks display look tame. It would lightning flash and the sky would literally light up from one side to the other, then go black again from one side to the other, until the next lightning flash. Quite spectacular it was. And all of this, sky turning black, thunder, rain, and lightning, would all come upon us quite suddenly, within a few minutes.

Jesus continued:

"As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were engaged to be married, they worked, and they played, until THE DAY when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was in the days of Lot - they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built houses, but on THE DAY when Lot went out from Sodom fire and brimstone rained from heaven and destroyed them all - SO will it be on THE DAY when the Son of man is revealed."

Noah entered the ark on ONE SPECIFIC 24 hour day, it did not take him a month to walk into the ark. The waters of the flood came on ONE specific day (of course the waters continued for a while as is recorded in Genesis), and on THAT DAY Noah entered the ark. The others were as good as dead men on that day, though some did not die on that day that Noah entered the ark. But Jesus is not concerned so much about that fact, as the fact that Noah ENTERED the ark on ONE specific day of the year.

Lot departed out of Sodom on ONE specific day of the year. It did not take him a month or a week to walk out of that city. It took him just ONE day to leave Sodom, and on that day destruction came upon those left in the city.

Jesus is clearly talking about the LITERAL 24 HOUR DAY in the year (whatever year that may be) when He will RETURN to earth with glory and POWER to save/and resurrect the saints, who will join Him in the air, in the clouds (1 Thes. 4:13-18), to be with Him forever more, as they descend to the Mount of Olives at Jerusalem (see Zechariah 14). He is talking about THE day when He comes back again to earth to establish the Kingdom of God on earth to rule all nations, and at that same time and for a while afterwards He will punish and destroy many people who will rebel against Him and will even try to fight Him (see Revelation 17:12-14; 19; and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

We now have THE day that Jesus has focused on, it is one particular literal 24 hour day, when He literally and bodily comes again to earth from heaven. Speaking of that same day Jesus continued with:

"On THAT day, let him who is on the housetop, with his goods and money in the house, NOT come down to take them away; and likewise let him who is in the field NOT turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together at the mill; one will be taken while the other is left behind."

Oh, the many books that have been written on these last few verses. Many have mistakenly thought Jesus was talking about a coming great tribulation time, near the very end of this age, when the saints would be "raptured" away to heaven - taken suddenly, while driving their car, flying an airplane, driving a school bus, to heaven. They think people will look around in astonishment and ask "Where did....(name)....go to, what happened to them, they were here a second ago and now they are not." Of course the ramifications for such a belief are mind-bending. If you are driving a school bus full of children down a steep hill on a mountain-side and....you suddenly disappear, the conclusion could be deadly tragic.

Jesus was NOT talking about such a time nor about such a "secret" event of suddenly having the saints disappear while they were doing their daily chores or daily work, and possibly leaving others to face death. Think about the death toll and crippled bodies there would be from all of a sudden thousands of motor vehicle drivers NOT driving, but sudden, in a split second....gone....gone to heaven in a secret rapture!

Jesus WAS talking about THE day in the year upon which He will return to earth. It will be a surprise to most, even the saints will not know which day it will be (as we shall see Jesus telling us later that fact), and people will still be living on earth, doing their daily work and pleasures. Yes, the saints will be on this earth during the last years of the Great Tribulation period. Yes, some of the saints will be in captivity in their enemies lands (the book of Revelation makes that clear), while some saints will be in the wilderness (as it was in the dark and so-called middle ages, to escape religious persecution and death from organizations and governments of nations who wanted to see them dead). Some people will be converted during those last few years before Jesus returns. They will be converted to true Christianity while living where they are living and doing their daily work.

Life at that time will still be going on, in many ways just as it is for us today in our lives. When Jesus returns on a specific day of the year, it will be dark and bedtime for half the world. Hence Jesus saying two would be in one bed. For the other half of the world, they will be awake and working at whatever they do during their waking hours. Jesus will come, not in secret! He will come SUDDENLY yes, but not without great spectacular signs. So mighty will be the signs it will be like one of those famous sudden English thunder and lightning storms I was telling you about. The book of Revelation tells us that every eye shall see Him when He comes. The round earth will continue to roll and make its 24 hour turn. All will finally see the mighty Jesus coming with great heavenly

signs. People will stop doing what they are doing. They will stop driving, stop flying airplanes. Stop their school bus. If working in a factory or grinding at the mill outside, they will stop and look up. If still asleep....well the one who is a true Christian will be.....gone indeed, gone in a RESURRECTION call of the blast of the last trumpet (see 1 Cor. 15 and Rev. 11:15-19).

There will be no needless death of persons, or children, or babies, as others around them suddenly disappear to be caught up and led by the angels to meet Jesus in the clouds (Matt. 24:29-31 with 1 Thes. 4:13-18), as they are part of the first resurrection (1 Cor.15).

After all this that Jesus told His disciples they asked him, "Where, Lord, where will we be taken to?"

Jesus replied, "Where the body is, there the eagles will also be gathered together" (Luke 17:22-37).

How this saying of Jesus has also been misunderstood and misapplied, all because of not keeping it within the CONTEXT of the words before it. Jesus has been talking about THE day of His coming back to earth to establish the Kingdom of God. The disciples were understanding that on THAT day they would be in safety, like Noah and Lot had been at their times of earth shattering events. They understood that they, the saints of God, would be taken....but they could just not finish putting it all together, they were left a little bewildered. What would happen when they were taken, where would they be taken to, hence their question, "Where Lord, where will we be taken to?"

Jesus was telling them about the RESURRECTION, which they would be a part of, at His coming again, at the end of the age, when He would return in glory and with spectacular signs. He was "the body" that would attract the "gathering of the eagles" - as the body is ONE and the eagles are MANY, so it is, that Jesus is ONE and the saints are MANY. And where the body happens to be there the eagles do come to it.

We can see the whole picture from Matthew 24:29-31 and from 1 Thes. 4:13-18 and from Zechariah 14. Jesus, as the "body" in this analogy He uses, comes to just above the clouds of this earth, and at that same time when the 7th trumpet is blown, the saints who are dead rise in a resurrection, while the saints living (sleeping in a bed or grinding at the mill) will be instantly changed from mortal to immortal (1 Cor. 15), and then with the help of the angels (Matt. 24:29-31) they will be taken WHERE Jesus is, to be gathered together with Him in the clouds, and so ever be with Him for ever more, as He descends to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14) in that very SAME day.

We must also remember that "analogies" are not always to be taken to their ultimate literal sense. Because a "body" is a dead rotting body in this analogy of Jesus' to which the eagles gather to feed themselves on, Jesus was not saying that He would be dead and saints coming to eat Him. That was not the point of the analogy. The main point and only point of it was to teach His disciples that the place where they would be, when in safety on the day of His return, would be the place where He Himself would be. To be WITH HIM on that day was ultimate safety.

We shall be with Him in the clouds (1 Thes. 4:13-18), and so be with Him for all eternity, as part of the very literal born sons and daughters of the Father in heaven. What a wonderful and breath-taking thought all of that is.

Stick To It Prayer And A Humble Mind

Jesus told them a parable, to the effect that they should always keep on praying and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate and revenge me against my adversary.' For a while he refused; but afterwards he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard the position of any man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.' "

The Jesus gave the meaning, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate and avenge His elect that cry to Him day and night? Will He keep delaying for a long time over them? I tell you He will give them justice and avenge for them. He will do it speedily."

Here in this analogy the "judge" is obvious God the Father, but the Father is not someone who does not fear Himself or disregard men. This proves that analogies break down in parts and not everything in the analogy is meant to be taken to prove something. The main point of the analogy is the main point for us to comprehend, not the used details.

Many evils have come upon God's elect down through the centuries, from those who determined to be their enemies for one reason or another. The people of God have cried out to Him for justice and vengeance to be poured out on their evil enemies. They have been crying out for a long time now. There is nothing wrong with this importuning of God's people to see their enemies brought to trial so to speak and handed their just reward of punishment because of the evil the world and certain groups and certain individuals have done against them. We see in symbolic form the lives of many saints who have been killed for their faith by evil persons, crying out to God in heaven, to be avenged (Revelation 6:9,10).

God's people are not to give up on this request. It is right and proper justice that those who have done evil against peaceful Christian saints, who wanted to do no more than just live their faith, have their enemies pay for their evil. God has written in His word that all shall be rewarded according to their works (see Romans 2:6-11).

Jesus went on: "Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find THE faith on earth?"

In the Greek New Testament the definite article "the" is there. So Jesus was asking the question as to whether THE faith would be found on the earth when He came again. The answer from the prophecies of the book of Revelation, is a YES, but it would still be only a relatively small group who will hold THE faith, the true beliefs and practices of God, when Jesus comes to earth again.

Jesus spent a lot of time trying to get the sect of the Pharisees to align themselves with the true spirit of godliness, as opposed to their false religious attitude. He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.

"Two men went up into the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed like this to himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner.' I tell you, this man went to his home justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:1-14).

When we fully realize and admit to ourselves that despite all the good things we may well do in this life, we have many sins we also commit in mind, thoughts, words, and actions, as we go about our lives, then we will at times not lift our eyes to heaven, but admit to God we are a sinner. We shall then always be in a state of mind that we ask for the mercy of God, knowing that we need it, and knowing as the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:8 that we are saved by grace and not by any of our "good" works. For, as it is written, when compared to the holy perfectness of our heavenly Father, all our own works of righteousness are but filthy rags before Him.

Being humble, and admitting we are a sinner, is a must in order for us to be justified and to inherit eternal life (1 John 1 through 2:2).

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Divorce and Re-Marriage and How To Inherit Eternal Life

Pharisees Ask About Divorce

Jesus and His disciples were getting closer to Jerusalem. One day as they were on their travels, the Pharisees wanting once more to test Him, came asking this question, "It is lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"

We have seen in the past chapters that there were two schools among the sect of the Pharisees, and the main school of thought and popularity among the Pharisee leaders was the school that taught that the laws of Moses allowed for divorce for just about any reason, large or very small. The Pharisees wanted to see if Jesus agreed with the most popular of their theology schools. And of course Jesus knew all this was what was going on in their minds. He did not beat around the bush with them but went on to state what would be the New Covenant teaching on this matter.

"Have you not read that He who made them from the beginning, made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

Jesus was telling them that the days of allowing divorce and remarriage for just any silly little reason was over. Under the New Covenant such conduct and allowances were now not to be permitted. He was not agreeing with their most popular school of theology, not for the New Testament age anyway.

They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" They were referring to Deuteronomy 24:1-2. And in their understanding of those verses people in Israel were allowed to divorce for all kinds of reasons, even trivial ones. Jesus did not argue with that interpretation and practice. He just stated what God's original intention for marriage was and that the days were over in allowing divorce for any and every reason.

Jesus answered their question about Moses this way, "For the HARDNESS of heart Moses ALLOWED you to divorce your wives, but from the BEGINNING it was not so."

It was because the heart of the Israelite people was mainly hardened and unconverted, not subject to the ways and laws of the Lord, certainly not to the spiritual intent of the law. And when it came to certain physical things like marriage, even having more than one wife (which is called polygamy), they were far from being in tune and in line with God's original intention for marriage, when He first made man and woman. For how God looked upon the heart of the Israelites see Deut. 5:29; and 29:4. God ALLOWED MANY things under the Old Covenant that was not ideal or as He would have wanted. Slavery was allowed, but that did not mean God approved of it or sanctioned it. He DID NOT, but because they were a carnal hard-hearted people, who would have practiced it, He

allowed it, but in allowing it He gave strict humane and compassionate laws to regulate it, as we see written in the laws of Moses.

From the BEGINNING of the creation of the world and man and woman upon it, God's intention for many things to do with human relations was far from what nations came to practice, far from what the heart of the Israelites was set upon to also practice, so He allowed things under the Old Testament, but many of those allowances were not going to be allowed under the New Testament.

Jesus went on to say, "And I say unto you; whoever divorces his wife, EXCEPT for unchastity (unfaithfulness, sexual misconduct), and marries another, commits adultery."

Jesus was tightening up the marriage bond between couples. No longer would it be permitted in God's eyes, to divorce and remarry for many of the little reasons it was allowed under the Old Covenant. Jesus DID ALLOW for one category of marriage misconduct, He allowed divorce for UNCHASTITY.....for any sexual sin one partner may commit against the other, such as adultery or any homosexual or lesbian sex act. The Greek word here used by Jesus, when we look how it is used throughout the New Testament, in many different passages, shows clearly that the word covers ALL improper acts of sex that God does not allow under His laws for sexual relations, which then include adultery and homosexuality and/or lesbianism (as well of course as "bestiality" or sex with an animal).

If one partner in a marriage union did commit such unlawful sex acts then Jesus and God, did allow for divorce and remarriage, if the offended party wants to take such action. The offended party could of course show mercy and forgiveness if the offending partner repented and turned away from their sexual sin. God did not say there HAD to be a divorce, only there could be grounds for divorce under that situation.

The disciples of Jesus you must remember were brought up in a society where the main Pharisee school of religion was practiced. They were accustomed to having divorce and remarriage on a very loose scale. On hearing these words from Jesus they could not believe it could be possible to live under a much tighter marriage bond, definitely not as tight as their Master was now proclaiming it would be, so as to be within the New Covenant laws of God. So they responded to the Lord this way: "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry!"

But He said to them, "Not all men can receive this precept you state, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs made by men, and there are eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it " (Matt. 19:3-12).

First of all, Jesus did not answer or debate with them over the matter of divorce and remarriage, you will notice. He had said what He had said, and it was to be that way under the New Covenant age, divorce for any silly reason was no longer allowed by God. Jesus aimed right in on the disciples saying that it might be better to NOT marry at all. He took the opportunity to talk about people not marrying. Despite the tightening up of the marriage bond for the New Testament age, most would still want to marry, and only the relatively few could accept the disciples thought about NOT marrying. It was

only the few, to whom it was given not to marry that would be able to live and never marry, or remain un-married if they lost a mate.

We need to understand what a "eunuch" is. A eunuch is someone (usually a man, or the word was commonly used for men) who has no sex drive, and no desire to have a marriage with a woman, because they have no desire for sex or to reproduce. Some people, because of things that go wrong from conception, never enter the life stage of sexuality, they never get any sex drive as we say, which usually starts around the age of 10-13 for the male.

Then some men back in Jesus day, had their testicles removed by other men, usually men in government power positions or kings. This made them lose any sexual drive, they had no interest in women for sexual relations. Often kings put such man made eunuchs in charge of their large concord of female dancers and sexy women (rulers and kings of carnal nations had many women just for sexual purposes only), because such men were not effected by the beauty and sexuality of women, hence had no desire to have sexual relations with them. Such eunuchs of men could have normal conversations with women, could rule and manage them, but had no desire to be sexual towards them.

Some persons (probably the apostle Paul was one of them, for he indicates in his writings that he was not married when doing the work of the Lord) have made themselves a eunuch, so to speak, for the work of the Kingdom of God. They have the power and self control to not be desirous for a sexual relationship with a woman in marriage.

Jesus makes it plain that this voluntary "non marriage" - "no sexual relationship" is not for the majority, but is only for the few, who have the power to refrain from sex and marriage, in order to put their whole life and energy into doing the work of the Kingdom of God.

An example would be that of John the Baptist. He remained un-married and a decided "eunuch" - no sexual relations with any woman, all his life, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, and the work he had been called to do. And of course the Lord Jesus was also a eunuch for the Kingdom of God's sake. Only a few men can so be, only a few are able to receive this, and Jesus said, let him who can receive it, receive it.

Jesus Blesses Little Children

And it was that they were bringing children to Him that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such ones belongs the Kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them.

What a great example we see here, and we will notice that children were not afraid to come to Jesus. He had a meek and mild manner with them. We might say He had a soft

and tender spot for children that made such young ones feel quite at ease in His presence and even in His arms (Mark 10:13-16).

The Way To Inherit The Kingdom

As Jesus was once more setting out on His journey towards Jerusalem, a certain very wealthy young ruler ran up to Jesus and kneeling before Him, asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone?" He was obviously wondering if this man knew that He, Jesus, was God in the flesh.

Continuing to answer his question, Jesus said, "You know the commandments, if you would enter or inherit eternal life, keep the commandments, 'Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not bear false witness, do not steal, honor your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "

The rich young man said to him, "All these I have done from my youth, what do I still lack in how I should live?" And Jesus looking upon him with love, said to him, "You lack one thing. If you would be perfect, go and sell what you possess and give it all to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and then come and follow me."

When the young rich ruler heard this he went away very sorrowfully because he had great possessions, and was physically very wealthy.

Jesus turned and looked at His disciples and said to them, "I tell you the truth, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. And 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."

The disciples were greatly astonished when they heard Him say these things. And they asked Him, "Who then can enter the Kingdom of God and be saved?"

"With men," Jesus replied, "it is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Yes, the natural tendency of the human heart is, if wealthy, to rely and covet, even putting faith in the material money and goods you have, and to not think you need God in your life. Or, as this young rich man found out, making your physical wealth something you cannot give up. Jesus loved this young man for observing the basic letter of the commandments of God from his youth, but He knew there was ONE weakness that he had that would keep him from entering the Kingdom of God. That weakness was that he could not give up his physical wealth, give it to the poor and needy and be a fully dedicated disciple of the Lord. His wealth had become his "god" and he did not realize it until Jesus put him to the test over it.

Sometimes God does put us to the test, not always, but sometimes, especially if we ask Him what we lack in order to inherit eternal life. He may very well tell us in no uncertain terms. Physical wealth is not wrong to have, for many of God's people down through the ages have been blessed with great material riches, such as Job, and Abraham, but their wealth never became their idol or "god" - they would readily have given it all up to be as

King David once said, "I'd rather be a door keeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of rich people."

We need to make sure that we can give up ANYTHING in this physical lifetime, IF God requires us to give it up.

It is very interesting and very instructive that you will notice Jesus did not tell this rich young man to sell all his possessions, give up all his money, and give it to the "church" or in Jesus' day, to the Temple and to the priests. He told him to give it to "the poor." We can also gather from this that Jesus knows and believes that there are "genuine" poor people who need help in a material way. Yes, there are what we term "bums" who are lazy people, who will try to live off their society, as if society owes them a free living. But Jesus and God also know there are people that circumstances of life often deal them the wrong hand, and they are in a poor situation because of it.

Jesus knew there were genuinely poor people that were worthy of a helping hand. He gave this young rich man the wonderful opportunity to serve and help such people, and then also be one of His chosen disciples.

Peter, hearing what Jesus had told the young ruler, and knowing he and the others had given up much to be a disciple, said to Jesus, "Master, we have left EVERYTHING to follow you. What then shall we receive in the Kingdom?"

Jesus answered, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. As for you twelve in particular, in the new age, when the Son of man shall sit on His glorious throne, you shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Many that are first will be last, and the last shall be first" (Matt. 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30).

When we become a disciple of the Lord Jesus, we may have to give up many friends and relatives who do not understand why we have become a Christian, they do not like that we have become a Christian, they may want nothing to do with us any more, especially when we really serve the Lord in all aspect of our lives. But we immediately become a member of the body of Christ and we are part of a large and loving family, with spiritual brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers all over the world. We have in this lifetime, great blessings from being a part of God's family. And in the world to come, we shall inherit eternal life in the glorious immortal Kingdom of God.

Many who have put themselves first in this lifetime, putting wealth, ambition, fame, family, jobs, etc. shall be last to have their minds opened and to receive a chance to have their names written into the book of life. Many of those first will have to wait until the white throne judgment day resurrection, at the end of the commonly called "millennium" (Rev. 20) or 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth, before they can receive and have the book of life opened to them.

Those who have put themselves last, been willing to give up anything and everything, in order to be part of God's family here and now, shall receive and be the first to gain and inherit eternal life, when Jesus returns to reign on earth and to establish the Kingdom of God over all nations.

Looking beyond the present, into what can be, by being in the first resurrection, the glory and splendor and rewards for that age to come and for ever more, makes giving up whatever we have to give up in this lifetime, well worth the sacrifice.

Understand Your Calling And Payment

Jesus taught them saying, "For the Kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for \$100 a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place; and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard also, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And then about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into my vineyard too.' And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' And when those who were hired about the eleventh hour came they received \$100.

"Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received \$100. And on receiving it they grumbled and complained at the householder, saying, 'These last worked only one hour and you have paid them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for \$100. Take what belongs to you, and go your way; I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' So the last will be first, and the first last" (Matt. 20:1-16).

And the first thing we need to note is the overall general meaning of this parable. God will call people to work for His Kingdom as and when He wants to. And no matter how long or short you work till the end of the day for you comes, all will get ONE thing in common. It is not the reward for our works that the New Testament talks about elsewhere, such as the twelve apostles each ruling over one tribe of Israel, as Jesus promised them, but the one thing each laborer for the Kingdom will receive that will be equal and common to all, is ETERNAL LIFE.

You may have been called to the Kingdom when young, say a teenager, and labored in it for decades, if you live a long life. On the other hand maybe God did not call you to labor in the Kingdom until you were elderly, in your sixties or seventies, or older, and so you labored not that long before you died. Whether you labor for a long or short time in this life for the Kingdom of God, all will receive eternal life. Such laboring and living for the Kingdom is God's choosing, it is all in His hands, to do with what is His to do with.

The book of Revelation in chapter 7 (just as the great day of God's wrath is to come upon this world, at the end of this age) shows that many will be called and converted very near the time of the coming of Christ in glory. They will be in the Kingdom with eternal life, though they may have only labored for a relatively short time (compared to others) for the Kingdom.

I will here talk a little about being CALLED and being CHOSEN. Jesus elsewhere did say that MANY are CALLED but FEW are CHOSEN.

There is obviously a DIFFERENCE. A calling from God is when you are given knowledge of certain truths, be it directly from God as you read His word, or by other people who are part of your life. It could be relatives, friends, your parents and so forth, so present to you certain truths of God's word or way of life. God has then allowed you to have a calling...BUT, a small word, with BIG meaning, it is still UP TO YOU to then take those truths in the calling you have been given and LIVE them, "run with them" we might say. You have YOUR part to do, that calling to knowledge of truths, you must make a choice to WANT to FOLLOW and have Jesus as your PERSONAL Savior, and desire to love God with all your heart, mind, and life. Then if you DO THAT you can become a part of God's CHOSEN ones, who desire to attain eternal life.

Many people HEAR the word of God, preached or spoken, in various ways in their life. Many people DO NOT come close to hearing the Bible, or the basic truths of God's word being taught and expounded. The latter people never even have a CALLING to read or hear the word of the Lord. Many of those that DO hear God's word, do not WANT or DESIRE to do anything with it - they have a calling to hear truth and see truth lived by others, but they go no further with it. Such have not become part of the CHOSEN.

Going ON from "calling to hear God's word" becomes the key issue. Just hearing it does not make you a child of God, or someone filled with His Spirit. You must GO ON forward from "a calling" to being a CHOSEN one, and that step YOU have a large part in, for you are a free moral agent. God does not FORCE anyone to go on to being a chosen member of His family. You personally must make the choice to serve Him.

Many children of parents are only in a "calling" situation. Those children or teens may not have taken Jesus as personal savior or taken any of their parents "faith" in any serious way for themselves. It does NOT mean those young people are automatically lost or heading for eternal death. I say this because MANY Jews had a knowledge of God, had His word in their lives in one form or another, but the apostle Paul makes it very clear that MOST of Israel, though "hearing" God's word, were still BLINDED (see Romans 10:17 to end of chapter 11). Most in Israel had a "calling" but were not part of the "chosen" and were not automatically LOST!

God has a great plan He is working out and spiritual blindness is not automatically removed just because you have a calling. That truth is made very clear by Paul in Romans 11.

Calling in this context is NOT the same as "chosen" for as Jesus said, many are called but few are CHOSEN.

I also want you to note another important teaching, that will be important to understand and remember when we come to the events of the day upon which Christ died. Jesus talked about certain hours of the day. The third hour was about our 9 a.m. the sixth hour about noon and the eleventh hour was about the hour we call 5 p.m. There were twelve hours in the day time part of the day and twelve hours in the night portion as the Jews split up the 24 hour day. The vineyard owner called his steward WHEN EVENING came.

Evening did not come until the twelfth hour was finished, which would then correspond to our 6 p.m. At 6 p.m. and not before, it was evening time. Then indeed the long heat of the day was over with. But, the main thing to remember, and a study in the word "evening" as used and as defined and interpreted by the New Testament itself, is that evening is not before 6 p.m. Anytime AFTER 6 p.m. it could be called evening, but evening did not come until the twelve hours of the day had been completed.

Jesus Foretells His Death The Third Time

And they were walking on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were somewhat amazed at His lonely solitude among them, even to the point of being afraid, but not really knowing why. And He took the twelve to one side and began to tell them for the third time what would happen to Him, saying, "Behold, we are on the way up to Jerusalem; and when we get there, the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Roman gentiles; and they will mock Him, and spit upon Him, and scourge Him, and then kill Him; and after three days He will rise from the dead and live again" (Mark 10:32-34).

Luke in his gospel account adds that the twelve still did not understand all this that Jesus said to them. It was not yet revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. They could not imagine that such things could happen to the very Son of God. And they, like many of that day, did not understand all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the first coming of the Messiah to the earth and all that was written would need to be fulfilled.

The journey to Jerusalem was near completed, and we are close to the last few weeks in the physical life of Jesus.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The Raising Of Lazarus

Sitting On Jesus' Right And Left Hand in the Kingdom of God?

As they went on their way towards Jerusalem, the mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John) came before Jesus and kneeling asked Him for something. "What do you want?" Jesus responded to her, and she said, "Teacher, we want you to do whatsoever we ask of you."

"Well, then what is it that you want me to do?" Jesus again replied.

The mother of James and John then finally came out with what she and her sons wanted, "Grant Lord that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand, in the Kingdom."

"Oh, you do not know what you are asking for," answered Jesus. "Can you drink of the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

And they said to Him, "Yes Lord, we are able!"

Jesus then responded with, "Indeed, you will drink of the cup that I drink from, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit, one at my right hand, and one at my left hand, is not mine to grant; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared for by my Father."

The disciples would indeed partake of the life of Jesus, they would drink what He was living. Drink and eat the physical life as a servant of God. And they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (as we'll see when we come to the first chapters of the book of Acts) as Christ was and do many of the same works that He did through the power of the Holy Spirit. They would partake of Christ in a very real and personal way, including martyrdom according to first century historical records, but what these two disciples wanted (and their mother also) was not Jesus' to grant.

And when the ten other disciples heard all this they were very indignant towards James and John.

And Jesus called them all to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over the people, and their leaders and kings and great men, exercise dictatorial authority over them. But it shall NOT be so among you! Whoever would be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of man came and set you the example. He came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45).

Here we see that there will be "positions" in the Kingdom when Jesus returns to establish it upon the earth. We also see that the Father in heaven has reserved for Himself certain positions of authority that only He will decide who will receive them. We know from other Scriptures of the Old Testament that king David of ancient Israel will rise in the resurrection and be king over the restored 12 tribes of Israel. We have seen that Jesus did have authority to promise to the twelve disciples that they would each rule over a tribe of Israel. But, who is going to sit at Jesus' right hand and left hand, was not for Jesus to say or to give away those positions. Only the Father would determine who would be given those seats of authority in the Kingdom.

When we think of all the great people of God down through the millenniums of time, is it any wonder then that only the Father could determine who shall receive those two positions of sitting on the right and left hand of Jesus in the Kingdom on earth.

We also note here a VERY IMPORTANT teaching of Christ. Whoever was, or whoever desired to be, the greatest among God's people at any particular time in history, had to become, MUST become, the servant of all, the slave to all the rest of the people of God. They had to become like Christ Himself, who came not to be vain and pompous and mentally and emotionally smug over all people, but came to give Himself in service and loving sacrifice to all people. Just think how many hours Jesus spent in a week and in His entire ministry in giving and to serving others. Think about the love and compassion He gave out towards others. Think about all the time He spent in teaching others and His disciples, to know the truths of God, and to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

So it must be, so must those who would be "great" among the people of God do as Jesus did.....serve and sacrifice for and towards God's people. That is the mark of greatness according to Christ. Greatness is NOT exercising dictatorial authority over people, bossing them around, and telling them what to do and when to do it.

Greatness is being kind, patient, loving, helping, serving, and teaching God's word with all of those attributes, as a person moves among the children of God.

Blind Bartimaeus Is Healed

Jesus and the disciples had arrived at Jericho. As they were leaving a great crowd was following them as usual. On the roadside they came across two blind men, sitting and begging. Now, Matthew's account says there were two blind men. The accounts of Mark and Luke only mention one man, someone who it seems was well known for whatever reasons, as his name is given as Bartimaeus - "blind Bartimaeus" in the popular speech of the day.

Possibly Mark and Luke only record this healing as if one man was involved, because Bartimaeus was the spokesman for the two men, and because he was the most famous of the two.

Bartimaeus was known as the son of Timaeus, who then was probably a man very well known in the community. When Jesus came close Bartimaeus called out, "Jesus, son of

David, have mercy on me and on us." Many started to rebuke him and told him to be silent. But he cried out even the more, "Son of David, Lord have mercy on us."

Jesus stopped walking, stood and said, "Call the blind man over to me." And they did call him over saying, "Take heart blind man, He is calling for you to come to Him." Throwing off his coat Bartimaeus sprang to his feet like someone being chased by a lion, and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do?"

"Oh, Master, let our eyes be opened so we can have sight." And Jesus, looking with kind compassion at him, touched their eyes and said, "Go your way; your faith has made you well."

Their sight was restored immediately, but they did not run off to their separate homes, they instead followed Jesus, glorifying God. And when all the people saw what had happened they also praised and gave glory to God. (Matt. 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43).

Zacchaeus A Tax Collector Is Converted

Jesus was still not far out of Jericho, just on the edge of the town limits. And there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector, and through craftiness he had become very rich. He wanted to see Jesus but he could not as he was a short man in stature and could not see over the heads and shoulders of the crowd. He was not going to give up that easy though. He decided he would run on ahead and climb up a sycamore tree to see Jesus.

When Jesus arrive at the sycamore tree that Zacchaeus had climbed, He looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly; for I must stay at your house today and for the night."

You can imagine how quickly Zacchaeus came down. He was thrilled that Jesus would be staying in his house. He would get to see Him up close for some number of hours. His heart beat like a race horse ready to run a race. He was overjoyed at what Jesus had told him.

But, some in the crowd, who hated people who collected taxes for the Roman Government, murmured with some indignation at what Jesus was going to do. "Why," they said, "he is going to be a guest of a man who is a sinner, this is terrible!"

When they all arrived at the house of Zacchaeus, he said to Jesus, "Behold Lord, the half of my goods I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I will restore it to them even four times as much."

Jesus smiled with a happy heart and said, "Today salvation indeed has come to this house, since this man is also a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:1-10).

Yes, what often seems hopeless to mankind, is what God can turn around and makes salvation from. Zacchaeus thought he would only see Jesus from up a tree and nothing

else would happen. Many within the crowd thought Jesus was doing wrong by befriending a despised tax collector. Everyone was wrong. God the Father and Jesus His Son were about to convert and bring a man to salvation. Nothing is impossible with God.

Some times in being converted, it is right and proper to make restitution to some people we may have wronged, if it is within our power to do so. We must realize that it is not always within our power to restore, for some people may have moved away and we have no possible means whereby we can locate them. God does not expect that we can right every wrong we may have done to people over our lifetime, but in some situations it may be possible, and if so, then we should make an effort to give restitution. And the example here given for us, which Jesus did not disagree with, was that, restitution would be far above the amount fraudulently taken. The example here also is that if you are very rich, you will, when converted to follow Christ Jesus, give a great part of your wealth to the poor. We will note "poor" is the first priority, the "church" would be second, although there are indeed many "poor" within the community of the church, which would be grateful for a helping hand.

Parable Of The Pounds

As they heard these things He proceeded to tell a parable, because He was getting near to Jerusalem, and they supposed that the Kingdom of God was to appear immediately. So He taught them saying, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive kingly power and then to return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them 50 dollars, and said to them, 'Trade with this money till I come again.' But his own citizens hated him and sent an embassy of men after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'

"When he returned, having received kingly power and authority, he commanded the servants to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading.

"And the first came to him and said, 'Lord, your 50 dollars has gain 50 dollars more.' And he said, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. Because you have been faithful in very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your 50 dollars has gained 25 more dollars.' And the king said to him, 'You shall have authority over 5 cities.'

"Then another came and said, 'Lord, here is your 50 dollars, which I looked after and kept safe in a steel box at home. For I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow.' The king replied to him, 'I will condemn you out of your own mouth you wicked servant! You knew I was a severe man, taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping where I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money into the bank at least, and at my coming, I should have collected it with some interest?'

"And he said to those who stood nearby watching and hearing all this, 'Take the 50 dollars from him, and give it to him who gained the 50 dollars more.' And they said to him, 'Lord, he already gained 50 dollars!' The king answered, 'I tell you, that every one

who has will be given more; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And as for those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me.'

“And when Jesus had said all this, He went on His way, heading for the city of Jerusalem” (Luke 19:11-28).

This parable teaches us a number of things. It was a parable Jesus gave to tell His disciples that the Kingdom of God was not going to appear as soon as they perhaps thought. They looked for it to come while Jesus was still on earth, and to come in the very near future of their lifetime. Jesus was here dispelling such an idea, yet still not giving any specifics as to when in time, the Kingdom would come. Hence of course many disciples would still have thought, even after Jesus had ascended back to heaven, that the Kingdom would come in the lifetime of many of the first century disciples.

This is also a parable that shows all disciples get the same gift to work with. The only gift that is equal among disciples of Jesus is the gift of the Holy Spirit through which God will give us ETERNAL LIFE! Upon repentance and conversion everyone is given this same equal gift. But from then on God expects us to use it, to go on from there with that gift and work in different ways with it, to increase yourself spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and also to use whatever else God has given us in ways of physical gifts and talents, to increase what He had first given us. If we do increase, we shall be rewarded with positions of authority in the Kingdom of God. How much we increase will determine how much authority we are given in the Kingdom.

But, if we think we can stand still, only keep what is first given to us at conversion, if we think we do not have to move at least a little more forward in spiritual growth, we are one day going to have a rude awakening. If we think we can wrap up God's gift of eternal life in a little box and simply keep it safe and not use it after we are given it, then even that which we think we have safely preserved, will be taken away from us. We shall be on the outside looking in as they say. We shall find ourselves as one of those who in earlier parables that Jesus gave, are crying and gnashing their teeth, saying, "Lord, did we not worship you, did we not go to church, did we not have you in our home, and sitting at our table at meal times?" And Jesus will say, "Depart from me, for I never knew you...."

Yes, as I've said before, some of the teachings of Jesus, cut right to the bone, and they are often not what most teachers of Christian theology want to tell you. They are often the parts of the Gospels that are neglected and/or completely ignored by far too many who claim to be reading the Bible. We need to be willing to read the Bible from cover to cover, and let it teach and correct us, inspire and admonish us, encourage and lift us up, but also let it warn us.

And speaking of warning, there is in this parable also a clear warning signal Jesus was wanting to get across. Those who will not let Jesus "reign" over them, rule them, tell them how to live, allow Him to direct their lives in the godly way they should go, shall be one day slain before His presence. This ultimate slaying of the unruly wicked will come just before the arrival of the new heavens and new earth (see the last verses of

Revelation 20), when all the wicked will die in the lake of fire, which the New Testament calls "the second death."

We must not only accept Jesus as our personal SAVIOR, but also as our LORD and MASTER. We must let Him reign and rule in our lives, letting Him and His word guide, teach, and lead us into the way of thinking, speaking, and doing, that which is pleasing to Him and to the Father in heaven.

Lazarus Is Raised From The Dead And Death Is Sleep

This next section of Scripture is very important in two respects. It teaches the "resurrection from the dead" and it teaches "death is a sleep."

It came to pass as Jesus and His disciples were going on their journey up to Jerusalem, that a certain man named Lazarus became ill. He was the brother to two sisters named Mary and Martha. Now, it is John in his Gospel account, that tells us that this Mary was none other than the woman who anointed Jesus feet with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair. We read all about that situation in an earlier chapter.

The two sisters sent to Jesus a message saying, "Lord, he whom you love is very ill." They expected Jesus to immediately come and heal their brother.

Jesus on hearing this news said, "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be praised and glorified by means of it." Jesus of course knew what was going to happen and what significance it would portend for all who would witness the event and the outcome.

Jesus, did love all three of those people, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. He heard the news about the illness of Lazarus, but did not immediately start off to go to heal him. Probably to the bewilderment of His disciples He stayed two days longer where they were at, after hearing the news concerning Lazarus. Then perhaps they were not surprised He did not go immediately to Lazarus, for they knew He was in danger if He stepped into Judea, as Lazarus lived in Bethany which was inside the area known as Judea. We gather this from some of the words they said which we shall come to shortly. Yet, as they knew Jesus was heading for Jerusalem in Judea anyway, it seems they were somewhat very confused about the whole situation of Jesus wanting to go up to Jerusalem. You must remember that even when Jesus told them about His being handed over to the religious authorities and finally being put to death, but rising from the dead, at Jerusalem, they did not understand it at all. So indeed they were probably very confused about everything that was going on in Jesus' life at that present time.

Well, two days after getting the news about Lazarus, He said to His disciples, "Let us go into Judea again."

"Why, Master, the Jews there were recently seeking to stone you, and are you really wanting to go there again?" said His disciples.

"Are there not twelve hours in a day?" replied Jesus, "If any man walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if any person walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

Jesus was telling them that while He was still alive and walking, there was work for Him to do, so others could come to see the light of God's truth and salvation. It was also a mild rebuke that they could not yet see the light of day, they were still in the blindness of the night.

Then He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has FALLEN ASLEEP. But I go to awake him out of sleep."

"Well Lord, " the disciples replied, "if he has fallen asleep, he will rest and recover."

The truth is Jesus was speaking about his death, but they thought He was meaning Lazarus had taken a rest in sleep, as we do at night time, or at other times when we are tired and sometimes taking a "cat nap."

Then Jesus said plainly to them, "What I am saying to you is that Lazarus is DEAD! And for your sakes I'm glad I was not there, so that you may believe even the more. Let us go to him."

At least Thomas, called the Twin, was beginning to see what it was all going to end with, it was beginning to sink into the mind of Thomas at least, that Jesus would now probably die in some fashion in Judea. He said to the other disciples, "Come on then, let us go also into Judea with Him, and let us die there with Him also."

Jesus arrived at Bethany to find that Lazarus had been dead in the tomb or grave for FOUR DAYS. Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away. Many Jews from Jerusalem and the area had come to console Mary and Martha concerning the death of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming she ran to meet Him, while Mary sat in their house.

On meeting Jesus Martha said to Him, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. Yet, even now I know that whatsoever you ask from the Father, God will give it to you."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again!"

"Oh, yes Lord," replied Martha, "I know my brother will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

"You know, do you not Martha," answered Jesus, "that I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and he who believes and lives in me, shall not die forever. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one promised to come into the world."

After this conversation Martha went quietly to her sister Mary, telling her that Jesus was asking to see her. And when Mary heard this she rose up quickly and went to Him. The

Jews in the house followed Mary thinking she was going to weep some more at Lazarus' grave site.

Mary came to where Jesus was and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died."

Jesus saw Mary and the Jews with her weeping in great anguish, and He was deeply moved in spirit, and said to them, "Where have you laid him?" And they answered, "Lord, come with us and see."

As Jesus was going with them to the grave where Lazarus was laid to rest, we have the shortest verse in the Bible, but one that shows us that there are times when it is right and proper for MEN as well as women to literally cry, for John records for us these words, "Jesus WEPT."

And some the Jews there said among themselves, "Ah, do you see how he loved this man."

But others said, "Why, if he loved him so, this man who could open the eyes of the blind, surely could he not have stopped Lazarus from dying?"

Then Jesus was deeply moved once more on hearing all this talk among the people. He came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a great huge stone lay upon it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, being surprised at what Jesus was now telling them to do, said, "Lord, there will be a terrible smell, for Lazarus has been dead four days now." Jesus responded with, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up His eyes towards heaven and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you hear me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that you did indeed send me." And after saying this, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, COME ON OUT!"

There was a shock that went through the minds of all standing there, they froze in their stand, many mouths dropped open, eyes were glued on the entrance to the cave. Could this man really raise someone from the dead after they had been dead four days, was the question that was now on everyone's mind. There was hushed silence as all were steadfastly looking to see if Lazarus would walk out of the cave....more seconds went by....THEN, to the amazement of every person there, Lazarus CAME OUT! He was once more alive. People were again frozen in their minds and speech for a few seconds at what they were seeing, then gasps of surprise filled the air, some fell to the ground on their knees, praising God, others looked at one another in astonishment, as they realized the power this man called Jesus had, even power over death.

Lazarus was bound with bandages over the hands and feet, in the manner that the Jews buried their dead. It was not at all like a large piece of cloth put over a body, but wound around bandages that were used over parts of the body like the hands and the legs and feet, even the face and head. Lazarus could not unwrap himself, so Jesus told them to unwrap the bandages and let him go free.

What joy and praising God there was that day, when Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave after his body had started to decompose after being dead four days.

Here, as I've said, is one of the great Bible passages, that tells us plainly that death is a SLEEP. We do NOT continue to live after death in some heaven, hell, or purgatory, with an immortal soul we are born with. Death is a sleep, from which the dead are waiting until the resurrection day, to be raised back to life once again. Lazarus was raised back to life as a physical person, to live and eat and breath again, as he did before. Lazarus later died once more, as we all do eventually, and is again sleeping till the resurrection day. The resurrection that Martha knew about, and told Jesus she knew her brother would rise in a resurrection at the last day, is what the Bible calls the "first resurrection" (Rev. 20), and this is the resurrection that all saints and children of God will rise up in. It is the resurrection day, at the coming of Christ in glory, as I've mentioned and given Scriptures for, in previous chapters of this New Testament Bible Story.

Jesus Is Condemned By The Jewish Council

Many Jews had come from various parts of the region to Mary and Martha's home and had witnessed this great miracle Jesus had done in resurrecting Lazarus from the dead after four days of laying in the tomb. And many of those Jews believed in Jesus as the Messiah to come, that was foretold in the pages of the Old Testament prophets. But other Jews still not ready to accept Jesus, went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together the council or Sanhedrin (the body of men who ruled on certain aspects of the Jewish religious life), and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him continue doing this, soon everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation."

They thought that if the people all believed in Jesus, they would want Him to be their king and leader in a revolution against the Roman yoke of servitude, and so bring onto the Jewish nation the full armies of Rome, in a battle that could only mean utter destruction for the Jews. This was of course wrong thinking, as Jesus would never have been a part of such a revolution and would never have allowed the Jews to try to use Him in such a revolution against Rome.

Then a man named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You speak about things you know nothing at all about. You do not understand that it is often best and expedient that ONE MAN should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Now, he did not say this of his own mind, but being high priest that year he actually was prophesying that Jesus should die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but to gather into one family the children of God who are scattered abroad in all nations.

So from that day forward they took counsel and sat around figuring out how to put Jesus to death.

Jesus knowing and hearing what the Jewish Sanhedrin was trying to plan, no longer went about among the people in an open manner, but went from there to the country near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim; and there He stayed with His disciples.

Now the Passover of the Jews, the feast that God gave to the people of Israel under Moses, was soon to be observed, and many went up from the country-side to Jerusalem before the Passover began in that city, to work through the purification rites, and so ceremonially purify themselves as directed under the laws of Moses.

They were looking for Jesus as they stood around in the Temple courtyards, knowing it was Jesus' custom to attend the Passover in the city of Jerusalem. Many were saying among themselves, "Well, what do you think? Will he or will he not come this year to the feast?"

The chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if any one knew where He was, he should let them know, so they might arrest Him" (John 11:45-57).

The air was tense with excitement and various emotions, in anticipation that Jesus would come to observe the Passover in Jerusalem as usual. Most at this time were for Him, that is they were on His side, as we say. They knew He was a mighty miracle worker, more and more were believing He was the promised Messiah. Yet, they did not understand why He had come to earth this first time. They did not understand the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning His first appearing on earth, even Jesus' disciples did not understand them, and most thought that being the Messiah He would deliver them from the Roman Empire, make the Jewish nation great and mighty, and so eventually the leading nation on the earth.

The people were hoping that this is what Jesus would now begin to do....lead the Jewish nation out from under the Roman yoke, and give them world dominance. The people were ready for such a leader, to lead and deliver them from their enemies. The emotional excitement in their hearts and minds was so high and so thick for everyone to see, that as we say, you could "cut the air" with a knife, and hand portions of excitement around to all entering the Temple and even setting foot into the city of Jerusalem.

Would Jesus come was the big question on all minds. If He would they would surely be ready to greet Him in a mighty and glorious way. They would not have long to wait for their answer to their question.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Jesus' Triumphant Entry Into Jerusalem

Reading the accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we can come to a complete understanding of the events which transpired as Jesus came near unto Jerusalem.

Arriving at the mount called Olivet (where the great event of Christ's glorious coming is to take place that is recorded in the 14th chapter of Zechariah), which is near Bethphage and Bethany, He sent two of His disciples to a village close by, saying to them, "Go into the village, and immediately as you enter it you will find an ass tied up, with a colt with her, on which no man has ever sat; untie them and bring them to me. If any one says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say to them, 'The Lord has need of them, and will send them back immediately when their work is done.' And they will let them go with you."

An "ass" is from the horse family, often what we call a donkey. A "colt" is a young male offspring of the horse family, in this instance, a young male from the female donkey. The young colt was still with its mother, hence Matthew records the ass was "with her" and she was tied up, the colt was "with her" and did not need to be tied as the young colt would not leave its mother's side. Such it is in nature with a mother and her young ones. The colt was not as they say in the horse world, "broken" - no man had ever sat upon it, yet it would have been old enough to withstand the weight of the average size Jewish man.

Jesus would perform a small miracle here. He was going to sit upon a young donkey that had never before had any training with men, to carry a person with calm and quietness. It is often missed (because only Matthew records it) by artists depicting this scene, that there was two donkeys.....the young one Jesus sat upon, but the mother was along side her colt, in order to bring no distress upon the colt, as would have been the case if its mother was not there.

Now, some would argue that Jesus could have performed two miracles, the second being "no distress" for the colt if it had been taken away from its mother. That maybe true, but it is not a case of what Jesus could have done, it is a case of what Jesus CHOSE to do. He chose to show everyone His compassion for BOTH the mother donkey and for her young offspring. He would not divide them up and perform a special miracle of "peace" for both of them when divided up, but would simply take both of them, keep them together, and perform a small miracle on the colt, giving it complete composure of mind and body, as Jesus sat upon it and as He would make His way into the city of Jerusalem.

As a young man I worked for a while breaking and training horses. Young colts or fillies (female offspring) of horses that are used for saddle riding (horse trails etc), will grow up around humans, and will of course have no fear of them, and if handled with kindness become like dogs in nature towards humans. But yet the day comes when they have to be "broken" to the saddle and for humans to ride.

Now, in my experience, such friendly colts and fillies, hardly ever "bucked" or went wild (as did horses we were breaking that had never been around humans before - they would be scared crazy and often buck like the bulls you see being ridden in the Rodeo). They just most often stood there and acted plain "dumb" - not knowing of course what to do, where to go, and not knowing how to react to commands you gave it, either by the voice or by the heels of your boots or by any tug on the bit. Naturally, all this stuff that the human was now doing was very new. They were not frightened of the human but just did not know what this human now wanted it to do.

So to help train the young colt or filly, we would have its mother right alongside, and it would follow her just fine. After a while the colt or filly would get to know what "stop" or "go" (with a little heel kick) meant, and its training would progress from there. It would take some time before its training would be finished and complete, so to make a good saddle horse for any person to ride on trail rides, by itself or with other horses other than next to its mother.

Jesus, chose to keep the colt with its mother, but performed a miracle of sorts by having the colt know exactly what was expected of it. I'm sure many people knew the situation of the mother and her colt (that no man had ever sat on the colt) and knew Jesus was doing something with both of them (especially the colt) that was quite different than the normal expectation of an untrained young donkey.

Sure enough when the two disciples got to where the colt and its mother were and started to untie the mother, some people seeing what they were doing and knowing they were not the owners of the animals, asked them why they were taking them. They responded with the words Jesus had told them to say, and the people said no more and let them go away with the two donkeys. Those persons concerned by what they saw the two disciples doing must have known who the "Lord" was, when told that "The Lord has need of them." Jesus was indeed "Lord" to many by this time.

Jesus coming into Jerusalem on a colt was to fulfil the prophecy in the Old Testament prophets of Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9. The Gospel of Luke quotes it this way: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold thy king is coming, sitting upon an ass's colt!"

The disciples did not understand all this at first, but later, after Jesus had been glorified, then they remembered what had been written and why Jesus had sat upon a colt to enter Jerusalem.

There was by this time a massive crowd of people gathered around Jesus, behind Him, and in front of Him. More and more were hearing that Jesus was making His way to Jerusalem, and so were gathering along the roadway. Many threw their coats on the roadway to make the footing softer for the colt. Many took leafy branches which they had cut from the fields and trees and placed them on the road that the colt, with Jesus on its back, was travelling.

All the people were worked up into great excitement. This was the day most of them had been waiting for, surely Jesus was about to deliver them from the yoke of the Roman government. This is what most of them were thinking and quite sure in their hearts that it would be so - Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, God's chosen one, God's

promised one, the mighty MIRACLE worker, the one who could raise people from the dead, would now lead them to victory over their enemies, and bring in the glorious Kingdom, where the Jewish people, and all the tribes of Israel, would be the MASTERS of the world. Many had gathered because they had heard about the mighty miracle Jesus had done in raising Lazarus from the dead.

The people were so sure that Jesus was about to lead them to victory over their enemies they all began to shout with uplifted voices, "HOSANNA! HOSANNA! Blessed be HE who comes in the name of the LORD! Blessed be the KINGDOM of our father David that is coming. HOSANNA to the Highest!"

The Hebrew word "Hosanna" when broken down into its meaning is very revealing, and gives the true understanding of what the people were shouting loud and long. "Hosan" means "save, help" and "na" means "please." The people were crying out, "PLEASE SAVE AND HELP US!"

Putting it in our English words, the multitude was saying, "He who is coming in the name of the Lord, Please help and SAVE us. Please save us from the Romans, deliver us, set up the Kingdom of David. Save us in the presence, in the sight of (the Greek "en" translated "in" can mean "before, in presence, in sight") the Highest.

The people wanted, now expected, that Jesus would save and deliver them from the Roman yoke, and set up the glorious Kingdom of God, a kingdom they thought would be like that kingdom in the days of their ancient great king David.

How they wanted to be delivered, set free from under the heavy yoke of what they considered a great evil. They could understand, they could see what the prophets had written, that the Messiah would come and deliver Israel from the yoke of its enemies, when the Messiah would come with the power of the Most High, to rule the world, and make Israel a prosperous and fruitful nation, that all other nations would look up to, and want to be like. But they were reading the Old Testament with one eye shut. They could not see that first of all the Messiah would come to save people, and that included people from within Israel, from their sins, from Satan, from themselves, and give salvation to the world.

They were going to be soon very disappointed with Jesus, and deflated in their expectations of what He was going to do for them. So disappointed they would be, that few would have ever expected at that time, that the coming events would have them turn their back on Jesus in a most drastic way....the most drastic way possible to turn your back on someone you once praised and glorified.

Then among all this praise for Jesus there were the ever present Pharisees, who once more wanted to throw buckets of water on the excited fire of enthusiasm being shown to this man riding on the back of a humble colt.

"Teacher, rebuke your disciples for making all this fuss over you," shouted some Pharisees.

"I tell you," replied Jesus, "if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

He drew near unto the city of Jerusalem, and when it all came into His view, Luke in his Gospel account records that "He wept over it." Once more we see the down to earth emotional side of Jesus. He knew what trouble and pain and devastation the people of that city were in for, if they did not all fully repent, and turn to their God in humble service. Jesus said, "I would that you knew what were the things that would make for peace in your lives! But, they are hid from your eyes, you refuse to see. The days shall come upon you when your enemies will cast a wall of armies around you, and hem you in on all sides. Then they shall dash you to the ground, you and your children within you. They shall not leave one stone upon another, utter destruction shall come upon you; because you did not know nor want to understand your time of visitation and punishment" (Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19, 29-44).

Jesus knew the vast majority in that city of Jerusalem would never come to true repentance. Though many in the days ahead would come to accept Him as Savior, acknowledge their sins, and find the true way to salvation (all of that after His resurrection and ascension back to heaven, as we shall see in the book of Acts), for the most part the majority of people and religious leaders would reject Jesus, and would not abandon their false ways of living, and their wrong thoughts towards the Roman powers. Hence in 70 A.D. the city of Jerusalem would be brought to the ground by the Roman armies, and its inhabitants (including children) slain by the sword.

Jesus foreknew this would all happen, and so with deep emotion, He cried tears of sorrow, as the city of Jerusalem came into His view. He knew He must die there, but He also knew the punishment to come upon that city, because its people would not turn from their sins, and look to seek the way of peace for themselves individually, as well as for their city as a whole.

Unfruitful Fig Tree Is Cursed, And Dies

On the following day, returning from Bethany, where Jesus and the twelve had spent the night, they were coming back to Jerusalem again, and Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree by the wayside in the distance, and walking up to it He discovered it had only leaves on its branches and no figs. "May no fruit ever come from you again," Jesus said to the tree. And the disciples heard what He said.

The next morning as they passed along the same way, they saw the fig tree was all withered away right down to its very roots. And Peter remembered, said to Jesus, "Master, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered away."

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered, and went on to say, "Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he has said will come to pass, it will indeed be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believing that you will receive it, you will receive. And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespass" (Mark 11:12-14, 20-25).

We need to understand that Jesus did not go around cursing this or that thing at random, or just to over use, or abuse, the power that He had. He did not take the mighty power from the Holy Spirit given Him, and use it like a play toy. He did not go about cursing things just for the fun of it.

A fig tree is one of the fruit trees that is very different from most fruit trees. The actual fruit, the fig, comes on the branches BEFORE the leaves come. So, when seeing a fig tree from a distance, and noting it has leaves on its branches, you would automatically gather it also had fruit on its branches. This is what Jesus expected when He finally got up close to the tree, but as we have seen, there was no fruit, or figs, on the tree at all. It was really a useless, unproductive, fruit tree that was not doing what it was designed to do. It was taking up space and nourishment from the soil, and giving nothing back, certainly not giving back what it should have been giving back.

We must take this as a lesson to learn from. God does not want people, all of which have some gifts, talents, and abilities, to just take up space so to speak, drink in and use up what they can from society and from others, and never give back to others, something that can enrich and help others in some manner. Everyone has something they can contribute to someone else, be it a smile, a word of encouragement, some form of a helping hand (i.e. opening the door for someone who has their hands full of parcels, or helping an old lady cross a busy street), giving of your time, energy, talents, to a charitable cause etc.

If we do not produce something that gives back to others, then we are fit for nothing, fit only to lose everything. And that is exactly what will happen to us, if we do not repent of living a useless, non-productive, non-giving life....we shall be rooted up, plucked up by the roots, we shall wither away and simply be no more. God cannot use in His family someone who is none productive for what they were created to be and to do in service for humanity. A Christian's life, the life of a child of God the Father, is to produce and serve, to give back to others, what God has given to you, and God does give something to every person so each can give something back to society and to others.

This is also a lesson in "faith." Again, we do not, and Jesus did not, go about demonstrating "faith" just for the sake of demonstrating faith, and casting this or that mountain or hill into the sea. But under the correct situation, where faith is needed, for a good and correct purpose (and it was a good purpose that this fig tree should be withered up, for it was taking up good space and soil, for no good purpose, the soil could be used to plant a productive tree), then having "faith" you could do miracles, and things that most would never expect could be done. Many a person down through history have performed things (or had things done for them) that most would have thought was quite impossible. They had faith in God that what they wanted and needed (asking according to His will, not asking amiss, James 4:3; with 1 John 3:22) for that situation, would be granted them. And with faith, mountains could be removed into the sea, if that was what was needed to be done for that particular circumstance.

Jesus also took the opportunity while speaking about "prayer" to remind them that an attitude of being able to forgive others, was a basic fundamental attribute of being a child of God, for only by being able to forgive others, would we have our sins forgiven by our heavenly Father.

Jesus Cleanses The Temple Once More

The ways of sin and unrighteousness had crept back into the practices within the Temple walls. Jesus had in the past thrown out the greedy, unscrupulous, merchants who sold things to the people who came to sacrifice in the temple. They had robbed the people, taken advantage of them, sold in such a way that was only to make as much profit as possible for themselves. Once more such merchant robbers were back in the Temple, doing their selling to the people as before. How soon the heart of man can forget the correcting of the Lord, and return to its former evil habits.

Jesus entered the Temple in Jerusalem, and saw again that the merchants had reverted back to their old sinful ways and practices. Once more with righteous indignation He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons and cried out, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you make it a den of robbers."

Jesus would not allow anyone to carry on their selling, bringing in and taking out their merchandise through the Temple.

The sellers by now knew the mighty power He possessed, and they were not about to test Him with it. All stood in fearful awe of Him.

The blind and the lame came to Him in the Temple, and He healed them as before. Children were even crying out with loud voices, "Hosanna, please save us, Son of David." And when the scribes and the chief priests heard what the children were saying, they said to Jesus with jealousy and frustration, "Do you not hear what these are saying." They wanted Jesus to tell them to stop, but Jesus looked at them and said, "Yes, I hear what they are saying. Have you never read where it is written, 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have brought perfect praise'?"

And they could say nothing or do nothing to Him in response. They feared Him, not only because of His great power in performing miracles and healings, but also because the multitudes of people were astonished at His teaching, hanging on every word He spoke, and were at this point fully behind and backing Him up all the way.

Leaving them, Jesus went out of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, and went again to Bethany and lodged there for a short while (Matt. 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48).

Chief Priests Question Jesus' Authority

It was not long before Jesus was back in the Temple preaching and teaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God. The religious leaders of the people were by now getting as uptight and as jumpy as a cat on a hot tin roof. The chief priests, and the scribes, with the elders (a good portion of the Jewish Sanhedrin, or court of religious matters) of the people, came to Jesus and demanded to know, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you the authority to do them?"

Jesus answered them with a question, "I also will ask you a question; and if you will tell me the answer, then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. My question is this: 'The baptism of John, where did it come from? Was it from the authority of heaven or from the authority of men?' "

Now those leaders were in quite the pickle as we say. They quickly reasoned among themselves that if they said John's authority came from heaven, then Jesus would ask them why they did not believe him. But if they said John's authority came from men, they knew the crowds of people would be against them, and might even do physical violence to them, for they knew the people held John as a prophet from God. So with a sheepish voice they answered Jesus, "Well....we really do not know where John's authority came from."

Jesus stared at them, paused for a moment....then with half a smile on His face, said to them, "Well....neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things" (Matt. 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8).

Those leaders of the people had been caught in their own trap. They went away seething with anger inside, and determined even the more to destroy this man called Jesus.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

More Parables and the Greatest Commandment

Parables Of The Vineyard

It was another day or two later, and Jesus was back teaching in the Temple once more. And as usual the Pharisees were not too far away. Knowing their deceitful hearts, He said to them, "What do you think about this? A man had two sons, and he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in my vineyard today.' And the son answered, 'No, I will not!' But a little while later he repented and went to work in the vineyard. The man went to his second son and said the same thing, and that son answered, 'Yes, sir, I will go,' but he did not. Now, which of the two did the will of his father?"

The Pharisees were quick to answer. They said, "Why the first son of course." Jesus then said to them, "It is true what I say unto you, the tax collectors and the harlots (prostitutes) go into the Kingdom of God BEFORE you. For John came to you in the pathway of righteousness, and you did NOT believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots DID believe him; and even when you saw what was happening, you still did not afterwards repent and believe him" (Matt. 21:28-32).

Many of those Pharisees were not blinded, and they will miss out on being in the Kingdom of God, for they were not willing to repent of their wrong attitudes, thoughts, and practices. Some of those Pharisees were blinded to the truth at that time, some later, as we shall see in the book of Acts, did repent and accept Christ as the Messiah and the Savior. They shall be in the first resurrection, at Christ's glorious coming, along with many of the tax collectors and harlots of Jesus' day, who also repented of their sins, and walked in the way of righteousness.

But Jesus was here giving a strong message to those Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees, who gave lip service to God, but whose hearts were far from humble repentance, who were far from walking in the light of God's straight and narrow pathway. He was telling those who were not blinded to the truths of God that He was teaching and preaching (and John the Baptist who did likewise), that they would be outside of the Kingdom, looking in. They would be among those that He mentioned earlier in His teachings, that would be crying and gnashing their teeth, and saying, "Lord, did we not speak in your name, did we not do miracles in your name, did we not regularly attend church services in your name?" And Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you, go away from me, you who work lawlessness."

Jesus went on to say to them, and to all that stood around Him:

"Hear another parable. There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. He rented it out for others to work and produce from, while he went into a far country for a long stay. Time went by and he sent a servant to the tenants, that they should give to him some fruit from his vineyard. But the tenants beat the servant and sent him away with nothing. And he sent another servant, but the tenants beat him up, wounding him in the head and treating

him shamefully. He sent another servant, and that one they killed. So it was with many others that he sent, some they beat and some they even killed. The owner of the vineyard said within himself, 'What shall I do?' He had a precious son, and he said to himself, 'I will send him to them, surely they will honor and respect him!' But when the tenants saw the son they said among each other, 'This is the very heir that he has sent to us. Let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.' And they cast him out of the vineyard and did indeed kill him. What then do you think the owner of the vineyard will do to them? Yes, you know very well what he will do. He will come and destroy those tenants, and give the vineyard to others who will give him the fruit he deserves in its season."

When those standing by heard this they knew what He was getting at and what He was saying to them. They said, "God forbid!"

Jesus looking at them even more intensely said, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in your eyes'? Everyone who shall fall on that stone will be broken to pieces; when that stone fall on any one it will crush him to powder. Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing the fruits of it."

The chief priest and the scribes and the Pharisees in the crowd hearing all this perceived correctly that the man called Jesus was speaking about them first, and the nation of Judah as a whole, secondly. It was they who He was saying were the evil tenants beating and killing servants that God was sending, and that God would destroy them, and give His work that was entrusted to them, to other people who would bring forth the fruits that God wanted to receive.

Once more, instead of repenting, because they knew the very truth that Jesus was telling them, they just hardened their hearts even more. They tried within that hour to figure a way to lay hands on Jesus to arrest Him for speaking those words, but they feared the multitude of people that were all around, for the people estimated in their minds that Jesus was a prophet from God (Matt. 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19).

Invited Guests To A Marriage Feast

And again Jesus spoke to them in a parable, saying: "The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who had been invited to the marriage; but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, look, I have made all things ready for my dinner, oxen and fat calves have been killed, and everything is ready; so come to the marriage feast.' But they made light of it and laughed and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest took hold of his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were first invited are not worthy. Go to the highways and roads and lanes, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you can find.' And those

servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they could find, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests."

Jesus was here plainly telling them that the Jewish nation, and especially its religious leaders, who should have been able to recognize God's truth, were the first ones to be invited to the Kingdom of God, through the preaching and teaching of John the Baptist and now Jesus Himself. They not only refused the invitation, but did shame and even killed some of the servants of God sent to them over the centuries.

Jesus was telling them in pretty plain words that God, as the king of the parable, would send an army that would come against Judah and its religious leaders, to destroy them and burn the city. This did take place in 70 A.D. when the Roman general Titus came with his army against Judah and Jerusalem.

The parable did not end there. Jesus went on to say, "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who did not have on a wedding garment; and so he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And the man was speechless, he had no answer to the question. Then the king said to the attendants, his servants, 'Bind this man hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.' So I say to you, many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:1-14).

Here Jesus is telling people that although many will be called to the Kingdom of God, after Judah and its people had been given first chance to enter, though many from other nations would be called (and we must remember that none can come to God unless God first calls them by His Spirit - John 6:44, 45, 63, 65) to enter the Kingdom, there are conditions to meet in order to inherit that Kingdom. One is repentance (Luke 13:1-3) and the other is to put on the righteousness of God as a garment (Rev.19:7-8 with Ps. 119:171 with Matt. 19:17). Keeping the commandments and works of God does not earn you salvation, for you are saved by God's grace (Eph. 2:8), but doing the works of God is expected of you (Eph. 2:10). You are to have an attitude of mind that is the garment of the wedding feast, in order to be at the wedding feast and not be cast out. Those who do not have the condition of the mind-set of a repentant and obeying attitude, who are willing to say with Christ, "Not my will be done, but your will be done Father," just will not enter the marriage supper of the Lamb that is pictured in the book of Revelation chapter 19. They will be, as we have seen many times already in the words of Christ's ministry, in earlier chapters, "on the outside looking in" to use a figure of speech.

Many may be called to walk in the way that leads to the wedding feast of the Kingdom, but you have to be among the "chosen" in order to enter and live for all eternity in the Kingdom. God does the calling, but you personally have to choose to come under the conditions to be in, and remain in, the wedding feast. Many may be called, but only the chosen inherit the feast of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus said elsewhere that "many are called but few are chosen" - so there can be a difference when used in a certain context. The chosen ones are those who have heard the word of God, have access to reading it, and who have committed themselves to not only accept Jesus as their personal Savior, but they have also committed themselves to

do as Jesus taught, which in a nut shell is what He said in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Many are called to "hear" God's word, but not to understand it, as they are not given the removal of spiritual blindness from their minds. This type of "calling" is as we find the apostle Paul talking about it in Romans 10:17 through to the end of chapter eleven. Such persons are not in a spiritually "lost" state for God has not given them the mind to comprehend His word and truths.

Then there are those who HAVE been "called" to not only hear the word but to understand it, and God IS wanting them to come to repentance and salvation through Jesus Christ His Son. But THEY must make that decision to accept God's invitation to be His very sons and daughters, and be in the first resurrection at the return of Jesus in glory to this earth. If they move on to come under the grace of God and receive His Holy Spirit, they then become part of the "chosen" ones. And if they "endure to the end" as Jesus said (Matt. 24:13), if they make their calling and election SURE (see 2 Peter 1:3-11), then they shall enter the Kingdom of God.

Concerning Paying Taxes

The Pharisees were ever wanting to trap Jesus in His words of response to their questions. This time they thought they had the very question that would finally trip Him up and get Him in hot water with all the people of Judah. This time they had the help of the Herodians who also came with some of the disciples of the Pharisees to question Him. Now, the Herodians were a party among the Jews, formed probably under Herod the Great, and basically held that it was right to pay homage to a sovereign who might be able to bring the friendship of Rome and other advantages. They had no title to reign in any way over the Jews either by law or by religion. They differed from the Pharisees on the answer to the question both parties would now put to Jesus, but here they joined forces with them in disguised but open opposition to Jesus. They also saw Jesus as an enemy. The Herodians then were something more than a political party and something less than a religious sect.

Both groups came to Jesus speaking in a way that would have melted butter, they said, "Oh teacher, we know that you are true, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men, but truly teach the way of God."

What a bunch of lies were now pouring out of those people who represented the sect of the Pharisees and the band of Herodians. They did not believe one word of what they had just said to Jesus.

They continued with the question that they were sure would be the final death blow to Jesus' popularity with the people, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" Most in Judaea did not like being under the Roman power. If Jesus said yes, give taxes to Rome, the Pharisees thought He would then be on the "outer" with the people, and if He said no, do not give taxes to Rome, then the Pharisees could report Him to the Roman authorities, as someone trying to turn the people against Rome. Either way they thought they had Him this time.

They could not fool Jesus for one second. He knew exactly what was going on and why they had come to Him with this question. He knew they were a group filled with hypocrisy, on both sides. He said to them, "Why do you try to put me to the test? Bring me a coin, and let me look at it." And so they did, they brought Him a coin, and that was their second mistake, the first being the very question they asked Him. "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" Jesus asked them. "Well...well..." they began to answer with some hesitation, "it is the likeness of Caesar." They sensed by now that they, not Jesus, were in for the public embarrassment.

"Very well then," Jesus began to reply, "you should render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and you should render to God the things that are God's."

The faces of those who asked Him the question first went as white as snow, then as red as a beetroot in embarrassment. They were stunned and everyone of them was speechless, they could not utter one word. They were both amazed at His reply, and also angry at Him for once more turning the tables upon them, and making them look silly and ridiculous among all the people standing by. With not one single word, they turned away from Him and departed (Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26).

Jesus taught that we are to have a certain amount of respect for secular governments. Some governments of men, we as Christians, living in some parts of the world, need to move away from, escape out of the land of that government, for they are very evil towards Christians. Recently we had a large black family come to the city I live in, and the church I attend. They came to Canada to escape the harmful evil Government of the Middle Eastern nation they were from, because they were under possible physical violence from that government because they were Christians.

This situation above did not exist in Judea during the time of Christ. The Roman government allowed the Jews to have all freedom to teach and practice their religion. There was no fear of physical violence from the Roman Government if the Jews lived in a peaceful way within the Roman Empire. Hence, under such a living situation Jesus taught people should pay taxes to the secular government, and be thankful that they did not have to flee for their lives as they taught and practiced the word and truths of God.

A Question Of Marriage In The Resurrection

On the same day the Sadducees came to Jesus with a question they thought was going to have Him treading on His shoe laces and falling flat on His face (of course I use a metaphor as they wore sandals not shoes with laces in those days). They were going to show the Herodians and the Pharisees "how to do it." The Sadducees did not believe in "the resurrection" of the dead to eternal life. This was their question: "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children from her, the man must take the wife and raise up children for his brother."

This was a law in the books of Moses, but here they only state the basic law, it was not written in stone, that the living brother HAD to do this, in other words there was a clause in the law that could be used so the brother did not have to take his dead brother's wife in marriage (see Deut. 25:5-10).

The question they had for Jesus was based on the basic principle of this law of Moses. They continued, "Now there were seven brothers; the first took a wife and died without having children from her; and the second, and the third took her, likewise all seven had her as wife and left no children, and they all died. Afterwards the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife."

You could see all these Sadducees with a large grin on their faces, oh how they thought they had won the day, finally they were thinking, we the great priests of the Temple, have backed this Jesus fellow into a corner and He is finally defeated in His theology. Oh how they were thinking that they the Sadducees were the victors over this man that many believed was the Messiah. This question they thought would be proof that this Jesus was NOT the promised Messiah, and the Son of God as He was claiming.

And Jesus said to them, "How wrong you are, for you know not what the Scriptures teach nor the power of God."

The Scriptures that the Sadducees could read clearly stated there would be a resurrection (see Daniel 12:2; Ezekiel 37; Isaiah 26:19), and the "power of God" that Jesus was talking about, is not only the literal power that God has, but it is also knowing the "spirit" and essence of what the Scriptures of God taught on that subject. With those two things in hand, Jesus was able to continue to say, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are accounted worthy to attain to the age to come and to the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die any more, because they are equal to the angels and are the very sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read what is written in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, and how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all shall live in Him. You are very wrong in your theology on this matter"

And when the crowd heard all this, they were astonished at His teaching, and the Sadducees found they had tripped over their own shoe laces, and it was they who had their faces in the dust of the ground (Matt. 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38).

Yes the Bible teaches very clearly there will be a resurrection, in fact as we have seen, Jesus taught (John chapter 5) that ALL who had ever died would be resurrected. What Jesus teaches here is that those who will be in the resurrection to be very sons of God, will be like the angels in that they will neither marry nor will they be given in marriage. There will be no husband and wife marriages as we in this physical life know them. There will be no sexual relations for those in the resurrection to eternal life, no sexual relations as we know and practice it in our physical marriages.

This explanation of Jesus' also tells us that angels do not marry, neither do they have, nor can they have, sexual relations among themselves or among and within human beings. Some teach that in Genesis chapter six, angels, be it "fallen ones," came to earth and married and had sexual relations with physical women, and that union produced great giants. What Jesus said here in the Gospels goes against such an idea that some hold concerning Genesis chapter six. The Pharisees actually taught that idea about angels marrying physical women, and we know that Jesus had already warned

His disciples about the "leaven" of the doctrines of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matt. 16:6-12). Much of what they taught was error and false.

We shall know each other when in the resurrection, be able to do things together, even eat meals together, have all the inter-actions with each other that we enjoy today in the flesh, just as Jesus could with His disciples AFTER He was raised from the dead. But in this passage we have the clear teaching from Jesus that those in the resurrection to life in the Kingdom of God, will not marry, nor have sexual relations as we do today when we in this age, marry each other.

The Great Commandment

It was not long before the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees. They came together again in a little huddle to determine what their next question would be for Jesus to try and answer, with the view that He would not be able to answer or give an answer that would disgrace or make Him look inept before all the people.

Looking from above, with a bird's eye view, down on the Temple, all of this would have seemed quite funny, if it was not all so serious. You had the chief priests, scribes and elders of the people, in the first huddle to plan their attack on Jesus with a trick question, and Jesus scoring a touchdown against them. Then the Herodians and Pharisees huddled down to plan their attack question on Him, and again He scores a touchdown against them. After that the Sadducees call time out and huddle down to come up with a question He could not answer, and Jesus scores a touchdown with the ball they kick at Him. Now, the Pharisees regroup, they call for another time out, and huddle down again to plan their attack against Jesus.

All really quite funny, looking from above on all these little "sect huddles" going on in the Temple grounds, if as I've said, it was not so serious a matter. This was not a game these sects were playing, they were dead earnest about trying to nail Jesus' hide against the wall. This time one of the Pharisees who was also one of the scribe lawyers, asked Him this question, "Teacher, which commandment is the first, the greatest commandment in the law?"

Without any hesitation Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your life, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandments greater than these."

And the lawyer scribe said to Him, "You are right teacher; you have truly said that He is one, and there is no other but He; and to love Him with all your heart, and with all your understanding, and with all your strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

And when Jesus saw that the man answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

After all this questioning from the different sects, and all of Jesus' correct and wonderful answers to them, there was not one person who dared to ask Him any other question (Mark 12:28-34).

About The Messiah's Ancestry

No one was brave enough to ask Jesus any more questions after all this, but Jesus thought it was now His turn to ask the Pharisees a question. While they were still as one group before Him, He asked them, "Tell me, what do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?" The lawyer scribes were quick to answer, "Why, the Christ is the son of David."

"Well then," replied Jesus, "if that is so, how is it that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls Him LORD, saying, 'The LORD said to my LORD, sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'? (Ps. 110:1). If David then calls Him LORD, how is HE his son?"

And no one was able to answer Him a word, they had no answer for the question Jesus now asked them. And from that time forward not a single person asked Him any more questions (Matt. 22:41-46).

Jesus was showing them that THE MESSIAH was not just from the line of their great king David, but that the Messiah was David's LORD, the Lord that David worshipped. The Messiah was DIVINE God, as well as coming in the physical form to earth via the blood line of David. This we saw way back in the very first few chapters of this New Testament Bible Story. Mary, who was to bear God's Son, was from the physical line or ancestry of Israel's ancient king David.

The Messiah, Jesus was pointing out to them, was to be BOTH humanly physical as well as DIVINE LORD or God.

Jesus had put up with a lot from the Pharisees, they had questioned Him time and time again, they had attacked His character, slandered Him, called Him names, even said He did things by the power of the Devil. Times was short now, Jesus knew He would soon be put to death, and the Pharisees would have a large part in bringing that event to fruition. Jesus was going to tell the Pharisees and all people standing around, just where it really was with the Pharisees. He would speak plainly about them and their attitude as never before. His words would, as we say, makes their ears burn.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Jesus Plainly Rebukes the Scribes And Pharisees

Woes To The Scribes And Pharisees

And Jesus said to the crowd and to His disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; so all therefore that they bid you observe, that is according to the Word of God, and what they have authority over, that observe and do, but do not follow their works for they say, but do not do practice what they preach."

Although the words "according to the Word of God, and what they have authority over" are added by myself, it is clear from all that Jesus has said as recorded in the four Gospels, this is the true meaning of what Jesus was saying to them. We have seen that Jesus said much of the doctrines and teachings of the Pharisees was "leaven" and to beware of their theology. We have seen that Jesus many times did not agree with the ideas and the theology of the scribes and Pharisees, so it is obvious that He was not telling people here to BLINDLY, without question, do and practice everything that came out of the mouth of those two groups of people, the scribes and the Pharisees.

Yet, Jesus did admit that they did have a certain amount of authority from Moses and did have some things correct, so where their authority and teachings were in line with God's word, people were to admit it was correct and so do the truth that they taught. But, He was just as clearly teaching here that people were NOT to follow the life example set by the scribes and Pharisees, for as we have seen Jesus often told them they were hypocrites....they often said what God's word did teach, and wanted people to obey it, but they did not do it themselves. So people were to be aware that their example was often far from what people should follow.

Now Jesus got really to the point, did not hold back, and painted in graphic words the foundational nature of the scribes and Pharisees. He went on to say, "They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them off with even a finger."

Religious cults are prone to do this sort of thing. They rule their members with all kinds of laws that govern every facet of their lives, from the time they wake up to the time they go to sleep. The scribes and Pharisees were in many ways a religious cult, and how they loved to burden people with hundreds of "do this" and "do not do that" laws of life, that were not the laws of God. The people were under heavy burdens, and the leaders of the two groups Jesus is addressing, were not willing to lift the smallest of these man made regulations, that could, in a figure of speech, be lifted from them with just one finger.

Jesus continued: "They do all their deeds and works to be seen of people; for on their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scriptures verses inside, and wear extra long tassels on their robes."

In their religion of those days, there was a lot of meaning to such clothing. Remember the Old Covenant of the Old Testament age was in many ways full of physical rites, rituals, sacrifices, Temple worship, and even decorating their homes and clothing with Bible verses was often practices. The scribes and Pharisees went to the ultimate extreme in decorating themselves with Scripture verses.....but it was, as Jesus said, mainly for outward show, in order to tell others how "religious" and how "godly" they were, but in fact the opposite was the true case.

Continuing with Jesus' words, "And how they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the most prominent seats in the church! They enjoy the adulation they get from people on the streets, and they revel in being called 'Rabbi' or 'teacher' in a vain religious sense. Do not let anyone call you "Teacher" in this vain pompous religious way, for you only have ONE "teacher" - God in heaven. You my disciples are on the same level as brothers and sisters. Do not address each other with pompous religious titles. And further more, do not address anyone here on earth with the religious title of 'Father,' for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father. And do not let anyone call you 'Master' in a spiritual religious way, for you have only one Master - the Christ, myself, the Messiah."

Right away we can think of one large religious body of people who use the word "Father" as a religious title for its church leaders. Jesus here clearly said such a practice was not to be done. It is so true in so many cases, that when Jesus said "do this" people do not, and when Jesus said, "do not do this" people do it. Such is the deception of the human heart.

To further amplify the attitude that Christians must have one towards another, Jesus went on to say: "The one who thinks he is the greatest among you, must be your servant. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites you are! For you will not let others enter the Kingdom of God, and you will not go in yourselves. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites you are, for shamelessly you cheat widows out of their property, and then, to cover up the kind of people you really are, you make long prayers in public. Because of this your punishment will be the greater."

Yes, those leaders of religious law, were very clever at getting money from people, even from the widow, who would often give over whatever property they were left by their husband at death, to "the church" as we say today. And so it still is in our time that many "religious" teachers out there are masterful at getting people to give and send them money. Now and again we see such people and their "religious work" be exposed on TV. Such persons usually have great personal wealth, or their organization does, and they live off the organization with a lifestyle that is up there with the "rich and the famous" in the Hollywood circle of movie stars.

Continuing: "Woe to you religious leaders of the scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! For you travel around the earth, over land and sea to make one convert, and when he is made, you make that person two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, you blind guides, which say, 'Whoever swears by the Temple, it is nothing, but whoever swears by the gold on the Temple, is a debtor and is obligated to pay and fulfil

what he has sworn to do.' You silly fools and carnally blind: for which is the greater, the gold, or the Temple that sanctifies the gold that is on it? The Temple where God says He would dwell is the greater of course!

"And you also say, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift of sacrifice on the altar, he is a debtor to pay in full what he swore to do.' You fools and you blind: for which is the greater, the gift on the altar or the altar itself that sanctifies the gift? Why the altar is the greatest of course!

"So, whoever swears by the altar, swears by it and everything that may be upon it. And whoever swears by the Temple, swears by it and all things upon its walls, and especially by Him that dwells in it - God.

"And whoever swears by heaven, swears by the very throne of God, and by Him that sits on the throne - God Himself!"

As we can see Jesus did not mince His words towards those religious leaders of the people known as the scribes and the Pharisees. Truly some of the teachings they held were by nature and by common human logic, very silly and foolish, and as Jesus bluntly put it "hypocritical."

Going on with Jesus' scathing rebukes: "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are careful to tithe even on the smallest parts of your income and goods, but then you IGNORE the large important parts of the law - JUSTICE, MERCY, and FAITH. Oh yes, you SHOULD tithe, but you SHOULD NOT leave UNDONE the more IMPORTANT things. Blind guides you are! You strain your water so you will not accidentally swallow a gnat; then you turn around and swallow a camel!

"How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and for you Pharisees. You hypocrites! You are so very careful to wash and clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but you forget the inside. You are filthy - full of greed and self-indulgence! You blind Pharisees! You should first wash the inside of the cup, then the outside will get clean also, as you wash the inside.

"Woe, unto you scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs - looking beautiful on the outside, but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. You all try to look like upright godly people outwardly, but inside your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.

"Woe, unto you scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build tombs for the prophets your ancestors killed and decorate the graves of the godly people your ancestors destroyed. Then you have the nerve to say, 'We would never have joined them in killing the prophets.' In saying what you say, you are accusing yourself of being the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead. Finish what they started! You snakes, you sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of hell fire?

"I will send you prophets and wise men and teachers of religious law. You will kill some, and whip others in your churches, chasing them from city to city. As a result of your evil heart you will be guilty of murdering all the godly people from righteous Abel to

Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered in the Temple between the altar and the sanctuary. I assure you, all the accumulated judgment of the centuries will break and come upon the heads of this very generation."

Jesus, as you see, did not mince His words at this time. His time had just about come to an end as far as living in the flesh as a human being. He had been very badly treated, shamefully treated, by those religious leaders of the people of Judah. They, of all people, should have known better, they were the ones supposedly reading and understanding all that the word of God in the Old Testament was saying. Many, many passages told of the first coming of the Messiah, and how He would live, and teach, and heal, and proclaim the truths of the Kingdom of God. Those scribes and Pharisees should have been able to have recognized that Jesus the Christ was indeed the very promised Messiah. The words Jesus used against those two groups of religious leaders were fair and proper words. They deserved every bit of Jesus' condemnation.

Jesus finished this attack on the scribes and Pharisees by thinking of the people in general, and how they had been influenced to deception by those leaders, so much so that in an overall sense, that deception would last for a great time to come. He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those whom God sends to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not let me do it! Behold therefore, your house is forsaken and will be desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord' " (Matt. 23:1-39).

Jerusalem, the city, and the majority of the Jews to this very day, are still spiritually forsaken, and their house is desolate. They still do not accept Jesus as the Messiah. They have had great troubles for many centuries. They still wait for the Messiah to come. They will indeed not see Jesus, until He comes again in glory. Then as the prophet Zechariah (chapters 12 to 14) shows, they will see that the very Jesus Christ that walked among them centuries earlier, IS the MESSIAH! They shall then praise Him and will indeed say, "Blessed be HE who comes in the name of the Lord."

A Widow Gives All

Jesus had been teaching for some hours. He was getting a little tired so He sat down across from the Temple treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury box. Many very rich people put in large sums of money. Then came along a poor widow, and put in just two copper coins, which make a penny, a very very small amount compared to what others had put in. So small an amount that some would have thought it pretty well amounted to nothing.

Jesus, knowing through His miraculous power of the Spirit, the true situation of what this widow had done, called His disciples to come, and He said to them, "I tell you of a truth, this poor widow has put into the Temple treasury more than all who have contributed. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in EVERYTHING she had, her whole living" (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4).

Nothing more is mentioned by the Gospel writers. But we can easily get the message Jesus was giving His disciples. The heart of the woman was much larger in attitude than

any of the wealthy who had contributed. They may have given large amounts of money, but they could have given more really. And you talk about "faith" that was exhibited by this widow, yes, she had great faith that God would provide for her. It does not say in the accounts, then again, it does not need to. Jesus noticed it, and I'm sure this widow was blessed in a physical way somehow, and that God made sure her daily needs were met.

The Start Of Rejection By The Jews

The Jews had great expectations of Jesus. They were sure He was going to start to lead them to full freedom from the Roman Empire. They had welcomed Him to Jerusalem with great acclaim and celebration. But all they saw was Him teaching in the Temple. His teaching was fine and even spectacular, and shocking at times, yet they thought, when was He going to break forth into a rallying army type leader who would gather them all together and lead them to victory over the Roman army. He had mighty miracle working power that they thought could surely destroy all the armies that Rome could send upon them. They were beginning to get doubts in this Jesus who called Himself the Messiah, and the Son of God.

Now among those that went up to worship at the feast time of the Passover were some Greeks. These came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

These Greeks had probably heard about Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and now wanted to learn more about and from this man. We are told that Philip went to Andrew. Philip may have wanted some other person to talk to about the matter, as these Greeks were Gentiles, and Jesus did not normally go out of His way to teach and preach to Gentiles. The Gentiles would have the door to the Kingdom of God fully opened to them after Jesus' resurrection, when God made it known to the Jewish disciples of Christ that salvation was for everyone.....Jew or Gentile.

Both Philip and Andrew went to Jesus to pass on to Him the request from these Greek persons. The narrative, recorded by the apostle John, simply goes into the words of Jesus. We are to assume these are the words given by Jesus to both His disciples, Jews, and to these Gentile Greeks.

And Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, yes true indeed, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, and fruitless; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life, loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for ever in the eternal life to come. "

Jesus was here speaking of Himself, that would die, but in so doing, much fruit would be brought forth by His death. He is also speaking to His disciples who would want to follow Him. He was once more telling them that they were to have their hearts primarily set upon eternal life in the Kingdom, and not on being wrapped up in the physical things of this life. His disciples must even give up their lives like He was going to give up His life, IF called upon to do so, for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven.

Jesus going on with the last thought I've mentioned, said, "If anyone serves me, he must FOLLOW me; and in so doing, where I shall be there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honor them."

Yes, all who live and die as a follower of Christ, shall one day be with Jesus. There will come a resurrection from death, at the coming of Christ in glory, as we have seen, and the dead in Christ will be raised to immortal life, and those living when He comes shall be changed from flesh and blood to immortal sons and daughters of God (1 Cor. 15; 1 Thes. 4), and meet Jesus in the air, in the clouds, and as the apostle Paul said, so shall they ever be with Christ.

Jesus, now looking at what the near hour of His death would be like, said, "Now is my mind troubled. And what shall I say? Shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No! For it was for this purpose I have come to this hour just ahead of me. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

Was this voice, the very personal voice of God the Father? We need to be careful not to jump to that conclusion too fast, for as John records, the crowd hearing that voice, did not automatically believe it was God Himself speaking. As in our governments of this world, a "spokes-person" on behalf of a leader of a nation, can speak in the first person, acting for the President or Prime Minister of the nation. So, it could also be in God's Kingdom. Here is what John recorded as the reaction of the crowd when hearing this voice, "The crowd standing by heard it and said that it thundered. Others said, 'An ANGEL has spoken to him.' "

Whatever, either the voice of an angel or the voice of God, Jesus went on to say, "This voice has come for your sakes, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself."

As the apostle John recorded, he said this to show what death He would die. Being lifted up, using that figure of speech, was well understood by the Jews and all within the Roman Empire. It signified being crucified on a cross or stake. Crucifixion was a common method used by the Romans to slowly kill someone. In most cases it was a slow death, over two or three days, but I'll have more to say on that when we get to the actual crucifixion of Jesus.

The ruler of this world to be cast out, that Jesus referred to, was Satan himself. At the death of Christ, the works of Satan were conquered. Sin began with Satan in the distant past. And from the time of Adam and Eve and their sin, ALL people have sinned, and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) - eternal death in the lake of fire which is the second death spoken about in Revelation chapter 20. Jesus' death would pay the penalty, He would take our sins upon Himself, so upon our repentance and accepting Him as our personal Savior, we could be freed from Satan's hold and death's hold on us.

At the death of Christ for the sins of the world (John 3:16) Satan would be in essence, cast out from holding the people of the world in his grip. His power over us would be

broken through the shed blood of Jesus. He would still be allowed to do his work on earth for another two thousand years or so, before he would finally be chained up for a thousand years, as Revelation 20 tells us. But Jesus dying on the cross would make sure and seal Satan's fate of being cast out....and as God often calls things done that are not yet literally done, but so sure are they that they will be done, God sometimes uses words that speak as if they are now done. This is what Jesus did here, spoke as if Satan would be cast out NOW, at Jesus' death. In one way as I've mentioned Satan would be, but in the literal sense Satan is not put away from the earth until the one thousand year reign of Christ begins, when Jesus comes again in glory to establish the literal Kingdom of God on earth (Rev. 19 and 20).

After Jesus had mentioned that he would be "lifted up" which all present knew He meant that He would die by crucifixion, the crowd said, "We have heard from the law of Moses that the Christ remains FOREVER. How then can you say the Son of man must be lifted up? Who then is THIS Son of man you talk about?"

Jesus replied to them, not in a direct way, He had over the course of His ministry told them plainly WHO the Son of man was. He replied in the way that showed they should have known by now WHO the Son of man was, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you; those who walk in the darkness do not know where they are going. While you have the light, BELIEVE in the light, that you may become the sons and daughters of the light."

Once more Jesus was referring to Himself. He was the light. They needed to BELIEVE in HIM! They needed to walk in the light of truth He was teaching them. He was again telling them they needed to become true sons and daughters of God the Father.

When Jesus had said all this, He departed and kept Himself hidden and out of sight from them. And John tells us that though He had done so many signs and miracles among them, they still did not believe in Him, they did not believe in Him as they should have believed in Him. It was all as the spoken word of the Prophet Isaiah said, "Lord, who had believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Isa. 53:1). It was not given for the majority of the people at that time to believe, for Isaiah also said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and turn to me to be healed" (Isa. 6:9, 10).

Yes, Isaiah was inspired of God to say these things because it would not be God's will to take the blindness away from the hearts of the majority of the people during the time of Christ's ministry. Nevertheless God had called a number of the people to believe in Him, even a number of the authorities within the Jewish nation believed in Jesus, but for fear of the sect of the Pharisees, who had a huge amount of pull and sway in a political religious manner, they did not openly confess they believed in Jesus, lest they should be put out of the synagogues. God had called them to believe, but as we have seen, we have out part to play in that calling.

As free moral agents we can decide how we will "run" with the belief God grants us. These people who believed, did not run well with it. As the apostle John states, they loved the praise of men MORE than the praise of God. They made the synagogue or

church their "social club" and did not want to be "put out" on account of believing in Jesus. Possibly, after Jesus' death and resurrection, some of them took a firmer stand on their conviction and were not bothered about being put out of the synagogues, but at this juncture in time, they were more afraid of men than God. We need always be more fearful (which is a deep respect and honor) of God than of men.

Jesus was not yet through speaking. He cried out, "He who believes in me, believes not merely in me but in HIM that sent me. And he who sees me sees also HIM that sent me. I have come as LIGHT into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness. If any one hears my teachings and does NOT keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not at this time come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects me and does NOT receive my sayings has a judge; the WORD that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. For I have not spoken on my OWN authority; the Father who sent me has Himself given me commandment WHAT I should SAY and WHAT to speak. And I surely know that His commandment is ETERNAL LIFE! What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has commissioned me to say" (John 12:20-50).

Jesus' main purpose in coming the first time was to die for the sins of the world, to give people a way out of sin, and a way to eternal life (John 3:16), through His shed blood on the cross. It was not Jesus' time to judge the world, to judge all the people on the earth. That day of judgement was not for that time, it was for a much later time, but people would even then not be judge out of Jesus' own mind per se, but judged by the very word of God, which of course includes all the words and teachings of Jesus that are recorded in the New Testament.

God has revealed His will for us, how we should live, what we should practice, what we should think and say and do. It is all in His word we call the Bible. Christians, the children of God the Father, are to as Jesus said, live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). All people, one day, shall be judge by that very word. We need to read it, understand it, love it, want to follow it and live by it. If we have that attitude of mind we need not fear our judgement day, for we shall be under the grace of God. We shall be loved by Him, and we shall inherit eternal life.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

The Great Prophecy Of The End Times Part One

Mary Anoints Jesus' Feet

The apostle John in his Gospel account relates to us that six days before the Passover, Jesus was in Bethany, the town where Lazarus (the man Jesus raised from the dead) was living. He was at a supper meal. Martha, Mary's sister, was serving, and Lazarus was also present, sitting at the same table with Jesus.

Mary took a pound of very costly ointment and started to anoint Jesus' head and also His feet, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot (the one who betrayed Jesus later) said, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred denarii (a large sum of money in our terms today), and given to the poor?"

We may think that Judas was kind hearted, especially towards the poor, but John informs us that he did not say this because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he was also in charge of the money box the disciples had, for their living expenses, he would steal from it at times.

It is good to here realize that Jesus and His disciples had a "bank account" as we might call it today. They were obviously given money from many different people and sources, to help them with physical expenses (such as food) as they travelled up and down Palestine doing the work of God. Perhaps some of the money was from the gifts that were given to Jesus when the Magi visited him as a baby.

Jesus replied to Judas' statement, "Let her alone, do not trouble her. For you will always have the poor with you, and whenever you will you can do good to them; but you will not always have me here. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand, for burying me, preparing me for death. And truly, I say to you, wherever the Gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her." She probably used the rest of the oil later when He would be buried.

When the people heard that Jesus was there in Bethany, they came in large numbers, not only to see Jesus, for some were already questioning and having second thoughts about Him, because He was not doing what they expected Him to do, gather all the Jewish men together to form an army to fight the Romans. They came also to see Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Many were through waiting and started to believe in Jesus while the power that the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees had over the people was diminishing. So those groups of men were planning to also put Lazarus to death along with Jesus (Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-11).

The Mount of Olives Prophecy

It is now only three days until the Passover and the fateful events of the night and day of the fourteenth of Nisan, the first month in the calendar that the Jews used, corresponding to our March/April (see a good Bible Dictionary under the article "calendar").

Jesus had been on this third day before the Passover, in the Temple, once more teaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God. He was now leaving the Temple, when His disciples, at least one of them, said, "Teacher, look at the wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings are within the Temple structure."

Jesus answered, "You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, there will not be left one single stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."

The disciples were astonished once more at His remarks and they pondered and mused among themselves as they walked along, what that remark was really meaning.

Jesus reached the Mount of Olives, and stopped to look at all He could see, as well as have a short rest. It was then that some of the disciples, namely, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked Him privately this question:

"Tell us Lord, when will this be that you spoke about concerning the stones of the Temple, and what will be the sign of your coming and the close of the age?"

We need to notice very clearly, for it is written by Matthew in very plain to understand words. The disciples were asking Jesus to tell them about the signs that would signal His RETURN.....and the END OF THE AGE!

What we are about to read, the words of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is MAINLY and for mostly, an END TIME prophecy. It has only a smaller fore-running local event of what happened to the Temple and Jerusalem, in 70 A.D. What happened in 70 A.D. did NOT fulfil this prophecy, for TODAY we still have part of the wall of the Temple in existence in Jerusalem. It is called the "Wailing Wall." Hence in 70 A.D. not EVERY STONE, was "will not be left one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down" as Jesus had said would come to pass, BEFORE His COMING AGAIN and the END of the age!

This prophecy of Jesus' is most certainly for the END TIMES, yet ahead of anyone reading this New Testament Bible Story!

Jesus said, "Take heed that no one leads you astray. For MANY will come in my name saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead MANY astray."

At the end times it is the MANY that would come saying that Jesus was the Christ. They would come in His name, claiming they were ministers of Christ. But they would be false ministers, leading MANY, not the few, astray. And so it is today we have dozens and dozens, even hundreds, of "religious" organizations claiming Jesus is the Christ. But

Jesus Himself said, the MANY would be false ministries and false preachers, leading the many into a false Christianity.

Jesus continued, "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end of the age is not yet. For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places; all this is but the BEGINNING of sufferings."

We have in the last 100 years seen all this fully come to pass. More earthquakes than ever, more famines than ever, more nations fighting nations than ever in the past. All this Jesus said had to come to pass, but the end of the age was not just yet, more specific things Jesus would now go on to name and foretell, would be the signs of the stones of the Temple in Jerusalem being cast down so not one would be left upon another (the stones of the Wailing Wall still stand, which was once a part of the Temple of Jesus' day), and the coming of Jesus again to earth.

Continuing with Jesus' words, "Then they will deliver you my disciples, up to tribulation, and beat you in the churches, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them. Some of you they will put to death. And you will be hated by all nations for my sake. Do not worry beforehand how to answer your accusers; for I will give you the words and wisdom to speak through the power of the Holy Spirit, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. And at that time many will fall away from the truth, and betray one another. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends. Family members will betray one another even to death. And at this time many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And along with all this, wickedness will be multiplied and the love of most people will wax cold."

This period, when all this will happen, will be the last few years before Jesus returns, as the book of Revelation explains and amplifies.

Jesus went on to say that those who would endure to the end, stick it out, keep the faith, no matter what the cost, would be saved.

And He said that before the end of the age came, the Gospel would be preached throughout the whole world as a witness to all nations. Some of that would be done by the servants of Christ, some of it done by the two great witnesses that the eleventh chapter of the book of Revelation speaks about, who will come to Jerusalem for the last three and one half years or forty-two months, and from there will witness for the truth of God. Then the final world-wide witness will be by an angel that will declare the Gospel to all that dwell upon the earth, to every nation, every kindred, and tongue, and people (Revelation 14:6,7).

Jesus said that after those specific events we just read about, then the end of the age and His return would come. Then the Kingdom of God would be established upon the earth.

Now Jesus, steps back in time somewhat, and talks about a specific event that will lead up to and trigger this last days persecution of God's spiritual children, as well as the physical people of the tribes of Israel.

"When you see," Jesus said, "the abomination that makes desolate, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it should not stand, standing in the holy place...."

We are not to guess what this is that Jesus has reference to. First, the Greek words for "holy place" are NOT unique. The Greek for "holy" is the common word used throughout the New Testament, and means, "consecrated, pure, holy, saint" - it is the Greek "hagios." The word for "place" means just that - "place, spot, location."

Jesus was saying something will make desolate a holy place, a holy location, or holy spot on the earth.

Secondly, we do not have to guess what this is, or come up with many different ideas, theories, interpretations, as many have done in the last 200 years. The Bible "interprets itself." Luke in his Gospel account of what Jesus said here, gives us the meaning. We find it in Luke 21:20, "But when you see JERUSALEM SURROUNDED BY ARMIES, then you will know, its DESOLATION IS AT HAND."

Jesus, was saying that what Daniel had foreseen and what he wrote about for the end times, was the DESOLATION of JERUSALEM!

Jerusalem was God's chosen HOLY PLACE. It was and still is the HOLY CITY! It is the city that God has chosen to have His headquarters in under the reign of Jesus Christ during the millennium or one thousand year period of Revelation chapter 20.

An end time power, the "King of the North" as Daniel calls it (the book of Revelation calls it a "Beast" power, with a "beast man" as army leader and "false prophet" as religious leader) will come against the "King of the South" at the end time and will defeat him, and then march on into the "glorious holy mountain" and "set up" or plant his tabernacle of dwelling "between the seas" (between the Mediterranean sea and the Dead sea) in the very holy place, or holy city of Jerusalem (Daniel 11:40-45).

Jerusalem will be surrounded by the armies of this Beast - King of the North power about three and one half years, or forty two months, or 1260 days, before Jesus returns to earth. This end time power will then march into Jerusalem and destroy most of the city. There will be great desolation of the holy city, and then the final wall (Wailing Wall) of the Temple that stood in Jesus' day, will come crashing down, and the prophecy will be fulfilled where Jesus said that not one stone of the Temple would stand on another stone.

In Daniel 12:11 it says that at that time "the daily sacrifice is taken away". The word sacrifice is in italics in most translations and is not in the original text written by Daniel. This daily that is taken away may well refer to the daily worship that is performed at the Wailing Wall.

When that event happens Jesus went on to say, "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let him who is on the housetop not go down to take things from the house, but flee. Those who are inside the city better flee, and those out in the country-side better not enter the city. Those in the field had better not return to their homes to gather things, but they better flee. For these will be the days of vengeance, to fulfil all that is written.

"Alas for those who are pregnant and with child, and for those who are still nursing their child! For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon THIS people in Palestine; they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away as captives into all nations; and this city of Jerusalem shall be trodden down and made desolate by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, until God has allowed the Gentile armies to do their devastation and evil.

"You my disciples need to pray that your fleeing will not be in the winter nor on the Sabbath day. For this will be the time of GREAT TRIBULATION such the like that the world will never have seen, no not from its very beginning, and never will see the like ever again. If those days were not shortened, no HUMAN BEING WOULD BE SAVED ALIVE; but for the sake of the ELECT, those days God will shorten."

There can be no mistaking about the time Jesus is here talking about. It was not the time of 70 A.D. It was not the time of the middle ages, not the time of the first world war, not the time of the second world war. No matter how bad those times were, the time that Jesus is talking about (as we shall see further as we proceed into the context of the next verses and what Jesus said) is still ahead of all who are reading these chapters in this Bible Story.

Jesus is clearly talking about a time just prior to His visible second coming in glory. It will be a time of tribulation and distress and suffering, like the world has never seen since man was created upon it. As Jesus said unless those days would be shortened not one single human being would be left alive on the face of the entire earth. Only in the last 50 years have we had the weapons of mass destruction that could indeed kill every man, woman, and child, from off the planet.

This prophecy of Matthew 24 is, without question, an end time prophecy, for the last three and one half years (the 42 months, the 1260 days, the times and time and half a time, of the book of Revelation).

Jesus further said, "Then, at that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There He is,' do NOT believe it! For false Christs and false prophets will rise up and even show GREAT signs and wonders, so great as to lead many astray, so deceptive they will be that IF it was possible they would deceive even the VERY ELECT! You need to take heed; I have told you and warned you of all these things beforehand.

"So, if they say to you, 'Ah, look, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out to look; if they say, 'Look, He is in this inner room,' do NOT believe them. For when I COME AGAIN, it will be like as LIGHTNING comes from the east and shines as far as to the west. Yes, that is what my coming will be like. The Son of man will come in a cloud with GREAT POWER and GLORY! Now, when these things begin to take place, look up and raise

your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

Once more Jesus has warned His true followers that at this end time, the last three or four years especially, many false prophets and religious teachers would arise. Some will be able to perform great and mighty miracles. The false prophet of the book of Revelation will be able to bring fire down from heaven. Many will come at that time claiming Jesus has returned, but Jesus said He will not come in such a secret manner that people have to tell you He had arrived and is over in this wilderness area or in a particular room somewhere.

Jesus said His coming will be like the LIGHTNING comes from the east and flashes to the west. As a young lad growing up in England I witnessed such events. Some of the thunder and lightning storms would come upon us very suddenly. Within minutes the sky would be dark with huge black clouds, then loud thunder would roll across the heaven, THEN SUDDENLY the lightning would flash at one side of the sky and flash across to the other side. It was all very SPECTACULAR and QUICK!

Jesus said as His disciples were watching these last day events unfold, they were to realize their redemption was near. He was referring to their being made immortal in the resurrection at His return. The resurrection spoken about in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15.

Jesus used the analogy of a carcass and the eagles or vultures gathering together around it. We have either seen that in person some time, or seen it in a movie or documentary on eagles and vultures. We are to get from that analogy the main thought, not the specifics as such. Jesus was not thinking about the carcass being dead, or the meal the vultures would have. The point He was making was the one carcass being there would draw the birds to it.

He had just mentioned the redemption of His followers, and that redemption was the time of HIM (the one person body, or the one carcass of His analogy) coming to earth again, with glory as the glory of lightning, and the resurrection of all the saints taking place, their redemption glory, and they then coming to where He was, just as the vultures come to where the carcass is. Jesus and His followers would COME TOGETHER. We see this perfectly explained by the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians chapter four.

Jesus will come like the glory of lightning to the clouds, to the air of this earth. It will be a spectacular event, not something secret or un-noticed. And when He comes the RESURRECTION (or changing from flesh and blood to immortal spirit for those saints alive at His coming - 1 Cor. 15) of the saints takes place, their redemption is complete, and they gather together where Christ is in the clouds, and so will be with Him forever more.

The prophecy of Zechariah 14 finishes it all for us. In that very day on which Jesus comes in glory, with the saints (who have been resurrected or changed from human to divine), Jesus and the saints land on earth, at the Mount of Olives, and start to establish the literal Kingdom of God on earth. The reign of Jesus for 1,000 years on earth begins.

Jesus now once more backtracks some in the time period of the last three or so years of this age. Jesus has not yet arrived, His coming like lightning is yet to happen. He wants to here tell His disciples about another spectacular event that will happen, that must happen, an event that they will see in the heavens above, and then know that His coming is very close at hand. Jesus gave definite signs for His servants to watch for during the last years of this age, leading up to His return and their completed redemption in the resurrection.

Jesus said, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the SUN will be DARKENED, and the MOON will not give its light, and the STARS will fall from heaven, and the powers of HEAVEN will be SHAKEN! THEN, after those signs of the heavens, the sign of the SON of man in heaven shall appear, then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will then see the SON of man coming on the CLOUDS of heaven with POWER and great GLORY; and He will send out His angels with a LOUD TRUMPET call, and they will gather together His ELECT from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other end of heaven."

Yes, this is what I just explained above, the time of completed redemption of the saints. The time of the resurrection of the saints to meet Christ in the air, in the clouds. We notice that the angels will have a part in bringing the saints to where Jesus is, gathering them together, like the eagles gather to where the carcass is, so the saints are gathered by the angels to be brought to where Jesus is in the clouds of heaven.

Before this takes place Jesus gave His people the sign of the "heavenly signs" to watch for, so when they saw the sun darkened, and the moon not giving light and the stars falling from heaven, AFTER the great tribulation, after a time of distress such as never before on earth, then they could know their completed redemption in the resurrection at the coming of Christ in glory, was NEAR at hand.

The sign of the Son of man in heaven that shall appear, maybe the sign that is talked about in Revelation 11:19. The sign of the Temple of God in heaven opened and the ark of His testament shown. We notice the context of Rev. 11:19 is the sound of the SEVENTH AND LAST trumpet, the time of the RESURRECTION of the saints, the time for Jesus to COME AGAIN and rule the nations of the earth. All fits together with 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thes. 4; Zech. 14; and Rev. 19 and 20.

Jesus really wanted His people to get the picture, and to get in their mind some very important points within this whole last days scene. He went on to tell us:

"I want you to learn the lesson from the fig tree; as soon as its branches become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So likewise, when you see all these things I've told you about, coming to pass, then know that the end is near, even at the gates. Truly I say to you that this age of mankind will not pass away until all these things come to pass. Heaven and earth will one day pass away, but my words will never pass away, so you can be assured it will all come to pass what I am telling you about.

"You need to take heed to yourself, lest your hearts be weighed down with wickedness and drunkenness and with the cares of this life, and that time come upon you suddenly

like a snare; for it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the earth suddenly, they will not be expecting it. But you my disciples, need to pray and watch at all times that you are counted worthy to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man when He comes.

“Of that specific day and hour when I come again in glory, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son of man, but ONLY my Father.

“I tell you this, as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, right up until the day that Noah went into the Ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them away, so will be the coming of the Son of man.

“So take heed, watch and pray, you do not know when that day will come. It is like a man going on a journey, and when he leaves he puts his servants in charge, each with his work to do, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. You need to watch, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening time, or at midnight, or at the time when the cock crows, or later in the morning. Watch, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

“When that day comes for me to return, two men will be in the field, one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, you do not know WHAT DAY your Lord is coming.”

This whole context is the VERY DAY, the literal 24 hour day, that Jesus will come again from heaven back to this earth. So when He said one would be taken and the other left, He was not talking about some "secret rapture" - an invisible silent, unseen, coming of His, that some people teach, to snatch away the saints while leaving others behind. All kinds of silly scenarios have been imagined by people who teach and believe in the so-called "secret rapture" of the saints, to be secretly snatched out of the world and taken to heaven, while the great tribulation falls on all that are left on earth.

Such people teach that people will be driving their car and then, all of a sudden, disappear or they are driving a school bus and they, as a Christian suddenly, disappear as they are caught up to heaven in a secret rapture. You are left to imagine the horror that takes place on the school bus when the driver suddenly vanishes.

Jesus is here in the whole context talking about the VERY DAY of His coming again. And as the book of Revelation clearly shows there will be Christians on the earth at that time. Jesus in this context of this great prophecy also makes it clear that Christians will be on the earth when He returns in glory. Some will be in the wilderness in safety from all the destruction around them. Some will be called and converted only when the tribulation of the last days is under way, and they will be in different nations, doing different things, with many unconverted people around them.

When the day comes for the Father to send Jesus back to earth, as we have seen the RESURRECTION or CHANGE for the living saints, will take place, ON THAT VERY DAY, as Jesus reaches the clouds of heaven above us. The saints will be gathered by the angels, they will be taken from the grave as they are raised to immortal life, and

taken from wherever they are on earth, in the field, in the bed, working at the mill, if still alive (but the live Christians will as we have seen, be changed from mortal to immortal - 1 Cor.15), and taken to be with Christ in the clouds.

One taken and one left is to do with the RESURRECTION of the saints on the very day that Jesus returns, the day that the Father sends Him back to earth to establish the Kingdom of God on earth for a thousand years.

And God will make sure that the Christian taken in the resurrection will not be driving a bus, or flying a plane, or any such thing, that would endanger innocent lives when they are suddenly not there.

Jesus gave emphasis to His people to WATCH! He went on to say, as He amplified the point of watching, "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and have not let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is going to come at an hour you do not expect.

"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant who when his master comes will find so doing his job faithfully. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

"But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come in a day when he does not expect him to come and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him and put him with the hypocrites; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt. 24:1-51; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-38).

We see that Jesus was very concerned that His disciples would always be WATCHING! The watching Jesus had in mind was far more than just watching world news and world events, in order to tell whereabouts we are in Bible prophecy. Jesus had in mind that His followers should always be watching their LIVES, their CONDUCT, and watching that they remain faithful to their calling. Then no matter when Jesus comes they will be ready to inherit and to enter the Kingdom of God.

We need to remember that for each one of us personally, the day of Christ's coming is just as close as our death, for the very next thing for us after death is to awake in the resurrection at the coming of Jesus. We will not know the passing of time, we will not know how long we have been asleep in death. And most of us do not know when we shall die. So we need, as servants of God, to always be ready, so we can meet our Lord in the clouds and forever more be with Him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

The Great Prophecy Of The End Times Part Two

Parable Of The Ten Maidens And Of The Talents

The Gospel of Matthew chapter 25 is a continuation of the great Olivet prophecy. Matthew is the only one to record the second half, or the continuation of this large and somewhat detailed prophecy of Christ's.

Jesus went on to say:

"Then the Kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and the other five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise maidens took a container of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and went to sleep. But then at midnight there was a loud cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all the maidens rose up and quickly trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise maidens replied, 'Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy more oil for yourselves.' And while they went off to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut. Afterwards the other maidens came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know who you are.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

Many have meditated over what the "oil" could represent. Obviously the bridegroom is Jesus. The wedding feast is the marriage feast at the coming of Christ, when He returns to receive His bride and to enter the feast marriage of the Kingdom of God on earth. This is all depicted in Revelation 19:6-16.

The maidens represent those called to the marriage feast of the Kingdom of God. Though they all went to sleep to some degree, the bridegroom Christ, taking longer than anyone expected to return, the church, half of them did think to make sure they had extra oil in their lamps. The oil could as some have speculated, represent the Holy Spirit, and I think there is some truth to that claim. Whatever the case may be for what the lamps and oil could represent, the main thought that Jesus wants to get across, is what He says at the end of this parable....WATCH, be ready, and He had just before got through talking about watching and being ready. It was all to do with a person's CONDUCT, how they lived. If some of His disciples thought He was delaying His coming, and only wanted to be a Christian and follow Jesus IF they could live to see His return, but got tired of waiting and living like Christ, and went back into the world, and all the ways of the unconverted world, they may very well miss out on entering the

Kingdom, being too late, or just not ready as they should be in order to enter the Kingdom.

Jesus was saying that His disciples, the children of God, must be faithful in their conduct of the life, to the end. If some gave up that life of light, and thought they could get it all back at the last moment, when the shout went out that the bridegroom Christ was coming, then Jesus was warning, they better think again! Some just may leave off making sure they make their calling and election sure (as Peter said we should in 2 Peter 1:3-11), and find it will be too late to do so at the last moment, and Jesus will refuse them entry into the Kingdom when He does come.

Again, some very sobering words from Jesus. They're just not the words most people want to hear, nor the words most are told from their pastors that Jesus said here, and at other times also.

We may also wonder about Jesus saying the maidens were going to meet the bridegroom at night, with lamps, and that he came at midnight. In our modern twenty-first century, western world, we have no such custom, but marriage customs differ in various countries, and they have differed or changed in some countries as the centuries have past.

Going back to the time when Jesus was relating this parable analogy, the general marriage custom in Judea was like this:

"...the essence of the ceremony consisted in the removal of the bride from her father's house....After putting on festive dress....the bridegroom set forth from his house, attended by his groomsmen, proceeded by a band of musicians or singers, and accompanied by persons bearing lamps. Having reached the house of the bride, who with her companions anxiously expected his arrival, he conducted the whole party back to his own or his father's house....On the way back they were joined by a party of young girls (virgins), friends of the bride and bridegroom, who were in waiting to catch the procession as it passed....At the house a feast was prepared, to which all the friends and neighbors were invited, and the festivities were protracted for seven or even fourteen days...." (The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, page 818).

Now it becomes clearer. The bridegroom would go to fetch his bride in the very late afternoon or early evening, hence the taking of lamps, for by the time he and his bride returned to his house it would be dark. As the bridegroom returned with his bride and all in attendance with them, they were met by young girls, maidens, friends of both the bride and bridegroom. These young ladies would also have lamps, as it was now dark. In the parable Jesus says the bridegroom was long in returning, or delayed his coming for some reason not stated and not important, for the purpose of the main point of the parable Jesus wanted to convey. The bridegroom was so long in returning that the maidens fell asleep. Then at midnight the cry went out that the bridegroom was coming, and the young ladies arose to trim and light their lamps, to meet him and join the wedding party back to his home and so be part of the marriage feast. Some of the maidens were wise enough to realize it might be possible the bridegroom would stay with his bride at her home for longer than usual, before returning as a group to his home, so they took extra oil for their lamp just in case that should happen.

The point being that Jesus wanted to get across was those five wise maidens were prepared for any and all situations, as to how long the bridegroom would be before returning, and their joining the bridegroom to the wedding feast.

Going on with more analogies of the Kingdom of heaven, Jesus continued:

"For it will be as a man going on a journey and calling his servants he entrusted to them his property; to one he gave FIVE talents, to another TWO, and another ONE, to each servant according to his natural ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them; and he made five talents more. So too, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But he who had received the one talent, went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants returned and settled the accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came before him, bringing five more talents as well, and saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here they are plus five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will give you authority over much; enter into the joy of your master.'

"And he also who had the two talents came before him, saying, 'Master, you gave me two talents; here they are besides two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done you good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will give you authority over a lot; enter into the joy of your master.'

"He that received the one talent also came before this master, and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not plant. I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is, you can have back what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not planted. Then you ought to have at least invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming back I should have received what was mine with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him that has ten talents.' For I say to you, that to everyone who has, it shall be given; but from him that has not shall be taken away even that which he has. And the unprofitable servant shall be cast out into darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

It was not the first time Jesus used this type of parable. The main point He wants us to get is that, although we may not all be equal in gifts, abilities, money, natural talents, although we may all differ in all these physical things and what was given to us in our genes at conception, in so far as things we can do with our mind, our hands, our feet, and our body (some of us are good at sports, some are not, some are good at music while others are not, some are good at art work while most of us may not be, some can sing like the birds and others are more like a fog-horn, etc.), we can all do something with what we have been given.

We need to find what we have been given and use it, do something with our lives that can make us a profitable servant. We can find what secular job we would be good at, go for it as they say, and be the best we can be at that job. We can look at what natural abilities or talents we have and use them to serve, help, do good to others with those

abilities. If we have or come to have large amounts of money, we can use that money to help, to serve, to give to those who are in true need. Whatever and wherever we are, we can make a difference in this life to someone, somewhere, sometime. And we need to let that sometime, be most of the time.

If we do not use what we have been given, God will count us as an unprofitable servant, and the words Jesus said about what happens to the unprofitable servant, speak for themselves.

If we sit down and use our mind to think, together with the Spirit of God, going to the Lord to ask Him for guidance, we can come up with something that we can do to be a profitable servant, and so have our Father in heaven say to us one day, "Well done you good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over little, so I will give you authority over much, enter the joy of your master."

The Great Separation Of Sheep From Goats

Being a follower of Christ is accepting Him as personal savior, it is repenting of sin, it is a willing heart to obey God, it is realizing the Lord does have teachings or doctrines, and a way of life that we are to try and live, and living that way of life is VERY IMPORTANT! It is so important that Jesus in Matthew 25 devoted a whole parable to and a somewhat detailed, down to earth, explanation, making it very clear what He expects from His disciples, and from those who claim to be have Christ's name....Christians.

Jesus said:

"When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the angels are with Him, then He will sit on His throne of glory. Before Him shall be gathered all the nations, and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left hand. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

"Then He will say to those at His left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Those on the left will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not serve and help you?' Then He will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it NOT to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it not to me.' And they on the left will go away into the punishment that lasts for eternity, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:31-46).

Pretty clear and simple words coming from Jesus is what we have just read. No University degree is needed to understand the message Jesus was teaching. Christians who want to inherit eternal life in the Kingdom of God, at the resurrection when Jesus comes again to rule all nations of the earth, had better be helping, serving, doing good, to others in this lifetime, in one way or another. Jesus clearly taught that being a true child of the Father and inheriting His Kingdom, meant that your life would have to be one of service to others, in whatever way your abilities, time, talents, physical resources, would allow you to be able to help and serve others.

A Christian is not to shut themselves up, go out by themselves and live the days of their life as a lonely hermit on some island in the sea where no one else lives.

We shall see later where Jesus prayed to the Father that His disciples would NOT be taken out of the world (as a general way of life), but that the Father would keep them from the evil of the world.

Jesus earlier had said that His disciples were to shine as a light in a dark place, to be a city set on a hill, that all could see. He had said their good works were to be manifested to the world, so people could come to glorify God. You do not do all that by being shut off in some secluded place all by yourself.

The Christianity Jesus taught was one of "being out there" as we say, being out there to help and serve others. Jesus taught that His followers were to be in essence "in the public eye," but not with vanity of mind and outward pomp, but with a humble and loving attitude of caring for and helping others, as they could and as their means of helping allowed them.

Those who would be Christians and who wanted to also have eternal life in the Kingdom, but who would not serve and help others, were just simply not going to make the grade. They were not going to be numbered among the righteous. They would be looked upon as goats by Jesus, and they would be on the left side, and those on that side would be cast away into the punishment that would last for all eternity, which is the second death in the lake of fire, as we find in the last verses of Revelation 20.

The righteous sheep, those on Jesus' right hand, those who served their fellow man, are called "the righteous" by Jesus, and they He said will go into eternal life.

I will say it again, we cannot "earn" our salvation by our good works, for we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), but God is only going to give His gift of grace or forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Christ, to those who will be willing to have a certain mind-set as to how they will live. And part of that mind-set attitude they must have as God's children, is to serve and help others.

It's not hard, it does not take four years of University book studying and exam writing, to get your degree in "public service" - well not the public service Jesus was here talking about. All you have to do is get up and serve your fellow human being in one way or another. Do that, and as Jesus said to one man who answered correctly about which was the great commandment, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Jesus' Last Passover On Earth Part One

Judas Iscariot Plans To Betray Jesus

After Jesus had finished His prophecy on the Mount of Olives it was evening time, and He said to His disciples, "You know that in two days it is the Passover, and the Son of man will be delivered up to be crucified."

We know from the last hours of Jesus' physical life on earth, what Jesus said to them (and it was not the first time He had told them He would die in Jerusalem), went right over their heads; once more they just did not get it, did not really believe those words. To them it was just incomprehensible to conceive that their Lord and Master, the one they knew was the Messiah, could be put to death.

The chief priests and the elders of the people were at this time busy gathering together in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, taking counsel with each other, as to how to arrest Jesus in a secret manner and kill him. They first thought they better not try to do this during the Feast of the Passover and days of Unleavened Bread (which was eight days in total, but during Christ's time the whole period was known by the name "Passover").

Then something happened to change their minds about when they would try to arrest and kill Jesus.

The disciples were really not understanding what was all going on at this time in Jesus' ministry. They did not understand the prophecies in the Old Testament about how the Messiah would come and have to die for the sins of the world. They were somewhat familiar with the prophecy of the Messiah coming in power and glory, to reign over the nations and rule the world, but with all that Jesus was saying, and the people getting divided over what they wanted to believe the Messiah should be doing with them, and for them, and against the Romans, there was confusion even in their minds.

Judas Iscariot was as confused as any of them. Surely he was thinking, the Messiah is going to rise up with His mighty power and show these scribes and Pharisees and priests, a thing or two. He was probably thinking Jesus had only used "words" against them so far, but He must be going to use His power and obliterate them, literally. Judas was probably thinking Christ should do that, obliterate those silly hypocritical religious leaders of Judea. And thought no doubt Jesus would then continue using His power to bring the people of Judah together, form an army, fight against the Roman power, destroy them, and set up the Kingdom of God on earth.

How could he, he thought, help get Jesus started on this road of conquest. His mind was not just confused, but anxious, on edge, eagerly desiring to see all this take place. And with his mind in such a state of unrest and looseness, it was all that Satan needed.

Luke records for us that it was at this time that Satan entered, literally took over the body and mind of Judas Iscariot.

Judas, now possessed by Satan the Devil, hurried off to the chief priests and elders of the people, to offer his service in how he might betray Jesus and hand Him over to them. The accounts in the Gospels do not tell us if Judas did this thinking Jesus would then have to use His power and fight and destroy the priests and elders, and then move on to destroy the Roman armies, or if Satan just simple got a hold of his mind, twisted it so much out of normal, that Judas just wanted Jesus in the hands of the priests and elders so they could do with Him whatever they wanted.

Whatever the case as to what was going on in the mind of Judas at this time, we are told Satan entered him, and off he went to betray Jesus to the priests and elders of Judea.

The priests and elders of course were delighted that Judas was offering his help so they could arrest Jesus. They had plans to kill Him. Judas may not have known that, probably did not, Satan no doubt kept that from the mind of Judas. Well, the priests and elders were so grateful for Judas' offer that they were ready to offer him money. Judas actually asked them how much they would give him if he delivered Jesus into their hands. They said they would pay him thirty pieces of silver. Thirty pieces of silver was the price for a slave (Exodus 21:32). They regarded Jesus as worth very little. He agreed, and from that moment on Judas looked for a way and an opportunity to betray Jesus into their hands (Matt. 26:1-5, 14-16; Mark 14:1, 2, 10, 11; Luke 22:1-6).

Preparing For The Passover

To understand some of the passages in the Gospels and the events of the last day of the life of Christ on this earth in human form, we need to understand some basics about the Passover, as well as some of the traditions that many of the Jews were doing at the time of Christ, as taught by the scribes and Pharisees.

The original Passover of Exodus 12, was a household Passover, a few families coming together. A priest was not needed, nor a Tabernacle or Temple. The lamb was chosen and was kept UP TO the 14th day of the first month. It was killed at "evening" or "between the two evenings" which was at dusk or sunset, the beginning of the 14th, that portion of time when the sun first goes down behind the horizon and when it become black of night. As the sun set the family or small gathering of two or so families, killed the Passover lamb, and roasted it, which took a number of hours (some say 3 or 4 hours) and then sat down with bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and ate the lamb. It was well into the night when all of this was finally finished, often everyone stayed up all during that night of the 14th.

The Passover day was not a Sabbath day, but at the end of the 14th, the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread began, and that first day of the Unleavened Bread feast, was a Sabbath day. It was God's law that by the time the 15th day arrived, all leaven was to be out of the homes of the Israelites. They had up to and including the 14th day, to remove the leaven and prepare for the feast of Unleavened Bread, which was to be observed for a full 7 days.

Now by the time of Christ the scribes and Pharisees had introduced and adopted a number of changes to Exodus 12. They and their followers had gotten into the habit of getting rid of leaven on the 14th day, and so in Jewish terminology, the 14th day was "a day of unleavened bread" because of the tradition taught by the Pharisees of putting out leaven on the 14th, so there was no question of any of it being left in the home when the 15th day arrived.

The Pharisees had taught the people that the lambs for the Passover were to be slain in the Temple, under the Priests and Levites. And they traditionally started to do this on the 14th day, after the morning sacrifice. Some scholars claim they started at 3 p.m. in the afternoon, but others state it could have been much earlier, as the priests would not have been able to kill enough lambs for the people, between only 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. 6 p.m. was when they would start to roast the lamb, which was the beginning of the 15th day of the first month.

Whatever it may have been, the fact is the Pharisees had taken the Passover meal and carried it over into the night portion of the 15th day, which was the start of the 7 days of the Unleavened Bread feast. They had MIXED the TWO separate feasts of God and put them together as one, or putting it another way, they had brought the Passover meal over into the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread.

With this in mind, we can begin to understand some of the words used in the Gospel accounts of this last day of Jesus' life as a human being.

We read in Mark and Luke that the day of "unleavened bread" when the Passover lambs WERE BEING SLAIN (as the Greek tense is) had just come. This was the "unleavened" day when the Pharisees and their followers were TRADITIONALLY getting leaven out of their homes (some even started to clear leaven out on the 13th day), it was the BEGINNING of the 14th day, which was not a part of the 7 days feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12), but had become traditionally a day of "unleavened" because of what the Pharisees were teaching and had been practicing for a few centuries by this time.

The disciples knew, from being with Jesus for three years or so, that He observed the Passover like many other Jews, at the beginning of the 14th day, the "evening" of the 14th day, as prescribed in the beginning by God in Exodus 12.

The small groups of people in and around Jerusalem, were beginning to gather together, they were already beginning to kill the Passover lambs, at sundown. It was sunset at the beginning of the 14th day of the first month, and Jesus had not said ANYTHING about where they would keep and observe the Passover meal. This was very unusual indeed. The disciples were getting very uptight, very anxious, very bewildered. Everything seemed very confusing to them, Jesus had said things about His death that they just could not believe, and they knew the scribes, Pharisees, and elders of the people were on the war path as we might put it, with Jesus. And now, it was just sunset, the beginning of the 14th, the time when groups of people in their homes were killing the Passover lamb and making reading to observe the Passover meal, and Jesus

had said not one word to them about where they as a group would observe the Passover meal.

They were now beside themselves, and had to say something, they could not retain their anxious thoughts any more.

"Master, master, it is late, you've said nothing to us about where we shall observe the Passover. People are already killing the lambs in their groups and places of gathering. Where Lord, will you have us go and prepare for you and us to eat the Passover?"

Jesus chose two of them, Peter and John, and sent them, saying to them, "Go into the city of Jerusalem, and when you enter you will see a man carrying a jar of water, follow him into the house where he goes, and say to the house owner, 'The Teacher says, my time is at hand, and I will eat the Passover at your house with my disciples.' Ask him to show you the room where we are to hold the Passover meal. He will show you an upper room that is furnished; there make ready for us all."

And the two disciples went and they found it all as Jesus had told them. And they there prepared the Passover meal (Matt. 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13).

Finding a man in Jerusalem as Jesus had described to them, was not hard, for it was women who usually carried the water pots, seeing a man doing this would have been very noticeable. To kill and roast a lamb for Jesus and the twelve disciples, probably would have taken about 3 to 4 hours. The two disciples were not sent to find the room until sunset, dusk time, of the beginning of the 14th day. By the time they arrived in Jerusalem and found the room and killed and prepared the Passover, for Jesus and the others to sit down and eat, it would have been about 10 p.m. possibly even as late as 11 p.m.

This was fine, for as I've said above, the eating of the Passover and reflections on the whole meaning of it, often went on all through the night, then they would go to their tents in the morning and sleep (Deut. 16:7). Of course in Jesus' day it was not "tents" they went to, but homes or places where they could sleep during the daylight hours of the 14th day. But this Passover night and coming day would be like no other ever before or ever again will be.

The Passover meal was now all prepared. They just had to wait for Jesus to arrive with the other ten disciples.

Jesus Eats The Passover Meal With His Disciples

It was late that Tuesday evening (it was a Tuesday evening when this Passover was observed in the year 30 A.D.) and Jesus arrived at this upper room with the other ten apostles. The hour had arrived and they all sat down. Jesus said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you all before I suffer; for I tell you I shall never eat it again, until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."

They then started into the ancient and traditional Passover meal of the basic three things that were always a part of that observance, namely, the lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs.

You may want to here re-read the Old Testament Bible Story of Exodus chapter twelve.

Now at this Passover Jesus introduced the New Testament ordinance of the "bread and fruit of the vine."

Jesus took some of the unleavened bread and broke it into pieces, gave thanks, and said, "Take a piece, this bread represents my body, which is given for you: this do in like manner in the memorial of me."

Jesus then took the cup of the fruit of the vine, and gave thanks. He then said to them, "Each one of you, drink from this cup. The fruit of the vine represents my blood of the New Covenant, which is poured out for you, for the forgiveness of sins. I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine again, unto the day I drink it new with you when the Kingdom of God comes."

They all did what Jesus requested and each took a piece of unleavened bread, and each drank from the cup of the fruit of the vine.

The apostle Paul also outlines this New Testament ordinance in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. It is THE memorial service, remembering the Lord's death. It was introduced by the Lord Jesus on the evening of the 14th of the first month in the Hebrew or Jewish calendar. It was only observed in the apostolic Church of God, once a year, in the first part of the hours of the 14th, what we call evening time.

After Jesus had introduced and performed this New Testament ordinance, He looked around at all twelve disciples and in a very sombre tone of voice, said, "But behold the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of man goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"

Amazement and shock came across the faces of the twelve, on hearing those words. And soon they began to question each other, as to which of them it was going to be that would betray Jesus (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23).

The part of that night had come, where it was customary to leave the supper table and recline and lounge around as we say, on various types of seats and cushions. It was the time to relax and ponder and meditate on the Passover and all that it signified in Jewish history. This Passover was way more significant than any of them could have possibly imagined.

Jesus' Words Do Not Imbed Too Deeply

No sooner it seemed had Jesus spoken these words of the disciples having love one towards another, that they were into arguing among themselves as to which one of them was to be regarded as the "greatest."

Jesus had to intervene with words He had told them once before, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. They rule each other with iron dictatorship. But it shall NOT be so with you! Rather, let those who would want to be the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the newest kid on the block. And those who would want to lead as the one who serves. For which is the greatest, the one who sits at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at the table? But I have been among you as one who serves."

The whole life and ministry of Jesus was one of service, one of helping, healing, doing goodness, having mercy, on people and for people. He served in teaching and preaching the wonderful truths of salvation and the Kingdom of God. Jesus had lived and acted as anything but a despot or iron fisted dictator, although He spoke pretty plainly a few times to the religious leaders of the day.

He even had, at this late time in the evening and in His physical life, to correct His disciples on a matter that was important. But He wanted to leave this conversation point in an upbeat, positive manner, so He said, "You are those who have continued with me in my trials; as my Father has appointed a Kingdom for me, so I have appointed that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:24-30).

The Kingdom that Jesus was thinking about, the one that the Father had appointed Him to have, was to be a literal Kingdom on this earth, one that would rule all nations. The Kingdom that the prophets of old had foretold about over and over again in their writings, was the one that they also foretold the Messiah would be king over. Jesus again promised His eleven as it was now, that they would each rule over one of the tribes of Israel when His Kingdom came.

Jesus' Washes The Feet Of His 12 Disciples

John is the only Gospel writer to record the next event at that last Passover Jesus held with His disciples.

The supper Passover meal had ended. The KJV translation is correct when it says, "and supper ended" for the Greek tense here used by John is "aorist" tense, which signifies a completed action in the past, an event already finished in the past.

The Devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back again to God, rose from the supper table, laid aside His outer garments, and girded Himself with a towel. He then poured water in a bowl, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel He had around Himself.

He came to Simon Peter; and Peter said to Him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "What I am doing now you do not understand, but you will afterwards, later you will understand." Peter still shocked at this thought of Jesus washing his feet, quickly replied, "Oh no Lord, you shall never wash my feet!"

We have to remember that it was the lowest of the servants of the household that washed the feet of visitors, washing away the dust and dirt from their travel. Also remember that the people wore sandals on their bare feet. It was the custom of the day that if you had visitors you had your lowest ranking servant wash their feet when they came into your home.

Peter could not think that Jesus was acting out what the lowest household servant would do. He just was not about to let Jesus wash his feet, thinking if anything it should be the other way around, and he should be washing Jesus' feet.

But Jesus answered him with, "If I do not wash your feet, you have no part in me." Simon Peter then said, "Well Lord, not my feet only then, but my hands and head!" Jesus said to him, "He that has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean but not all of you."

Jesus knew who it was that would betray Him, and that was the reason He said, "You are not all clean."

The disciples would have bathed themselves before attending the very important Passover meal. So they really were clean in a physical way, but in a spiritual way there was need for a lesson to be learned in Jesus washing all of their feet, even the feet of Judas Iscariot. They all needed to learn the lesson, which Jesus explained (and we'll get to that right away), but one of them (Judas) was unclean in many ways other than the physical. We have seen he was by now possessed by Satan the Devil himself.

When He had washed their feet, and taken up His garments again, and resumed His sitting place, He said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? I will tell you. You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, I am indeed both. If I then, your Lord, and your Teacher, have washed your feet, then you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an EXAMPLE, that you also SHOULD DO as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, BLESSED are you IF YOU DO them."

Jesus was demonstrating to them that they should be servants. And if Jesus could get down and wash His disciples feet, being much greater than they, being the one to send them out to do His work, and so if He could humble Himself to wash their feet, like a lowly servant, how much more should they be willing to wash one another's feet. He said He had set them the example, and that they knowing this should do likewise, and they would be blessed for knowing and doing as He had done to them.

So today God's people around the world, on Passover evening, not only take the bread and the fruit of the vine (wine or grape juice) but also wash each other's feet.

It is an outward symbol of a willingness to be a servant to others, to not think too highly of themselves, to remember they are called to serve each other, to live a life of serving and helping each other, and all mankind, in whatever good ways they can possibly do, with the gifts, talents, abilities, and material goods, they have been given from God in order to share and serve others with.

Jesus was saying all these things to all of them, but ONE, for He finished this event by saying, "I am not speaking of you all; I know whom I have chosen; it is that the Scriptures may be fulfilled, 'He who ate by bread has lifted his heel against me.' I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives Him who sent me" (John 13:1-20).

The evening had taken on by now a VERY SOMBRE atmosphere, a grave foreboding was in that upper room. Many of the minds of the disciples were even more troubled and confused by all that Jesus had said and done.

Jesus was about to say to them words that He had said a little earlier. This would once more trouble them greatly.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Jesus' Last Passover On Earth Part Two

Jesus Tells Judas To Do His Work Quickly

It was well into the night of the 14th. It was the early hours past midnight, and Jesus was very troubled in spirit, and said, "Truly, it is indeed true, what I say unto you; one of you shall betray me."

The disciples again with a sleepy dazed look on their faces, were not certain of whom He was speaking about. In fact "betraying" was just too hard for them to imagine. One of His disciples (it was John) was stretched out somewhat, lying half across Jesus' chest, as they were all in a relaxed and lazy lounging position. Simon Peter beckoned to John and asked him to ask Jesus, whom He was speaking about, as John was the closest to Christ. So John said to Jesus, "Lord, who is it?"

Jesus, paused for a moment, then said, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel of bread, when I have dipped it." Jesus got up and dipped a small portion of bread and He gave it to Judas Iscariot. Then after Judas took it, Satan once more entered into him (the Devil had left Judas for a while, but was now back with a vengeance as we say). Jesus looked at Judas and said, "What you are going to do, do it quickly."

The disciples heard Him saying those words and still did not realize why He had said them, or what they meant. Some thought that because Judas had the money box (as he was banker for them) Jesus was telling Judas to go and buy things that was needful for them as they observed the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. Their minds were as far away from knowing what Jesus really meant and what about was to happen the rest of that night, as east is from west. Judas stood up and immediately left. It was a dark night in more than one way.

After Judas had gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in Him is God glorified; and if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself."

The time had come in the history of the universe that God's great plan of redemption for the human kind, was to take its literal fulfilment, and the time that BOTH God the Father and Christ Jesus would be glorified as this plan of salvation took reality.

Jesus looking more intently at the eleven disciples, went on to say, "Little children, for yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' A NEW commandment I give to you, it is, that you LOVE one another, EVEN AS I LOVED YOU, that you ALSO LOVE one another. And by this all men will know that you are my disciples, IF you have LOVE one for another" (John 13:21-25).

Jesus had certainly set that perfect example of how love between brethren should be lived. He wanted all His disciples to emulate His example. Then people would indeed know that such people who lived as Jesus had lived towards His disciples while on earth, were His true followers. In this down-to-earth, nitty-gritty, sometimes hard ways to strive against, it is not always easy to live up to the example of Jesus, as we work with, fellowship with, talk with, and inter-act with, other disciples of Christ. But we must try, we must endeavor, to follow His example in this matter of love towards others in the flock that belongs to Jesus.

To The Mount of Olives

It was time to close this event of the Passover celebration in the upper room. They all sang a hymn, and then Jesus and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives.

Peter had not forgotten what Jesus had told them about Him going away, so he asked Christ, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterwards."

Jesus was probably here talking about what would happen to Him in the next 12 or so hours, eventually dying on the cross. Though the disciples could not follow Him in all He would undergo the rest of the 14th day, many of them would in their lifetime, be put to death for their following in the footsteps of Christ.

Jesus then looked at all the eleven and said to them, "You will all fall away because of what I will go through this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered' (Zech.13:7). But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

Turning once more to Peter, Jesus, said to him, "Peter, Peter, Satan desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat is sifted, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you are converted with the Spirit, I want you to strengthen your brethren."

Peter stood up straight at these words from Jesus. He put his shoulders back, raised his chin, got a strong defiant look on his face, and with boldness and with force in his voice, said, "Oh, Lord, even though they all fall away I will not. I am ready to go with you to prison and death, Yes, I will lay down my life for you."

Jesus smiled a little, then said, "O, Peter, it is true what I'm going to say. This very night before the cock crows twice, you will have denied me three times."

Peter vehemently and immediately shot back with, "Lord, if I must die with you, I will not deny you." And the other ten disciples all said the same thing. They had no idea their words would come flying back in their face, much sooner than they ever thought, for all of them would have to eat their words, as they would all forsake Jesus within a short while, as the events of that night would escalate and explode out of control.

Jesus said to them, "I sent you out once with no purse or bag, or extra sandals, and did you lack anything?" They replied that they did not. "Well now," Jesus continued, "let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword, sell his coat and buy one. For I tell you this Scripture must be fulfilled, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors' (Isa. 53:12), for what is written about me has its fulfillment."

The disciples looked at each other, some of them moved their outer garment to reveal a few swords. "Look Lord," they said, "here we have two swords." And Jesus seeing this said, "Alright, that is enough, the prophecy is fulfilled" (Luke 22:31-38; Matt. 26:30-35; Mark 14:26-31; John 13:36-38).

Some Final In-Depth Teaching On Faith, Hope, Love, And Obedience

There was still some time left before He would be betrayed by Judas Iscariot. Jesus would use that time to give His disciples some very important teachings and encouragement.

Jesus said: "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it was not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And in so preparing a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to be with me, that where I am when I come again, you may be also. You know the way to where I am going."

Jesus was going to go back to be with God the Father in heaven. While there He would prepare positions of rulership for all His disciples. Then He would come again. He would receive His disciples at His coming, as we have seen, He would receive them in the clouds, in the air or atmosphere of this earth. The clouds are relatively close to the earth's surface. From there He would continue to descend with His followers to the Mount of Olives. His disciples of all ages from the time of Adam, would then be with Jesus forever more. I have in past chapters given you passages of Scripture to prove what I have just stated.

At these words from Jesus, Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know or understand where you are going; so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me. If you have known me then you will know the Father also; so you really do know the Father and have seen Him."

Philip spoke up and said, "Lord, show us plainly the Father, and literally seeing Him we will be satisfied." Jesus replied, "Oh, have I been all this time with you, and you do not know me Philip? He who has seen ME has also seen the Father; how can you say, 'Let us see the Father'? Do you not believe that I am IN the Father and the Father IN me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from mine own authority; but the Father who DWELLS IN me does His works. Believe me that I AM IN the Father and the Father IS IN me; or believe what I say because of the works I do. Truly, very true indeed, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I have done; and yes, even greater works than these, many will do, because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my

name I will do it. IF you LOVE me, you WILL keep my COMMANDMENTS!" (John 14:1-15).

Jesus was the very personification of the Father. Seeing and knowing Jesus as the 12 disciples had for three years or more, was just like as if they had literally seen the Father. If the Father had actually come down from heaven and stood before the disciples, they would have seen another Jesus Christ. What Jesus was trying to convey to them was that He and Father were like identical twins. And if you have ever seen identical twins you will know that it is just about impossible to tell them apart, they are so much like each other.

Jesus and the Father were IN each other, as was the one so was the other. And Christ had done the works during His ministry to prove beyond any question or doubt that He was IN the Father and the Father was IN Him!

Many would come after He was back in heaven, Jesus said, that would do the same kind of works as He did, even sometimes greater works. And this we shall see was indeed true, as we go through the book of Acts in this New Testament Bible Story.

Jesus once more reminded them to ask in His name, and many things would be granted, so God could be glorified in the Son.

Then Jesus finished this part of His last hour of teaching them while still a human being, by telling them that if they loved Him, they would keep His commandments. This last request or command certainly does not sound like Jesus was "doing away with" commandments, but firmly establishing them. And a reading of the rest of the New Testament, especially the letters of the apostle John (1, 2 and 3 John) and the letter of James, clearly show that commandment keeping is to be a very important part of the life of anyone who claims to love Jesus.

Promise Of The Holy Spirit

Jesus told His disciples, "And I will pray to the Father and He will give you another encouraging Counselor, to be with you at all times, even the Holy Spirit which will lead you into all truth. The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit, because it neither sees him or recognizes him; you know him, for he dwells with you now, and shall be in you later. I will not abandon you as orphans; I will come to you. In a little while the world will not see me again, but you will. For I will live again, and you will also. When I am raised to life again you will know that I am in the Father, and that you are in me, and I in you. Those who obey my commandments are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them, and I will love them. And I will reveal myself to each one of those who love me."

Judas (not Iscariot, but the other disciple with that name) said to Him, "Lord, why are you going to reveal yourself to us and not to the world at large?" Jesus answered him, "All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and WE will COME to them and LIVE in them. Anyone who does not love me will not do what I say. And remember my words are not my own. What I say is from the Father who sent me. I am telling you these things now, while I am still with you. But when the Father sends the

Comforter, the Holy Spirit, in my name, he will teach you everything and remind you of everything I have told you.

"I am leaving you with a gift - peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is not like the peace the world gives. So do not be troubled or afraid. Remember what I have told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really love me you will be happy for me, because now I can go to the Father, who is GREATER than I am. I have told you these things before they happen so that you will believe when they do happen. I don't have much more time to talk to you, because the prince of this world approaches. He has no power over me, but I will do what the Father requires of me, so that the world will know that I love the Father. Rise up now, and let's go a little further."

In Jesus' last in-depth teaching while still a physical man, this was the great promise He gave that the Holy Spirit would come to His disciples and unite with their minds. This came about on the great feast of Pentecost, as we shall read later in the second chapter of the book of the Acts of the apostles. From that day forward the Holy Spirit has ever been available to beget the children of God. The Holy Spirit is the power nature that comes from the very being of God the Father and Jesus Christ, and in so coming into human kind, it is just as if God the Father and Jesus Christ were BOTH living inside that human being. That is why Jesus said that both He and the Father would come and live within the disciple. They live in the disciple by means of their Holy Spirit.

Jesus here uses "he" for the Holy Spirit, or so the King James Version and others translate. It is all really a "technical" Greek grammar rule of writing, which does not concern us here in this writing of the New Testament Bible Story. The Holy Spirit is not a literal person, as are Jesus and the Father. Many writers in the Bible used what is called "personification" - which is giving human form and character to things not being a separate individual person. A very good example is that found in the book of Proverbs. There we see that "wisdom" (which is of God) is likened unto a physical human woman. And of course we today in our English language often call our car or boat "she" - we may say, "Well, something is wrong with my car today, she just would not start."

Jesus said He would give His disciples "peace" - of mind and heart. The child of God knows truths of life and death and the promise of what is to come, that the rest of the world does not know or understand, not in the way true Christians do. There is much comfort and peace in knowing the truths of God.

Jesus was freely giving His life as a sacrifice for sins. The Devil had no power over Him, except what Jesus Himself allowed, and He was going to allow Satan to kill Him physically because it was the Father's will, for the salvation plan of mankind that the Father had ordained from before the world began. And Jesus was willing to obey the Father's wish, desire, and commands.

Vine And Branch Analogy And Command To Love One Another

Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears NO fruit, He takes away, and every branch that DOES bear fruit He prunes, so that they produce even more fruit. You have already been pruned for greater fruitfulness by the words and teachings I have given you. Remain in me, and I will

remain in you. For a branch cannot bear fruit if it is cut off from the vine, and so you cannot be fruitful apart from me.

Yes, I am the true vine and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me, cut off from me, you can do nothing that is everlasting, and eternally good. Anyone who parts from me is thrown away like a useless branch and dries up, being dead. Then such branches are gathered into a pile and burned. But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you will receive many answers to your requests. My true disciples joined to me will produce much fruit. This brings great glory to my Father."

These are simple words to read and understand. They are also the heart and core of being a true disciple and child of God the Father. If we remain in Christ, which means we know His word, and we are willing to obey His commands, then and only then can we produce the fruit that is fit for eternal life. Not that we earn our salvation as I've said a number of times before, but we must remain IN Jesus so we will not be a cut off branch that is useless and only good to be burned up. As we stay in Christ, we will automatically produce fruit, and the Father wants fruit produced. He expects that when He gives His gift of grace through Christ to someone, they will use it to grow and produce worthwhile fruit. He will be glorified by branches (Christians) of the vine (Christ) producing much fruit.

Jesus finished this thought and teaching with, "I have loved you even as my Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey me you remain in my love, just as I obey the Father and remain in His love. I have told you all this that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, you will have an overflowing joy.

"I command you to love each other as I have loved you. And here is how to measure it - the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends. You are my friends IF you obey me. I no longer call you 'servants' because the master does not confide and open up to his servants in personal ways. But I call you 'friends' as I have opened up to you and told you everything the Father told me. You did not really choose me. It was I that chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you many other things that you may ask for, when using my name. I COMMAND YOU to LOVE each other!" (John 15:1-17).

Once more, some pretty simple words to understand, from Jesus. His followers are to remain in His love, and remaining in His love means they OBEY Him, as He obeyed the Father. Jesus commands His disciples to love each other, and the ultimate love is to lay down our lives for another. Jesus was in a few hours going to literally lay down His life for the love of His disciples and for all mankind. We may not be called upon to literally give our life up for another human person (some people do as we now and again see on TV news reports), but we must, as we have seen Jesus emphasize in parables and teachings of the past, be willing to serve and help others as we can, by the means that we can, especially those who are the disciples of our Lord and Savior. This was not a "suggestion" from Jesus, it was a COMMAND!

Yes, what we are reading, the words of Jesus just before He gave up His life for His friends, for you and me, are plain and simple....they are the plain truth.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Jesus' Last Passover On Earth Part Three

Jesus Warns Of Persecution

Jesus continued with plain words to His disciples, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, doing what the world does, the world would love you; but because you are not living like the general world lives, but I chose you to live differently, then the world will hate you. Remember the word I said to you that a servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they keep my word, they will also keep yours. They will persecute you because of me, for they do not know the One who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to the world, they would not understand what sin is; but now they really do not have any excuse for their sin.

He who hates me, hates my Father also. If I had not done in the world the works that I did do, which no one else ever did, they could say they do not understand what sin is; but now they have seen and heard, and they hated both myself and the Father. All this fulfils the words written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.' But when the Holy Spirit comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, that proceeds from the Father Himself, he will bear witness of me; and you also are witnesses because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry.

I have said all this to you to help keep you from falling away. They, your persecutors, will throw you out of the churches; indeed, the day is coming when whoever KILLS you will THINK he is offering SERVICE to GOD! And they will do all this because they have not known the Father, nor known me. But I have said these things to you, that when they do these things, you will remember I told you it would happen at times until I come again" (John 15:18 to 16:4).

And so the history of the last two thousands year has shown that at times some of God's true people have been persecuted even unto death, often by others who claimed the name of Christ, thinking that by killing people they were actually serving God. Such can be the depths of deception that the human mind can fall into, usually helped along in that deception by Satan the Devil and his demons.

Words Of Comfort

Jesus now goes into quite a long talk about Himself and the Holy Spirit, to give comfort and encouragement to all His disciples from the day He spoke them, to the day of His return in glory.

"I did not say these things to you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to Him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell

you the truth; it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go, the Holy Spirit will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince and convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. Of sin, because they do not believe in me; of righteousness because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

"I have many things to say to you, but now is not the right time, for you are not in the state of mind to hear all I have to say to you. When the Spirit of truth has come, he [it] will guide you all into the truth; for he [it] will not speak to you by his own authority, but whatsoever the Spirit hears that it will speak to you, and he [it] will declare and help you understand the things that are yet to come on this earth. He [It] will glorify me, for he [it] will take what belongs to me, and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore that is why I said to you he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

"In a little while, you will see me no more; then again in a little while, you will see me once more."

Some of the disciples said to each other, "What is this that Jesus talks about, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'; and 'because I go to the Father'? They said to each other that they did not understand what Jesus was saying by "a little while." They were again very puzzled by many things He was saying of late, and now puzzled over this, "a little while" talk.

Jesus knew they wanted to ask Him to be clearer in His talking to them. Jesus said to them, "Is this what you are asking each other, what I meant by saying, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and then a little while and you will see me'? Well, shortly you will all weep and lament, while the world will rejoice; you will be filled with sorrow, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. When a woman goes into labor and is ready to deliver a child, she has sorrow and anguish because her time to bring forth a child has come; but when she has brought forth her baby, her anguish she no longer remembers, for her joy that a child is born over shadows any anguish she had. So, you have sorrow now, you are down cast and low in the spirit of your minds, but I will see you again and your heart will then rejoice, and no one will be able to take away your joy of heart. On that day you will ask me no questions. But truly I say to you, if you do ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you, in my name. If you have not yet asked anything in my name, then ask, and you will receive, in order that your joy may be full.

Yes I know I have often spoken to you in parables and analogies; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in parables and analogies, but I will tell you clearly and plainly what comes from the Father. At that time you will ask in my name; and I will not have to pray to the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father. So the Father will answer you. Yes, I have come from the Father into this world, and again I am going to leave this world and return to the Father."

"Ah, now you are speaking plainly," the disciples said, "and not in parables. We know that you know all things, and need no one to question you about that fact. And by all this we believe you have come from God."

Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will all be scattered, every man to his home, and will leave me alone; yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace of heart. In the world you will at times have tribulation; but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world, and you can also, if you have me with you" (John 16:4-33).

Once more Jesus gave them the hope and comfort that the Holy Spirit would come and lead them, teach them, give them strength, and guide them into remembering all that Jesus had taught them, and also lead them into more of the truths of God.

Jesus was telling them that He would be taken away from them in a very short time, that they would be scattered, they would be in sorrow, anguish, very low in their hearts and minds, somewhat like being very sad over the loss of a close friend, or a pet dog or cat. But, He was also assuring them that they would see Him again, and they did indeed after He had risen from the grave. And Jesus told them that at that time they would be in utter joy, which, as we shall see later, they certainly were.

He told them to be asking the Father in His name, and He was telling them that the Father loved them, because they had loved Him and believed that He did come from the Father. He told them He did come from the Father, and that He now needed to go back to the Father.

The disciples could now understand those clear words of Jesus' and they told Him they very much believed He had come from the Father.

Jesus acknowledged what they now confessed, but wanted to tell them that even in their state of belief, they would very shortly be scattered by the events that would unfold, and He would be a lonely individual, yet not alone because the Father would be with Him.

Jesus told them that sometimes in the life of a disciple of His, there would be trials, tests, troubles, and tribulation; but He wanted them to know they could still have great joy, to be of good cheer, for as He had overcome the world with all its tribulations, so they likewise could overcome the world.

With God the Father and Jesus Christ living within us through the Holy Spirit, we can have victory over Satan, our carnal pulls of the flesh, and over all the tribulations that the world can sometimes throw at us. When those disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit on the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2), they were filled with the very power and nature of God, and did go forth into the world, did at times face tribulations, but they remembered and understood all the words Jesus had spoken to them, while He was with them on earth. They did have cheer in their hearts and they did overcome the world.

Jesus' Personal Prayer For His Disciples

Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given Him power over all flesh, so that he might give ETERNAL LIFE to all whom YOU have given to HIM. And this is eternal

life, that they may KNOW YOU the ONLY true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished and done all the works you gave me to do; and now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the GLORY I HAD WITH YOU BEFORE the world was made.

"I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave to me out of this world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they HAVE KEPT my WORD. Now they KNOW that EVERYTHING you gave me was FROM you; and they have BELIEVED that YOU DID send me. I am praying FOR THEM; I am not now praying for the world, but for THOSE whom you gave to me, for they are YOURS. All mine are yours. And yours are mine. I am glorified in them.

"Now I will soon be no more in this world, but they will remain in this world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, PLEASE KEEP THEM in the name which you gave to me, that THEY may be as ONE, even as WE are ONE.

"While I was with them I kept them in the name you gave to me; I have guarded and protected them, and not one of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you; and these things I have spoken while in the world that my disciples may have the joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given THEM your WORD; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Please Father, set them apart in the truth; YOUR WORD IS TRUTH. As you did send me into the world, so I send them into the world. And for their sake I set myself apart in you, that they also may be set apart in the truth.

"I do only not pray for these my disciples that are here, but also for those who will believe in me through their word of teaching, that they ALL may be ONE; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be IN US, so that the world may believe that you DID SEND me.

"The glory that you gave to me I give to them, that THEY may be ONE even as WE are ONE. I in them and you in me, that THEY may become PERFECTLY ONE, so that the world may know that you did send me, and have loved THEM as you loved ME.

"Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I will be, in your Kingdom, to behold my GLORY which you have given me in the love for me before the foundation of the world.

"O righteous Father, the world has not known you, but I HAVE KNOWN you; and these my disciples have known that you have sent me. I made known to them YOUR NAME, and I will make it known always, that the love with which you have loved me may be in THEM, and I IN them" (John 17:1-26).

There is little to comment on here, the words of Jesus in this pray are clear and simple to read and understand. It is worth going over them again, slowly, and often, with thoughtful meditation.

When Jesus had spoken these words He went on with His disciples, across the Kidron Valley to a garden called Gethsemane.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Jesus In Gethsemane - Is Betrayed And Arrested

After Jesus had told His disciples all the things we covered in the last two chapter, He and His disciples crossed the Kidron Valley and entered a garden called Gethsemane.

"I want you to sit here," Jesus told them all, as He Himself would go a little further into the garden. He took with him, Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, namely, James and John. Jesus became very troubled and sorrowful. He said to the three that were with Him, "I am very sorrowful, even unto death; I want you to remain here, and watch with me." He went on alone a little further, about a stones throw, and fell down on His knees and with great anguish prayed, "O Father, if it be possible, let this hour pass from me; nevertheless, let it not be my will, but your will that is done."

Jesus was feeling weak in the knees, and as we feel when about to faint, there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, who was sent to strengthen Him.

And He came back to the three disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, "Could you not watch with me for just one hour? Watch and pray that you will not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

Jesus went away for the second time, and prayed, "My Father, if it be possible let this cup be taken away, so I don't have to drink it, but your will be done."

Again, He came to the three disciples and found them sleeping, for their eyes were too heavy to stay awake, as it was well into the night of this 14th Passover day.

Jesus was in emotional agony by now, so much so that His sweat was mingled with blood. According to the medical world, this is quite possible, you can be so intense that your blood vessels break beneath your skin and blood does indeed mingle with your sweat. Jesus for the third time went away and prayed the same words.

Then returning to the disciples for the third time and finding them still asleep, said, "Are you still sleeping. Rise up and pray that you do not enter into temptation. Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man will is going to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see my betrayer is coming."

While Jesus was still uttering these words Judas Iscariot came. Now, Judas was well acquainted with the garden of Gethsemane, for Jesus often met there with His disciples. He knew Jesus would probably be in the garden during the hours of the Passover night. Judas procuring and gathering together a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and some of the Pharisees, came with lanterns and torches and weapons that soldiers of the day used in warfare. Judas had arranged that he would kiss Jesus, so the soldiers and Pharisees would know which one was Jesus. It was the dark of night, and Jesus looked very much like all Jews of the day, so the soldiers and Pharisees needed Judas to point out which one was Jesus. As soon as he came to the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, Judas immediately came up to Jesus and

kissed Him on the cheek. Jesus said to Judas, "Friend why are you here? Would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" We are not told if Judas ever answered.

Jesus, knowing all that was to befall Him, then came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"

They answered Him, "We seek Jesus of Nazareth."

"I am he," said Jesus. At those words they drew back and fell to the ground. They knew Jesus had great super-natural powers, and they were fully expecting that He would use them. They were at this point very scared as to what Jesus would do.

Again, Jesus said, "Whom do you seek?" And they once more replied, "We seek Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am he, so if you seek only me, then let these men that are with me, go." This was to fulfil the word which He had spoken, "Of those whom you gave me Father, I have lost not one."

The soldiers and Pharisees by now had realized no flames of fire were coming from heaven to devour them. Jesus was not using His mighty powers to fight them. They grew braver every second. Then they came forward to lay hands on Jesus and arrest Him.

Some of the disciples seeing all that was going on, asked Jesus if they should bring out their swords, the few they had, and fight. Jesus, with a wave of the hand, told them they should not.

Peter, either did not see Jesus' reaction to the disciples' question as to if they should fight, or simply was too angry at the whole scene. He could see what was going to take place, and now fully awake and on edge, he drew the sword that he had and slashed out with it, cutting off the ear of the high priest's slave as he ducked the silver flash of the sword as it passed over his head. In all probability, Peter was trying to cut his head off and as the man ducked his head to where it was horizontal, the sword was just able to cut off his ear as Peter swung through.

For whatever reason John's Gospel account records the slave's name, it was Malchus, but we know no more about him, other than what Jesus did next.

Jesus said to Peter with a firm voice, "Put your sword away; shall I not drink of the cup which the Father has given me to drink?" Then bending down He picked up the ear of the slave and did a miracle by re-attaching it to his head as if it had never been sliced off.

Turning to His disciples Jesus said, "All who will take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you not realize that I can appeal to my Father, and He will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels to protect me. But then how should the Scripture be fulfilled, that must come to pass as written?"

Then turning to the crowd that had come to arrest Him, He said, "Have you come out as if I was a robber, with swords and clubs, to capture me? Day after day I sat in the

Temple, teaching, and you did not arrest me. But I realize all this has taken place that the Scripture of the prophets might be fulfilled."

It was indeed the time for all that was written about this part of the Messiah's life, and His arrest, and His death, to come to pass.

So the band of soldiers and the officers of the Jews, with the Pharisees, seized Jesus, bound Him, and led Him away.

At this sight, of Jesus being arrested and led away, the eleven disciples panicked, and like scared rabbits, ran away as fast as their legs could go. By now some other people had come along to see all that was happening. It was Passover night and many were as I've mentioned, up all night on this particular day. A young man, only wearing a linen outer cloak followed Jesus, and they were going to arrest him also. They were laying hands on him, grabbing his linen cloak, when he also fled from them leaving his cloak in their hands, and ran away naked (Matt. 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-52; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-12).

Jesus, was now alone, all His disciples at this point were gone, but He was not alone, for as He had said, the Father, was ever with Him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Jesus On Trial Part One

Jesus Before The High Priest

The soldiers and the Pharisees that had come to the garden of Gethsemane with Judas, took Jesus first to Annas. Now Annas was father-in-law to Caiaphas who was the High Priest that particular year. His house (Annas) was probably the closest to Gethsemane, and Annas had been High Priest himself for a long period. History tells us that he had five sons who also had functioned as High Priest in Judea, and now his son-in-law was High Priest. They probably thought it was important to gain his counsel in the work of evil they were now planning against Jesus. And they wanted a little more time to gather more people from the Jewish Sanhedrin before taking Jesus to the High Priest himself, so they first went to the home of Annas.

They were not there that long, and Annas had Jesus bound and they were all off to the palace of Caiaphas the High Priest. It was Caiaphas who had given counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

By now it was probably between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m. when Jesus was inside the palace of Caiaphas. You will remember that the eleven disciples had scattered when they arrested Jesus in Gethsemane. Now Peter, after gaining back some courage, decided he would follow the band of people who had arrested Jesus, but he was keeping his distance, not wanting to get himself arrested. There was also another disciple who decided to follow also. The name of that disciple we are not specifically told by the Gospel writers, but we are told he had some "pull" or was as we say, "on the in" with the High Priest. Some Bible Commentators think this other disciple may have been the apostle John, but we simply cannot say for sure, because his name is not given to us in the Gospels.

The soldiers, the scribes (some of), the Pharisees (some of), the elders (some of), arrived at the palace of the High Priest, with Jesus who was now bound with a rope or chain. The palace had a kind of "porch" entrance, then a gate from the porch into a court-yard area, then there was a second story area that was not enclosed but open, so you could look down from it into the courtyard. Jesus was taken up onto the second story to face questioning by the High Priest, and others.

Peter had followed to the porch of the palace, but was not permitted to enter the "court" area. The other disciple who followed and was "on the good side" with the High Priest, was permitted to enter the courtyard and witness all that was going to take place. As this other disciple had some pull with the High Priest (how that was we are not told), he was able to go to the servant maid who looked after the door from the porch to the courtyard, and persuade her to let Peter into the court area. Peter was now inside the court area and Jesus could see from above, where He was, both of the disciples below.

Some of the following, was taking place at the same time, but I shall have to give them separately, but I will use at times the phrase "mean while this was happening" so you can get a better picture of the whole scene and what probably lasted for a couple of hours.

Peter was now in the courtyard. The soldiers had built a fire to keep themselves warm, and Peter was also taking advantage of the fire, sitting with the guards to keep himself warm also.

The chief priests and Jewish council (the ones who were there) had been as busy as bees trying to find people who would testify against Jesus, even willing to lie about Jesus, so they could condemn Him to death. Well, it was all back-firing on them, as the witnesses were contradicting each other, even as they lied about what Jesus had done and said. Finally they managed to get two people to say, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it back again in three days.' " Now the religious leaders took those words of Jesus to mean He was talking about the great physical Temple in Jerusalem, but we know Jesus was not talking about any physical Temple, but was talking about Himself, His death and resurrection in three days.

The High Priest looked at Jesus and said, "Do you hear what these witnesses say about you? How do you answer what they have said you once said?" Jesus did not say a word in His defence. He gave no reply.

The blood pressure of the High Priest was rising. With a loud voice and nearly to the point of shouting, he barked out at Jesus, "I command you by the living God of our people, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God!!"

Jesus replied, "You have said it! Yes, I am! From now on Son of man will be sitting at the right hand of Power, the right hand of God. And will come again with the clouds of heaven."

"So you are the Son of God then?" many shouted back at Jesus. "You have said the words," Jesus replied, "and yes, so I am."

At this the High Priest and others were ready to blow their gasket as we say. They were hot under the collar, and just about ready to lynch Jesus on the spot. To them anyone saying he was the Son of God, was blasphemy. Many were crying out, "We have heard it from his own lips! We do not need to hear any more. This is blasphemy, and so he deserves to die. Put him to death!"

Meanwhile, as all this was going on up on the second floor of the palace, down in the courtyard a servant maid was looking intently and closely at Peter sitting by the fire. She kept gazing at him, finally it hit her like a bolt of lightning, and she said to all around, "This man here was also with him, part of his disciples!" Peter immediately responded by saying, "I do not know what you are talking about. Woman, I do not know this man called Jesus!"

Peter was disturbed, he arose quickly, and went to the porch area, near the gateway from the porch to the courtyard, trying to keep his head low, so no one could see him very well.

Back up on the second floor, they were so angry at the words Jesus had said to them, admitting He was the Christ, that some began to SPIT in His face. Some PUNCHED Him. Then others covered His eyes with a blind-fold, and began to SLAP Him and PUNCH Him, saying to Him, "All right you Son of God, you the Christ, work your powers and tell us who it was that just hit you!" The big strong guards wanted in on the action, and they also began to hit Jesus with their hands and fists. All were mocking Him and laughing at Him. Now that Jesus was blind-folded He could not prepare Himself for their punches. They all landed on Him with full force. He did not know when or where the slapping and punches would come from.

Meanwhile down where Peter was, at the gateway by the porch and courtyard, the servant maid whose duty it was to look after that area, the same servant maid who had allowed Peter to enter into the courtyard, after the other disciple had talked to her, was able to see Peter close at hand and for a longer time. She also said to others standing there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth. He is one of his disciples."

"I tell you with an oath, I do not know this man called Jesus," Peter shouted out. The cock crowed.

Peter once more nervous, made his way back into the courtyard area, still keeping his head low, as not to be seen. An hour or so had gone by since Jesus had been brought to the palace of the High Priest. Then a servant of the High Priest, a blood relative to the man whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden of Gethsemane, and who had heard Peter speaking as he denied ever knowing Jesus, said to Peter, "I know you are one of this man's disciples. I saw you in the garden of Gethsemane with him, and your accent also bears this out, for you are from the Galilee area, where this Jesus is from."

"May my head of hair turn white," Peter began to loudly protest, "if I know this man. May the house of my parents crash down around them if I am lying. May I drop dead on the spot, if I do not tell the truth. I do NOT know this man from Galilee, who you speak about!" Peter was now invoking various curses upon himself and swearing vehemently that he in no way knew this man called Jesus.

Then as Peter finished his last words, the cock crowed a second time. Like a sharp two edged knife cutting into his heart, Peter remembered at the sound of the cock once again crowing, that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny knowing me three times."

It was now way too much for Peter to bear, as Jesus looked down from above (the blind-fold having been removed from His eyes) at him standing in the courtyard, knowing that Jesus knew he had denied knowing Him three times, indeed before the cock had crowed twice.

Peter was shattered, he felt like he would break apart into a thousand pieces. He found himself a lonely spot in the court area, leaned forward, put his head in his hands and

cried like a baby. He had denied his Lord, his Master, his Savior. He wept and he cried some more.

As Peter was crying his heart out, the assembly of scribes, Pharisees, elders, and priests, up on the second floor were making the decision to put Jesus before the whole Jewish council, the great Sanhedrin. It was close to daybreak, the sun was coming up, and soon it would appear over the horizon. Now it would be easy to call all the members of the Sanhedrin together and bring Jesus before them all, at Caiaphas' palace.

Word was soon sent that an emergency council meeting was needed, and before long Jesus stood before the great council of the Jews. They once more asked Him, "If you are the Christ, then tell us."

"If I tell you again," Jesus answered, "you will still not believe me. You haven't believed me at any time. But the Son of man will be seated at the right hand of God."

They all said, "So you are the Son of God then?" And Jesus said to them, "You've said it."

The council members then replied, "Oh, what further testimony do we need? We have heard this man blaspheme with his own voice, from his own lips. We need to bring him before Pilate, and get Rome's permission to put him to death." The Jews could not put anyone to death without permission from the Roman authorities, that was the one thing the Romans would not allow the Jews to do. The Romans allowed the Jews freedom to practice their religion in pretty well all aspects save putting people to death.

It was now morning, the sun was just up over the horizon, when they led Jesus away to the Roman governor called Pilate (Matt. 26:57 to 27:1; Mark 14:53-72; Luke 22:53-71; John 18:13-27).

CHAPTER FORTY

Jesus On Trial Part Two

Jesus Before Pilate

And they took Jesus from the palace of Caiaphas the High Priest to the palace (called "praetorium" in John's Gospel) that Herod the Great built for himself, and which became the palace that the governor of Judea resided in when on duty in the Holy Land. The governor at this time in history, over the area, was Pilate, who had risen in the ranks of the Roman Empire, and for his faithful dedication to the world power of Rome, was appointed governor of Judea by Tiberius in 26 A.D. The governor of Judea usually resided in Caesarea, but Pilate moved his headquarters and army to Jerusalem. He was there quite often, and especially it was the custom for the governor of Judea to be at Jerusalem, when the feasts of the Jews were being celebrated, to make sure peace and order was preserved.

It was very early in the morning of the 14th day of the first month, which corresponds to our March/April. They brought Jesus before Pilate. The Jews themselves would not enter the palace of a Gentile, or anyone they considered a Roman Gentile, especially just hours before they would partake of the Passover which they held, by traditions from the Pharisees, on the 15th of the first month, which was actually the first day of the seven day feast of Unleavened Bread. For them to have entered this palace would have been a religious "defilement" and would have kept them from the Passover they were to observe in about twelve hours.

It was Pilate who first came out to them, probably not pleased at all that Jews had got him up so early in the morning, concerning what he would have thought as "their religious problems."

"You have brought this man before me, for what reason? What is he accused of?" Pilate said to the Jews.

They answered, "If this man was not an evil doer, we would not have brought him to you."

"Why don't you take him yourself and judge him by your laws of Moses?" returned Pilate in a straight crisp tone of voice.

The Jews replied, "It is not lawful under Roman law for us to put a man to death."

The Jews made various accusations against Jesus, and Pilate somewhat listened to them. Jesus did not try to defend Himself against their accusing vicious remarks. After a while Pilate told the Jews to be quiet, and turning to Jesus said, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you? Are you not going to defend yourself and answer them?"

But Jesus made no attempt to answer the Jewish Sanhedrin members. And Pilate was greatly impressed, and was amazed at Jesus' cool composure, under the onslaught of Jewish accusations.

The Jews then said to Pilate, "We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is a king." Now Pilate pricked up his ears and stood tall, when this was said about the man they had brought before him. Pilate would now want to speak in a private manner to the man called Jesus. He entered the palace and called to have Jesus come before him, and then asked this question to Christ, "Are you indeed the King of the Jews? Do you claim to be a KING?"

Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others, like those Jews outside, say this about me, and put this idea in your mind?"

Pilate replied, "Am I a Jew? Your own people and the chief priests have handed you over to me as a criminal; what have you done?"

Jesus replied, "My Kingdom is not of this age and time, you have nothing to fear. If my Kingdom was of this age and time, then would my servants fight, that I would not be handed over to the Jews so they could have me put to death. My Kingdom and Kingship is not of this world and age."

"So you are a King then?" Pilate said to Jesus.

"You have said it, that I am a King," Jesus said, "For this reason I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the TRUTH. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice,"

Pilate looked at Jesus in wonderment, and said, "Well, what indeed is truth?"

The governor Pilate, spent some years in the British Isles under the schooling of the famous Druids, who were quite well respected by Rome. The Druids were well known for asking the question "What is truth?" They would spend much time in debating that question. So when Jesus said He had come to bear witness to the truth, it was very natural for Pilate to have replied with "What is truth?"

We know from Jesus' own words as He prayed to the Father earlier that night, that truth is the WORD of God. Jesus had said, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

Pilate was very impressed and somewhat awe struck by this man called Jesus. He walked back outside to the chief priests and the other Jews, and said, "I find no fault in this man!"

That is NOT what the Jews wanted to hear. Those were the last words they wanted Pilate to say. And so they were more urgent and pressing in their words to Pilate, saying such things as, "This Jesus, stirs up the people, teaching throughout all of Judea, from Galilee even to this city."

When Pilate heard the word "Galilee" he asked if Jesus was from Galilee. And on hearing that He belonged to the jurisdiction of Herod, he immediately saw a way out from the problem before him, a way out so he thought. He would send Jesus over to Herod, who just happened to be in Jerusalem at this time (Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38).

Jesus Before Herod

Herod was delighted to meet Jesus, for he had heard about Him for a long time, and was hoping to see some kind of miracle performed by Jesus. Herod questioned Him at some length, but Jesus made no answer, which then upset Herod, for the chief priests and scribes and others from the Sanhedrin stood by, vehemently accusing Him. Herod was displeased with the whole scene, but especially with Jesus, after waiting for so long a time to meet Him.

Herod and his soldiers finally treated Jesus with contempt and mocking laughter, then, putting on Him some very expensive apparel (mocking Him as a King) they sent Him back to Pilate.

Herod and Pilate that day became very good friends, whereas before that day they were at enmity and had disdain for each other (Luke 23:6-12).

Judas Hangs Himself

Judas saw all that was going on, first with Pilate, then with Herod, and now back with Pilate. Deep remorse and sorrow filled his heart. Satan had by this time left him. He brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying to them, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." Things just did not go the way Judas expected. Jesus was not defending Himself or using His mighty power to crush His enemies.

The chief priests and elders said to Judas, when he returned the money and declared Jesus to be innocent, "What do we care about what you say. See if you can do anything about it now! It's too late!"

And so throwing down the pieces of silver Judas departed from the Temple, and straight away went and committed suicide by hanging himself.

The chief priests and elders now had the thirty pieces of silver. What would they do with them was the big question. One of them said, "It is not within our law to put this money into the Temple treasury, since it is now 'blood money'." They sat with each other to figure what to do. They decided to use the money to buy a no good piece of land called "the potters field" in which strangers were buried, people who no one knew where they were from, or who were their relatives. Somewhat like what we today call "homeless" or "street" people. That piece of land then became known as "The field of blood." All this was done that the words spoken by the prophet Jeremiah might be fulfilled, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me " (Matt. 27:3-10).

Jeremiah never wrote down those words. They are not contained in the Old Testament book called Jeremiah. They are words that Jeremiah must have said at one time, and others took note of them and one way or another had preserved them and handed them down from generation to generation.

Back Before Pilate

Jesus is now back before Pilate at the palace built by Herod the Great. Jesus is inside being questioned again by Pilate. The Jews are outside, not going in lest they be "religiously" defiled (entering the palace of a Gentile) and would not be able to observe the Passover which they kept on the 15th day of this first month.

Pilate goes out to the Jews, and says to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him, I find this man not guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to me. There is nothing done by this man that is worthy of death. There is no crime done by this Jesus. I will chastise him some, and then release him."

The Jewish leaders, now supported by many people who had become disgruntled and impatient with Jesus (because He had not brought them together and used His mighty power to overthrow the Roman armies), immediately, upon hearing Pilate's words, began to shout and cry out at the top of their voices, that they wanted Jesus condemned to death.

Pilate was shocked at their reaction, was speechless for a moment, then an idea flashed into his mind, that he hoped would spare the innocent Jesus. It was the custom at Passover time that the governor release a prisoner, one of their own choosing. In prison at this time was a notorious fellow by the name of Barabbas. He had killed people in an insurrection or uprising against Rome. He was also a robber of some fame.

"Whom do you want me to release for you? Shall it be Barabbas or shall it be Jesus who is called the Christ?" Pilate called out to the Jews.

Now he knew very well that they had delivered Jesus up to himself because they were envious of Him. Then, besides that, while he had been sitting on the judgment seat, questioning Jesus, his wife had sent word to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream."

The chief priests and elders had already persuaded the people to demand that Jesus be destroyed and Barabbas released. They knew that Pilate might resort to this tactic, so they were prepared for it. Pilate once more shouted out to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you." He himself was hoping they would say it was Jesus they wanted to have released.

But the crowd shouted back, "Release to us Barabbas!"

Pilate then said to them, "Well, what shall I then do with Jesus who is called the Christ?"

All with one voice loudly proclaimed, "Let him be crucified!"

Pilate could not believe what he had heard, "Why crucify him, what evil has he done? I have found nothing in him worthy of death," he replied to the crowd.

The crowd ignored his question and shouted even more loudly, "Let him be crucified!"

When Pilate saw that he was gaining no ground, but rather that a riot could well break out, he took a water bowl and washed his hands before them all, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this man; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children."

And so it was that Barabbas was released to the Jews, while Jesus was handed over to them, to be crucified. And Jesus' blood was indeed upon them and their children. That generation with their children, did not repent as a whole from the sin they committed, and their attitude led them into huge troubles with the Roman authorities over the next 40 years. It finally culminated in the Roman general Titus bringing his armies against Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and destroying most of the city, and the people therein (Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:38-40).

Conclusion Of Jesus' Trial

Pilate told his soldiers to take Jesus into the palace. He then called for all the whole battalion of soldiers to come and be present while Jesus would be "scourged." The scourging that Roman soldiers did was often VERY brutal, so brutal at times that many people did not live past being scourged. They used a whip that had little bones attached to the long thong strips of the whip. These little sharp bones would tear the skin apart on the back and around the sides of the person being scourged. It was most brutal a whipping, was the Roman scourging, and there was no limit as to how many whip lashes could be inflicted.

Jesus was of magnificent bodily health and strength, and He did live through the scourging, but much skin and blood was lost from His back and sides. The soldiers were not finished with Him yet. They stripped Him of what clothes He had and put on Him a purple cloak and then a crown of plaited thorns was placed on His head. They put a reed in His right hand. Then they began to salute Him, some kneeling before Him in mockery, and saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Some took turns beating on His head with a reed. The sharp needles of the crown of thorns were now being hammered into Jesus' skull. The pain....well you can imagine if you ever have had a thorn needle stuck in your hand.

The soldiers also spat upon Jesus and hit Him with their fists as they continued to mock Him for quite some time.

Pilate took Jesus back out to the railing mob of Jews outside the palace. "Look, I am bringing Him out to you so you can know that I find no fault or crime in this man."

Jesus stood there wearing the crown of thorns smashed into His head and the purple cloak. Pilate again said, "Here is the man." When the chief priests and the elders and those of the Sanhedrin, saw Jesus, they cried out with frenzied voices, "Crucify him, crucify him!"

Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; for I cannot find any fault or crime in this man."

The religious leaders shouted back, "We have a law, and by that law he should die, because he has made himself the Son of God."

When Pilate heard those words he was even more afraid. He hurried Jesus back into the palace again and said to Him, "Where are you from?" But Jesus did not answer. Pilate therefore said, "So you will not speak to me. Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus then answered, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given to you from my Father above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin."

Pilate was by now very upset and certainly afraid, and sought even the more to release this Jesus, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; every one who makes himself a King sets himself against Caesar."

The Jews were now resorting to every "political" angle they could think of, to insure Jesus would be crucified.

When Pilate heard these last words from the Jews, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place in the palace called the "Pavement." All was in full view of the mass of Jews and the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin. It was the "preparation" day as the Pharisees Jews called it, the day they prepared for the keeping of their Passover on the 15th day. It was still the 14th day of the first month and it was about the 3rd hour (as it should be, not the 6th hour as the KJV gives in the Gospel of John, which was an error, as the original Greek manuscripts say "it was the third hour"), which was as we count time, between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m.

Pilate said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They answered, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!"

Pilate replied, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

Then Pilate had the purple cloak removed from Jesus and His own clothes put back on, then handed Jesus over to the Jewish leaders and the mob of people, for them to crucify Him. The prophecies of how the Messiah would die were now quickly coming to pass (Matt. 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20; John 19:1-16).

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Jesus Is Crucified On Golgotha Part One

So the members of the Sanhedrin and the Jewish mob took Jesus, and He went out having to carry His own cross, to the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew "Golgotha" (meaning - place of a skull).

Jesus was so weakened by now with all the beatings and the scourging He had endured, that it became impossible for Him to carry His cross. So they compelled a passer-by, one name Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry Jesus' cross.

There had by now a large crowd gathered behind Jesus and along the sides of the road. Many women were crying and lamenting in sorrow for Him. It is perhaps more than interesting, that we see here and will again up to the time of Jesus' resurrection, while the men were at the point of giving up (going back home and back to their secular jobs) many women were quietly in their hearts holding on to their faithfulness to Jesus.

Christ could see and hear many of the women crying for Him as He was being led to His death on the cross. He turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck to new born children!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this action when the wood is green, when things are relatively good, what will happen when it is dry, when they will really have something to complain about."

They were doing evil against a man that did nothing but good for people, and taught wonderful truths of the word of God. The Roman government allowed the Jews freedom to travel, freedom to practice their religion, times were quite "green" in many ways. If they were doing this kind of evil in the time of green, Jesus was saying, then what on earth would they do when it was dry? Christ was once more telling them that the time was coming, in the next generation of the children many of them would have, and the children of their children, that people would have wished they never would have brought children into the world. It would all come to a head in 70 A.D. when the armies of Rome would sweep into Jerusalem, destroy much of the city and the all of the Temple except a part of the outer Temple retaining wall (which is still standing in Jerusalem today, called the Wailing Wall), and kill tens of thousands of Jews. It would be a bitter and terrible time that would lay ahead for the people of Judea.

Jesus On Golgotha And Crucifixion

Jesus, with two other criminals, who were to also be crucified and put to death for their crimes, and the large crowd, arrived at the place of the skull, or Golgotha in the Hebrew tongue.

We need to stop here and learn a few things about "crucifixion." There are a number of false ideas people have about the death of Jesus and about crucifixion itself, as generally practiced by the Romans. And they did practice it a great deal in putting criminals and their enemies to death.

I will quote from "Manners and Customs of the Bible" by James M. Freeman. This is from the old original edition, not the new one that most are familiar with today.

"Crucifixion was NOT a Jewish punishment, though among the Jews culprits were sometimes tied to a stake by their hands AFTER death. See Deut. 21:22. It was an ancient mode of capital punishment....It was used by the Persians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Carthaginians, Scythians, Greeks, Romans, and ancient Germans. It was a shameful and degrading punishment, and among the Romans was the fate of robbers, assassins, and rebels. It was especially the punishment of criminal slaves.

"There were several kinds of crosses used. One consisted of two beams of wood laid across each other in the form of an X. Another had two beams of unequal length, the shorter placed on top of the longer, like the letter T. In a third variety, a small portion of the longer piece appeared above the transverse beam; and on this the inscription was placed [the shape as the popular Christian cross that appears in churches etc.]

"This was doubtless the form of cross on which our Lord was crucified. From the center of the perpendicular beam there projected a wooden plug or horn, on which the body of the condemned rested. The bottom of the cross was sharpened, that it might be more easily driven into the ground....It was not generally more than ten feet high, so that when erected, a part of it being in the earth, the feet of the sufferer were not far from the ground.

"The condemned man was first stripped of his clothing, which seems to have been the perquisite of the executioners. He was then fastened to the cross, which had been previously fixed in the earth - though sometimes he was first fixed to the cross - which was then lifted and thrust into the ground.

"He sat on the middle bar or horn, already mentioned, and his limbs were stretched out and tied to the bars of the cross. Large iron spikes were then driven through the hands and feet. Sometimes the feet were nailed separately, and at other times they were crossed and a long spike was driven through them both.

"In this situation the poor sufferer was left to linger until death slowly came to his relief. This usually required two or three days, though some lingered a longer time before their sufferings ended.

"The pain was severe, though not so intense as has sometimes been represented. On this subject Dr. Stroud says, 'The bodily suffering attending this punishment were doubtless great; but either through ignorance or design, have been much exaggerated. The insertion of the cross into its hole or socket, when the criminal was previously attached to it, did not necessarily produce the violent concussion which has been supposed; and; as the body rested on a bar, it did not bear with its whole weight on the

perforated extremities. At all events there have been many examples of persons enduring these sufferings with the utmost fortitude, and almost without a complaint, until relieved from them by death. A fact of importance to be known, but which has not been sufficiently regarded, is that crucifixion was a very lingering punishment, and proved fatal, not so much by loss of blood - since the wounds in the hands and feet did not lacerate any large vessel, and were nearly closed by the nails which produced them - as by the slow processes of nervous irritation and exhaustion' (The Physical Cause of the Death of Christ, p. 55).

"After death the body was left to be devoured by beasts and birds of prey. The Romans, however, made an exception in favor of all Jews who were crucified; this was on account of their law, as contained in Deut. 21:22, 23. They were permitted to bury the crucified Jews on the day of crucifixion. This usually made it necessary to hasten their death, which was done by kindling a fire under them, or by letting hungry beats attack them, or by breaking their bones with an iron mallet." (End of quote from "Manners and Customs of the Bible" old edition.)

I think it would be good to re-read the quote above, slowly, and let it all sink in. There are things mentioned that most Christians do not understand and have not been taught about Roman crucifixion. Especially to note is that it was NOT usually a quick death. It was not DESIGNED to be a quick death, in fact the opposite was true. It was designed to be a slow humiliating death. And we need to note that there was a peg on which the body of the victim rested, so the weight was not on the hands, and the victim was not having to pull himself up to breath. When this is understood we can see why the victim often lived for two or three days or in some cases even longer, before death came to them.

True, in the case of Jews their death was hastened, often by breaking their bones, so they could die on the same day they were crucified, in keeping with their law, as given by God through Moses, Deut. 21:22, 23.

We shall see, as we come to it, that they did come to break the legs of Jesus, but found He was already dead, and the reason for this, His already being dead, I will give as I cover that part of the crucifixion. It is another bit of truth that most do not realize because in most translations of the Gospels, a verse has been missed out that was in the original Greek manuscripts.

Golgotha was near the city of Jerusalem. The now they had Jesus up on the cross, with the other two criminals, one on His right had and one on His left hand, also up on crosses. Pilate wrote an inscription and placed it above Jesus' head. The inscription was in three languages, Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. Just about anyone could read it, the Greek language was especially the most common language of all who were within the Roman Empire. The inscription read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

The chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.' "

Pilate with a cold and straight face answered them, "What I have written I have written. It will not be changed."

The Gospel of Mark tells us that it was the "third" hour when they crucified Jesus. Now, hours by the Jews were counted this way. 6 a.m. to 7 a.m. was hour ONE. 7 a.m. to 8 a.m. was hour TWO. 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. was hour THREE.

The Jews only gave "the hour" (at least in the Gospels). They did not give any exact time as we might today, in saying something like "8:30" or "8:45" or "ten minutes to 9 a.m." We only know Jesus was put up on the cross between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. on the morning of the 14th day of the first month in the Jewish calendar.

Many who were looking on and passing by were laughing and making fun of Jesus. Here was this man that had worked many mighty miracles for over three years, but now he was badly beaten, His back and sides shredded by the Roman scourging, the crown of thorns smash into His head, and black and blue bruises all over His face, chest, arms, from being slapped and punched. Here was this miracle working man, who claimed to be the Son of God, who had raised Lazarus from the dead, now He was helpless under Roman crucifixion. Yes, many were laughing at Him. Many said, "You who would destroy the Temple and build it back in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

The chief priests, with many of the scribes and the elders, and some of the Pharisees, mocked also, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. If he is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he is special in his eyes; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' "

It is recorded that the soldiers also did their share of mocking Jesus. They must at that time have really been feeling like they had the power, and not this Jesus man. Probably thinking this man's power was not so great after all.

Yes, Jesus' enemies, and those who had become disenchanted with Him, for not doing things their way against the Romans, were now having a field-day, a great time deriding Him as He hung there on the cross, seemingly completely helpless to do anything about the situation He was in. Little did they know it was all in the salvation plan of the Father in heaven, for all sinners who would repent and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

Some standing by offered Jesus some wine mingled with myrrh. But He refused it. This was a wine that had some bitterness added, such as myrrh, that was a bitter substance, produced in Arabia. It had the effect of stupefying the senses. It was often given to those crucified to help make them insensitive to the pains of death as they hung on the cross. Jesus knew this, and so refused to drink it. He had to suffer the full physical suffering and not be numbed from it in any way. This was the Father's will.

With most now deriding and laughing at Him, saying all the things recorded for us in the Gospels, and probably a whole lot more not recorded, Jesus looked at them, knowing they were blinded by Satan, and their own human mind, and said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing."

Jesus was, as we have seen, stripped of His clothes. He may have been put on the

cross naked, but then they may have left His under garment on him, that covered His private parts. We cannot say for sure. But His clothes that were looked upon as useful for others to have, were stripped from Him. There was enough clothing for four parts, one for each soldier the apostle John tells us. There were obviously four main soldiers that were in charge of this crucifixion. Jesus' outer tunic John tells us, was woven without a seam from top to bottom. This was a special and costly way to make a tunic. It would have been regarded by anyone in that day, as one of the finest tunics you could have. The soldiers knew this tunic was of the highest quality, and so they said, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who shall have it."

This was done to fulfil the prophecy of the Scriptures that said, "They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots" (Psalm 22:18).

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Jesus Is Crucified On Golgotha Part Two

The Criminal Who Jesus Will Remember

And two criminals were crucified with Jesus, one on His right hand and one on His left hand. One looked over at Jesus, and with disdain sarcasm in his voice said, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us also!" The other criminal on hearing this, immediately replied to him, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation and death? And we indeed justly are condemned, for we are receiving our due reward for our actions; but this man Jesus has done nothing wrong." Then looking and speaking directly to Jesus, he said, "Please remember me when you come into the power of your Kingdom." Jesus replied, "Yes, for truly I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:39-43).

Jesus could see that the heart of this man was in a humble state of repentance, a heart that was in the right godly attitude. He had never been called by God in this physical life as far as we know. He will one day be resurrected in the great White Throne Judgment resurrection spoken about in the last verses of Revelation chapter 20. This resurrection takes place after the 1,000 year reign of Christ and His Kingdom on earth. Millions who never had a chance for salvation, who were never called by God in their physical life (like babies who die, young children that die, people in remote areas of the world who never hear the Gospel, and people just plain blinded to the truths of God's Kingdom and salvation) will be raised again and the book of LIFE will be opened to them. They will live and they will be judged by the word of God, just as we today who are called and chosen are being judged. If they, like us, will confess their sins, repent of being a sinner, call on God for mercy, accept Jesus as our personal savior, be willing to serve and obey God in a humble attitude, and remain faithful to their calling to the end of their physical lives, then they, like us, will inherit eternal life and be with God in His paradise for ever more.

Jesus could see this man's attitude was in the right condition. When he is raised again in that general resurrection, his attitude that he died with on the cross, will be the same. It will be the right attitude to receive salvation. Jesus was confident that he would serve God and so would indeed inherit eternal life, so He was able to say to him that very day, as they hung on their crosses together, that he would be with Him, Jesus, in Paradise.

The paradise of God is shown to us in the book of Revelation, it is the throne of God in the eternal holy city of God, the new Jerusalem that will one day come down from heaven and be placed on the earth that is made new (see Rev. 2:7 with 22:2, 14; read the context of all of Rev. 20, 21, 22).

God has a wonderful plan of salvation for ALL people that have ever lived. That plan of salvation will not be finished until the GREAT general resurrection, spoken about in Revelation 20, has taken place. Everyone will have their day when salvation will be

plainly offered them. No more deception, no more blindness of mind. They will have revealed to them the truths of God. They will then have to decide which way they will go, the way and life that is of God, or the way and life that is of Satan the Devil. They will have to choose, the way of life or the way of death, but all in their time will be clearly offered that choice, with no blindness of heart or mind standing in the way. God will be there to ask them to choose LIFE!(see Deut. 30:19). Praise the Lord for His wonderful ways and work and great mercy.

Jesus Takes Care Of His Mother

There were many standing around the cross of Jesus. Many were weeping and crying for Him. Many bewildered and confused, in anguish of mind, just not understanding why all this was happening. There was standing close by, Jesus' mother, and also Mary the wife of Clopas, and there was Mary Magdalene. Jesus turned His eyes towards His mother and towards the disciple He had a close bond with. Many believe this was the apostle John, the John who wrote the Gospel that bears his name. Jesus said to them both, "Mother, behold your son!" And to the disciple, "Behold your mother!"

From that very hour the disciple took her to his own home and looked after her. We are left to presume that Joseph, the husband of Mary, Jesus' mother, was no longer living, hence Jesus wanted His mother to be taken care of by this particular disciple.

Darkness Covers The Land

It was about the sixth hour, for us today that would be anywhere from 11 a.m. to noon or 12 p.m.

"Look....look, see what's happening to the sun," someone shouted. Dozens of pairs of eyes immediately looked up, and what they saw was shocking and terrifying, they could hardly believe their eyes we would say. The bright shining of the sun was dimming. The sunshine of the day was beginning to fade away as if it was evening time. It was growing darker much faster than it did at the natural sunset time of the day. It was a cold foreboding darkness that was fast coming, even an unnerving darkness. Many were looking white like snow as their blood drained from their faces at the sight of the sun being darkened.

It was only a few minutes of time, and all the land was covered with darkness as if it was night. It would last for about three hours, and most by then knew it was something that only the power of God had brought about.

The Roman soldiers in charge of the three crucifixion crosses, on which hung Jesus and the two criminals, tried to be bold and strong, not wanting anyone to see that in their minds they were also getting worried and a little scared at what had taken place in the heavens above.

Three hours of this intimidating, harrowing, and shivering darkness passed. It was now about the ninth hour, which for us would be between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. Jesus had been silent. All the people that were still gathered there were mostly silent. Because of the extraordinary and peculiarly bizarre darkness over the land, some were looking for

Jesus to work a great miracle, maybe, they thought, He would heal Himself of all His wounds and pull out the nails that fastened Him to the cross, and climb down. Many of Jesus' disciples were still expecting Him to come down from the cross. All that they were witnessing must be a dream, and was not really happening, many of them were thinking. They were expecting Jesus to perform a miracle for Himself, just as He had performed many miracles for so many others during His ministry.

But nothing was happening, one hour had gone by, then two hours, and now it was the third hour of this darkness over the land.

Suddenly, the dark silence was shattered by Jesus crying out with as loud a voice as they had ever heard from a human being, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" Which being translated was, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The time had come for the Father to step aside, to step back into the darkness that was all around. Jesus would have to bear the sins of the whole world on Himself now, without any help or any kind of softening pillow to cushion the sacrifice of His life in death, for the sins of mankind.

Some of the bystanders hearing Jesus cry out, said, "This man is calling for Elijah." And one of them ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a long reed and raised it up to Jesus' mouth for Him to drink. As the person was doing this they said, "Wait, let us see if he is going to work a miracle, and bring Elijah to save him and help him come down from his cross." (Matt 27:45-49).

Jesus Is Killed As A Lamb Led To The Slaughter

There was again only silence from Jesus. No miracle was happening, no Elijah the prophet of old was appearing to save Jesus.

Now it was all just too much for one soldier standing there. He was thinking that kind of talk from people about Elijah, and people crying for this Jesus man, people thinking that Jesus would yet work a mighty miracle, was just too much. It was now, for this hardened soldier, all way too much. He would show everyone that this man was just a man, and nothing more, that he could not work any miracles. He would show everyone that he, as a soldier of the mighty Roman army, had the power to kill this Jesus that hung helpless before him. He would show those Jews that were Jesus' disciples, that this man they thought of as the Son of God, the Messiah, was just merely a human man and nothing more. This soldier also knew that Jews who were crucified were to have their life ended on the same day as they were nailed and hung up on their cross.

He, this tough powerful soldier....well he would now show everyone that he was greater than this Jesus, he would now finally KILL this man called Jesus Christ, and so declare to all standing there that Jesus was not the Son of God.

The soldier grabbed hold of his war spear and with one thrust plunged it into the side of Jesus' body, the spear head breaking through Jesus' bladder. As the soldier pulled it out of Jesus' body out came the water from His bladder together with a gushing flow of His blood.

Jesus cried out, "It is finished! Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" and having said those words, He bowed His head and breathed His last breath.

Jesus, God in the flesh, the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Son of man, was now hanging DEAD on the cross. The soldier walked away a few steps with a large confident grin on his face. The scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and elders of the people that were present and who had longed for this event, the death of Jesus, were smiling also. The moment they had planned for and wanted to see, had finally come, this Jesus was finished and done with. They thought they were rid of Him forever, and that the people would soon forget about Him and they would once more have full power and control over their "religious little empire." They were, in a very short while, to see how wrong they were for thinking such thoughts.

As Jesus hung there dead, so very dead, His disciples were now in complete and utter shock and disbelief. They had up to this point still clung to the thought that He just could not die, that He would somehow live and come down from His cross. The eleven disciples were especially broken to pieces, like dropping a china dish from the top of a twenty-story building on to the concrete pavement below. They were shattered in heart and mind. All the women disciples were weeping and crying even more than they would have imagined possible. All the hopes and dreams and expectations of all of Jesus' followers that were present there, had flown away, disappeared it would seem into the blackness all around them, with that one action of that one soldier who had thrust his spear into the side of Jesus, and put an end to His life.

Yes, Jesus did not die of a broken heart, or of not being able to breath. He did not die of suffocation. He died as the prophet Isaiah had been inspired to write about. He died as a sheep led to the slaughter. He was slain with an instrument designed to slay and kill people. He had His blood SHED, for the sins of mankind. That through the shedding of His blood, people who will accept Jesus as their personal Savior, can have forgiveness of their sins, and can have the grace and mercy of God the Father bestowed upon them, so they need not die, but live in the Father's Kingdom for all eternity (see Isaiah 52:13-15; with chapter 53; and Ephesians 2:8; with Romans 3:23-26).

We know that Jesus died with a spear thrust into His side from the original Greek manuscripts of Matthew 27. There is a verse missing in most translations, but it is in the original Greek. All of verse 50 of Matthew 27, should read this way, "But another taking a spear pierced His side, when blood and water came out. Jesus, however, having again cried out with a loud voice, resigned His spirit" (Fenton translation).

We shall see shortly that John in his Gospel account verifies that Jesus died by being slain, so indeed like a lamb is led to the slaughter.

The Father Makes Clear Jesus Was His Son

No sooner had the soldier walked away from slaying Jesus with his spear than the ground started to shake and rumble and roll. There was an earthquake over the whole Jerusalem area. People were screaming in fear. Many were running this way and that way.

Many large rocks were broken into pieces, and many of the tombs of the dead were opened, the stones sealing the entrances flung to one side. And it is recorded for us that AFTER Jesus had been resurrected, many of these physical people in the tombs were resurrected back to physical life and walked back into Jerusalem, and showed themselves to their friends and relatives and others. This would have been an awesome witness to all in Jerusalem of God's witness that Jesus was truly His Son seeing all these dead people coming back to life again.

Among all this shaking of the earth, the mighty curtain of the Temple that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (see a pictorial Bible Dictionary of the Temple structure) was, with one tremendous and mighty crack, split into two from top to bottom. The Most Holy Place of the Temple (that no one ever entered except the High Priest, and only on one day of the year - the Day or Feast of Atonement, on the 10th day of the 7th month in the Hebrew calendar) was open for all who stepped into the Holy Place of the Temple to see.

This happening to the monstrous curtain of the Temple, would have put into panic and complete disarray to all that may have been taking place in the Temple at the time, which would also have been put into some disarray from the three hours of darkness covering the land. Some of the activity that was going on within the Temple was the evening sacrifice and the slaying of Passover lambs, as the Pharisees and their followers were traditionally doing, in preparation for observing the Passover on the evening of the 15th day of Nisan, that was only hours away.

Remember Jesus had observed the Passover with His disciples already, at the beginning of the 14th, and on into the night of the 14th, when He was betrayed by Judas, as we have already seen. The correct Passover, and time to observe it, was when Jesus observed it, but the Pharisees had built their own traditions over the centuries and were observing the Passover at the beginning of the 15th, which is really the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a totally different festival of the Lord, than the Passover. Such false traditions of the Pharisees, were why Jesus said what He said, as recorded in Mark 7:5-13.

Well, whatever was going on in the Temple when Jesus was slain and the earthquake hit the area, and the curtain of the Temple torn into two, you can pretty well guess correctly that everything would have come to a grinding, and chaotic STOP! There was nothing but confusion, perplexity, disorder, and pandemonium, going on inside and outside the Temple, and in and around Jerusalem.

Then on top of all that, after all that had taken place, the darkness suddenly, and as quickly as it came on the land, it was gone! Light, and the sun was blazing brightly once more in the heaven.

So amazing was it all that the centurion, and all who were with him watching over Jesus, were filled with great awe and said to each other, "Truly, indeed, this man was innocent, and THIS WAS the SON of God!"

The earth stopped shaking, the darkness was lifted, the sun was casting forth its mighty light again. There was no more physical signs of anything, all returned to being as the physical day had begun. The soldiers and the crowd of people around the crucifixion area, also returned to a somewhat normal disposition of mind. They were no longer thinking the end of the world had come upon them.

Many of the women that had served in different ways Jesus and His men, when they were in the Galilee area, were present, looking on, but keeping themselves at a distance. Among those women were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee, and many other women who had come up with Jesus to Jerusalem. Others of Jesus' followers did not stay around for very long after He had been killed. They departed to their homes, downcast and very distraught, still in confusion of mind about all that had taken place (Matt. 27:51-56; Mark 15:38-41; Luke 23:45-49).

The Apostle John's Further Account

It was now about the tenth hour or between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. as we reckon time. Much of the crowd had dispersed and were making their way to their homes or back into Jerusalem. Jesus' disciples were so upset and confused, none of them thought about Jesus' dead body on the cross, and what they should do with it. Not one of them at that time had their mind on such a detail. Jesus was left there, dead on the cross, and none talked about removing it.

But there were still two criminals alive. And as we have seen, Jewish law (actually a law given to them from God) said that persons hung on a stake should be taken down and buried the same day as when put on the stake, or tree (Deut. 21:22-23).

It was also what many Jews (especially those of the Pharisee sect) called "the preparation" day. It was the 14th of Nisan and not a Sabbath day, and the Jews who followed the Pharisees were getting ready to observe their Passover supper, starting at evening time, which was the beginning of the 15th of Nisan, and which was also an annual Sabbath day, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They were also cleaning out their homes of leaven bread and getting ready to eat unleavened bread for the next seven days. So the 14th day of Nisan, for many Jews, became known as "preparation day." They were preparing for the 15th day.

The Sabbath day that was coming at evening time, was not the weekly Sabbath, but the Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and such a Sabbath became known as "a high day" or "a high Sabbath day." That high Sabbath day was a Thursday. Jesus had observed the Passover with His disciples on a Tuesday evening, the beginning of the 14th of Nisan. He was put on the cross Wednesday morning, and died as we have seen, in the early afternoon of Wednesday.

The evening and the beginning of the high Sabbath day of the 15th of Nisan, a Wednesday evening, was fast arriving. Many of the Jews knew that no Jew should be left for the night hanging on a tree or cross. The Romans allowed the Jews to obey that law given to them by God through Moses. The Jews went to Pilate and asked if they might break the legs of those on the crosses, to speed up their death and so be taken

down from the crosses and buried, before the Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread arrived.

Pilate was in Jerusalem, and he granted them their wish, but did not send a message to the soldiers already keeping watch over Jesus and the other two criminals, but sent a few other soldiers that were at his palace in Jerusalem, to go and do the job of breaking the legs of those on the three crosses.

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first criminal, and then of the other criminal. But coming to Jesus they saw He was ALREADY DEAD. No one had told them, well....there was by this time just about no one standing around to tell them anything. It would seem even the original soldiers that had been keeping guard from the beginning of the crucifying, were no longer there to say anything to them.

They saw that Jesus was already dead and so did not break His legs, no need to, as He was dead. Then John says this in his Gospel, "But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water."

Now, in the Greek that John wrote, the word "pierced" is in the "aorist" or past tense (an single action done and completed in the past), and so what John actually wrote was this, "But one of the soldiers HAD ALREADY pierced His side with a spear...."

John is telling us the reason as to WHY the soldiers coming to break Jesus' legs, found Him already dead, it was BECAUSE another soldier HAD BEFORE those soldiers came, ALREADY plunged a spear into Jesus' side and killed Him, hence He was already dead when the new soldiers arrived to start breaking the legs of all three men on the crosses. They then had no need to break Jesus' legs to speed up His death, as He was already dead. And exactly how that took place we have seen just a short while back. It was indeed by a soldier taking his spear and thrusting it into Jesus' side.

The apostle John finishes this part of his Gospel by saying, "He who saw it (referring to himself) has borne witness - his testimony is true, and he knows that he has told the truth - that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled, 'Not a bone of Him shall be broken' (Psalm 34:20). And again another Scripture says, 'They shall look on Him whom they had pierced' " (Psalm 22:16, 17).

This part of God the Father's plan of salvation was indeed as Jesus cried out just before He died, FINISHED! (John 19:31-37).

The power of Satan and sin, had been forever broken and defeated. Through the shed blood and death of Jesus on the cross, all who want and desire to be saved from eternal death, can find the way to eternal life through Jesus as their personal Savior.

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Jesus Is Buried In A Tomb

And When Evening Had Come

The three hours of darkness over the land of Jerusalem, on that Wednesday of the 14th of Nisan (in the year 30 A.D.) had been mysteriously foreboding, even scary. At the end of it all, Jesus had been slain by the spear from a soldier. Those there, from the scribes and Pharisees and elders of the people, walked away smiling to themselves and to each other. They could not have cared less what happened to Jesus' dead body. They, of all people, were certainly not doing to apply the law of Moses, which said that the body of a dead person hung on a tree or stake, should not remain on it all night, but should be taken down on the same day they were placed on the tree or wooden stake, before the night came, and buried (Deut. 21:22, 23). Those religious leaders and elders who were happy to see Jesus dead, went their way, and as far as they were concerned, Jesus' body could rot off the cross and be devoured by the birds of the air and the wild beasts and dogs of the city of Jerusalem.

As for Jesus' disciples, we know from the Gospel accounts and what was to transpire, as we shall soon see, they also went their way, with a downcast heart, a sad, grieved, desolate, and dejected mind. They felt utterly crushed, troubled and despairing. Even Jesus' close inner circle of eleven disciples felt defeated and spiritually forsaken. They could not understand the events that had just taken place over the last night and into the late afternoon of this 14th day of Nisan. It would seem even they had no plans or were not giving it much thought if at all any, as to what would happen to the body of Jesus, now hanging dead on the cross.

Yes, all but a few of Jesus' disciples left that cold place of death. All that is but a few women from Galilee, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus. They felt they had to stay, even if it was at a distance. They were sure that some of Jesus' disciples would come and take away His body before nightfall. They wanted to see where Jesus would be taken.

A half hour passed, and no one returned to take Jesus down from the cross. Then an hour went by, and still no one came for Jesus. Then an hour and a half, then two hours, and still no disciple of had returned.

By this time, it was being whispered around among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem, that no disciple had claimed the body of Jesus. Finally someone decided he had to do something about this situation of Jesus still hanging on the cross, alone, with all of His close disciples oblivious it seemed, even to be thinking they should claim Jesus' body. Perhaps many thought that with Mary, Jesus' mother, being there, and no doubt some of her other children, it would be they who would have claimed Jesus' body. (You will remember in some of the past chapters, we saw that Jesus did have brothers and sister....well half brothers and sister, we would say, for Joseph, Mary's husband was not the father of Jesus, but God the Father in heaven was.)

Whatever were the thoughts of Christ's disciples at this time, it is clear from the Gospel writers that no one was going to do anything about taking Jesus down from the cross and laying Him to rest in a tomb.

So it was, that finally one man was going to come forward to ask for the body of Jesus from the governor Pilate. He was not one of Jesus' close disciples, but it is said of him that he was a disciple.

Time had passed quickly since Jesus had been slain. Matthew and Mark record that it was now "evening." Matthew says, "When it was evening...." Mark puts it this way, "And when evening had come...."

If we research ALL the verses in the New Testament where the word "evening" is used, and we let the New Testament interpret itself, without putting any additional ideas of man into the truth of it all, we see that the New Testament interprets for us that "evening" is NOT BEFORE the TWELFTH hour as the Jews then reckoned time, or 5 p.m to 6 p.m. for us. Evening, as interpreted by the New Testament, did not arrive until the twelfth hour had finished. Evening then was AFTER 6 p.m.

This all makes sense and adds up to the fact that all of Jesus' disciples had left the area where He was now dead on the cross, and none were coming back to reclaim and remove His body. It would have taken a few hours or more for the word to get around that no one was claiming Jesus' body, not even His closest eleven disciples or His immediate family members.

It was now "evening" but Mark adds these additional words, "And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is the day before Sabbath...."

Let us remember that the Sabbath talked about here is NOT the weekly Sabbath, but the Sabbath of the 15th day of Nisan, a Thursday, the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread, in the year 30 A.D. when all this took place. And the Jews were indeed preparing, putting out leaven from their homes. Many had already done so as we saw that it was a custom for Pharisee following Jews to start putting leaven out at the beginning of the 14th day, and getting ready for this Sabbath of the 15th. Again I remind you that the Pharisee Jews were preparing to observe the Passover supper at the beginning of the 15th, as they do to this very day.

Many, thinking that a Sabbath begins at sunset, or when the evening first starts, will have a question as to why Mark wrote it the way he did, that evening HAD come, but it was preparation, the day BEFORE this coming Sabbath. Well it may all be answered when we understand that a large part of the Jews in Jesus' day (and still even in our day) did not count the Sabbath as STARTING until the first STARS appeared in the heavens.

Understanding this, we can see that evening could well have come, that is the time after 6 p.m. but still be the preparation day, for the Sabbath that was yet to arrive when the stars came out.

The Men Who Claimed The Body Of Jesus

I said "a" man finally came forward and asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Actually, according to the Gospel of John, there were TWO men, but it seems one man was the main one who started the process and was the one who went to Pilate. The second man was Nicodemus! Yes, the same Nicodemus that came to Jesus by night, to tells Him that he and many other religious leaders KNEW He was from God (John chapter 3).

The man who went before Pilate to request the body of Jesus was a man called Joseph. From all that the Gospel writers have to say about this man, we can list these things:

1. He was from a town in Arimathea. The Bible Dictionaries say it was situated NW of Jerusalem, in the hill country of Ephraim.
2. He was a rich man.
3. He owned an empty tomb in the Jerusalem area, in which no person had been put to rest in. In other words the tomb had never been used as a burial grave.
4. It is said he looked for the coming of the Kingdom of God.
5. He was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin council.
6. He was said to be a righteous man, who had NOT consented to the Sanhedrin's purpose and plans and deeds to kill Jesus.
7. It is also related to us that he was one of Jesus' disciples, but kept it under cover, did not relate this in a public way, because of fear of the Jews. He had not till now stood up to be counted as we say.

But now, with no person coming forward from among Jesus' disciples or immediate family, and as time had reached the evening, and the Sabbath of the 15th day was soon to begin, Joseph, says Mark, **TOOK COURAGE** and went to Pilate to request that he be granted Jesus' body. Joseph had obviously also talked to Nicodemus about the urgent situation for someone to claim Jesus' body, and Nicodemus would help out, as we shall shortly see.

Joseph Before Pilate

There stood Joseph, in the palace of Pilate, waiting for the governor to grant permission for him to come before his presence and ask his question. Joseph was nervous, ringing his hands, being a little fidgety, his heart beating faster every minute he had to wait. He knew that by doing this action and if he was granted the body of Jesus, that all the Sanhedrin and all Judea would know the truth of him being a disciple of Jesus Christ. But keeping that fact hidden for so long a time....well now he thought, it was time to come clean, to come out in the open. It was as he thought the very least he could do, to ask for Jesus' body and lay it in a tomb of his that was empty and had never been used. Joseph knew God was wanting him to do this, especially as not one other person was making any move to request if they could take Jesus down from the cross and bury Him.

Joseph was nervous yes, but courage had finally come to him. He knew God was with him.

Pilate summoned Joseph to appear before him. With a firm upper lip and courage in his heart, Joseph walked into Pilate's presence.

"What can I do for you," Pilate said to Joseph. "Please, governor, I request that you give me permission to take down Jesus from the cross and bury him, after our custom of the Jews."

Pilate looked somewhat puzzled. Said nothing for a few seconds. Then said words to the effect that everyone present knew he was shocked to hear that Jesus was already dead. Pilate was not even thinking about any laws of the Jews, or thinking very much about what had taken place on Golgotha that day. He was used to the fact that some people continued to live hanging on a cross for a few days or even longer, before they died. No one had said anything to him about a soldier taking a spear and thrusting it into Jesus' side and so putting an end to His life.

So now with Joseph standing before him and requesting Jesus' body, Pilate was realizing that Joseph was saying that Jesus was dead.

But it all still sounded a little strange to him, so Pilate called in the centurion that was in charge of keeping watch over the three men who had been taken to Golgotha to be crucified.

"Centurion," asked Pilate, "has this Jesus man been dead for somewhat of a time already?"

"Yes, indeed he has, governor, Jesus has been dead for a while now," replied the centurion to Pilate.

Pilate now looked back at Joseph, and said, "Very well then. You may have the body of Jesus and bury it according to your customs."

Joseph sighed a sigh of relief, silently gave thanks to God, and quickly walked out of Pilate's palace. Waiting outside for him was Nicodemus. Joseph told him that the request had been granted, and both men hurried as fast as their legs would go to the place called Golgotha, where Jesus was hanging lifelessly on His cross.

Jesus Is Buried

Joseph was doing his part in all this by providing a tomb for Jesus. Nicodemus, would do his part by bringing along with him, a mixture of myrrh and aloes, to help preserve to some degree the torn and broken flesh of Jesus' body. It was not a small amount either that Nicodemus brought, it was about one hundred pounds in weight, a considerable large amount. It is possible Nicodemus had servant help to carry all this mixture of myrrh and aloes.

The two men soon arrived at the cross upon which Jesus hung. The two women, both having the name Mary, were still watching over Jesus, but from a distance. They knew Joseph and Nicodemus, and were so relieved to finally see that men were coming to take Jesus down from the cross.

Joseph and Nicodemus soon pulled out the nails from Jesus' hands and feet. Nicodemus then got busy putting the mixture of myrrh and aloes into all the wounds of Jesus' body. When that was done, Joseph was busy wrapping Jesus' arms, legs, body, and even the head, with long cloth bandage type rolls. This was how the Jews buried their dead, certainly not with a "shroud" of one piece cloth draped over the body. Remember when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and when Lazarus came out of the tomb, Jesus told people to unwrap him, because he could not unwrap himself, as his hands had been wrapped. Lazarus could walk, because Jesus called to him and told him to come out of the tomb. So we know the legs were wrapped individually.

Jesus' dead body was wrapped like Lazarus' body had been wrapped. And Joseph with Nicodemus, were quickly off to rest Jesus in the tomb owned by Joseph. The tomb was quite close at hand we are told. Actually Jesus was crucified in a garden type place on Golgotha. Joseph had probably chosen that spot in that garden, for his resting place, upon his death, and hence had that tomb hewn out of a rock within that garden.

The two ladies who had been standing by, at a distance, ever since Jesus had been hung up on the cross, followed Joseph and Nicodemus, and they saw where they laid Jesus.

After Christ was placed in the tomb, Joseph had a huge massive rock rolled in front of the entrance. This would indicate that Joseph and Nicodemus were not alone, but had either friends, or servants with them, as two men alone could probably not roll a huge stone, unless of course the entrance to the tomb was much smaller than we imagine.

By the time all this was done, and Jesus was in the tomb, Luke records this, "It was Preparation, and Sabbath drew on" (Luke 23:54 KJV).

Just about everyone has missed how the Greek reads in this verse. The words "drew on" are, in the Greek, in the IMPERFECT tense. The imperfect tense in the New Testament Greek, is an action that has ALREADY taken place but is ALSO CONTINUING TO TAKE PLACE. What Luke actually said was "....and Sabbath HAD COME AND WAS CONTINUING TO COME!"

Luke did say it was "preparation" - yes, Joseph had started all this action at evening, when evening had come. That is when he went to Pilate to request he be given the body of Christ, and the Sabbath of the 15th day was yet to arrive (Jews reckoning the start of the Sabbath when the stars appeared). But by the time he and Nicodemus put Jesus in the tomb and rolled a rock in front of the entrance, the Sabbath had already come and was continuing to come.

Stop and think. It was evening (not earlier than 6 p.m.) when Joseph went to Pilate. By the time he and Nicodemus went to Golgotha, took Jesus from off the cross, wrapped Him up (which was not just placing a one piece cloth over His body) and placed Him in the tomb, it could well have been between 8 and 9 p.m.

It was the early hours of the 15th day Sabbath, the annual Sabbath of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when Jesus was placed in the tomb. He had previously told

people that He would be three days and three night in the heart of the earth, the tomb, and would then rise again (Matt. 12:40). Three days and three nights after being placed in the tomb, in the first hours of the 15th, the Sabbath, which was a Wednesday evening in our understanding of time today, Jesus would rise again. And so it was, for Mark records for us, "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdaline...." (Mark 16:9). The first hours of the first day of the week, as God and the Jews count days, is the first hours of what we call Saturday evening. Jesus was resurrected to immortal life, within the first hours of the first day of the week. I shall have more to say on that when we arrive at that section of the Gospels.

The two ladies from Galilee, saw where they put Jesus to rest. They were so pleased they had waited near the cross of Jesus, and saw all that Joseph and Nicodemus had done, especially where they could find Jesus, for they had by this time determined between themselves, that they would buy and prepare spices after that 15th day Sabbath was over (which was a Thursday), buy and prepare them on the Friday, rest on the weekly Sabbath (our Saturday), and then come back to the tomb very early on the morning of the first day of the week (our Sunday) and anoint Jesus' body with the spices. How they were going to roll away the massive stone that now covered the entrance to the tomb, they just never gave it a thought, for they were too exited in knowing where they had laid Jesus, the one they loved so much.

The Priests And Pharisees Plan More Evil Work

It was not long after Joseph and Nicodemus had placed Jesus in Joseph's tomb that word got around to the members of the Sanhedrin and chief priests and Pharisees, what the two men had done. They were soon gathering together, even in that night of the now 15th day of Nisan, to determine where they would go from this point, for they now realized, at least some of Jesus' followers were not about to "go away" and forget about this man called they believed was the Son of God. These conniving, conspiring men were once more together in secret to plan their next move, in making sure the disciples of Jesus would be halted and stopped in whatever work they were going to do with the dead Jesus.

Those men of the dark, would go very early in the morning, just after sun up, to Pilate. They stood before the governor and said to him, "Sir, we now remember how this Messiah imposter, said while still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore we beseech you, and request, that you order the tomb to be made secure until at least the third day from last night when he was placed in it. We want you to order this be done in case his disciples go to the tomb and steal away his body, and so go around telling the people that he did rise from the dead as he said he would. And if they do this, the last fraud will be worse than the first fraud."

Pilate thought for a moment, and to keep himself on the good side of those Jewish leaders, whom he knew had great influence with the people, and did not want any riot to take place with the people, said to them, "Alright, take a guard of soldiers; go, make the tomb as secure as you can."

So off they happily went, and they put a cement like substance between the tomb entrance and the stone rolled in front of it, to seal it up tight. And they set soldiers

around the tomb to keep anyone from trying to enter the tomb and steal away Jesus' body.

They left, feeling they had now fully and completely sealed the fate of Jesus, and with that, the fate of all His disciples. Finally and at last, once and for all, they thought, they were rid of this Messiah imposter and His disciples would soon disappear into the forest and fade away (Matt. 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42).

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Jesus Rises From The Dead

Ladies Prepare To Anoint Jesus' Body

The two ladies both called Mary (Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses and James), told other ladies what they had witnessed that evening of the 15th day. They told other ladies where Joseph and Nicodemus had buried Jesus, in a tomb in the garden of Golgotha. It was probably Mary Magdalene's idea to buy spices, prepare them, and come and anoint Jesus in the tomb.

The anointing was a kind of preserving a body for a while, so it would not decompose as quickly as not being anointed with the special spices. This shows that they never expected Jesus to rise from the dead. Indeed none of the disciples were expecting such a miracle to happen.

It was now the annual Sabbath, the 15th of Nisan, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It seems none of the ladies had in stock in their homes any of the spices needed to anoint Jesus' body. They would have to buy them after the annual Sabbath of the 15th of Nisan (which was a Thursday), was over. Friday, a work day, the second day of the feast of Unleavened Bread would be the day they would purchase the spices and prepare them. This they did, then rested on the weekly Sabbath (Saturday) according to the fourth commandment (see Mark 16:1 with Luke 23:56).

They were now all ready, very excited, with the thought of rising very early the first day of the week, our Sunday, a work day, and head for the tomb in which Jesus was laying and anoint Him with the spices.

Jesus is Resurrected!

The ladies had bought and prepared the spices on Friday, and they had rested the seventh day, in accordance with the fourth commandment of God's great Ten Commandments. That Sabbath was now over, the sun had set, it was getting very close to three days and three night, or 72 hours, that Jesus had been placed in the tomb. Darkness was closing in, the stars were about to shine in the heaven above. It was a pretty normal Saturday evening we would say, for most people that is. But in that Golgotha garden, and in one particular tomb, something was about to happen that was far from normal, in fact it had NEVER happened before, in the history of mankind being on the earth.

God in heaven above, was watching over His Son Jesus in the tomb where He lay. Jesus had died in complete FAITH that His Father in heaven would, three days and three nights later, RESURRECT Him from the dead, but not to just being once more a physical man, but to being GLORIFIED and made IMMORTAL, made eternal, having once more the GLORY that He had when He was with the Father before becoming a human being (that was made clear to us in Jesus' prayer to the Father during the night He was betrayed - John chapter 17). No other human person who ever lived had ever

been made IMMORTAL! Some had been raised from the dead, like when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but not one single individual from the time of Adam and Eve, had ever been made ETERNALLY IMMORTAL.

The time had COME....it was now 72 hours since Jesus was placed in the tomb. The Almighty Father in heaven said, "LET IT BE DONE. LET MY SON LIVE AGAIN WITH THE GLORY HE HAD BEFORE HE BECAME A HUMAN BEING!!"

Glory FILLED the tomb where Jesus lay. The Father filled the tomb with the POWER of His Holy Spirit....and in one split second, Jesus' literal body was made IMMORTAL! Jesus opened His eyes. He was ALIVE once more! He had been dead, had NOT EXISTED for three days and three nights. He had died in full FAITH, given His spirit over into the hands of the Father in heaven, and He was NOW ALIVE again! His body was filled with eternal GLORY. He now once more had the power and majesty to appear as flesh and bone, and to vanish away into the unseen world of SPIRIT!

God and the angels live in a different dimension than we humans do. We are ONLY physical. But God, Jesus once said, is SPIRIT (see John chapter 4), meaning He has a Spirit body, eternal and full of GLORY. His world is a world made of Spirit. The heavenly Jerusalem, and all it contains, with all the angels and beings in that world that God has created (last chapters of the book of Revelation) is made of Spirit. And is, unless God chooses otherwise, not able to be seen by the human eyes. God's face is like the SUN, and even more. We are told in the Bible that Moses once asked God to show Himself to him, in His GLORY form. God said He would show Moses His glory form, but only His back parts, for God said to Moses, "Mankind cannot look on my face and live" (see Exodus 33:11-23).

Then God can, if He so desires, make Himself into physical matter, of flesh and bone. He can then appear to humans, talk to them, eat a meal with them, have them touch Him. We see this in the Old Testament, in such chapters as Genesis 18, where God appeared to Abraham, even ate a meal with him.

Jesus was again alive, but alive with the GLORY of IMMORTALITY. He was laying in the tomb wrapped all over with cloth, arms, legs, torso, even His head. No problem, in His now glorified state, He simply came through all the cloth around His glorified body, just in a sense walked through it all, or as we might think of it today in our space age....He beamed Himself through it and beamed Himself back into physical form of flesh and bone. He stood there inside the tomb, and glorified the Father in heaven for His watchful love and power.

It did not matter that the great stone was still over the entrance to the tomb, and was sealed shut by the soldiers that Pilate had sent on the request of the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus just "beamed" Himself, so to speak, through the walls of the tomb, and stood outside in His invisible form, the soldiers guarding the tomb, completely oblivious to what had taken place.

There was singing and joyful praising going on by all the angels and created beings in heaven. They were praising the heavenly Father for His glory and His power. Jesus had overcome SIN and DEATH. And Christ was the very FIRST of millions of more humans

that one day would also be raised to eternal IMMORTAL GLORY! Yes, this was a time to praise and give the Father great glory.

We are not told what Jesus did the rest of that night, but then we are not told what Jesus did on many days (only some events we are told) while still on earth after His resurrection, and before going back to heaven to sit on the Father's right hand.

The Ladies Come To The Tomb

From all the Gospel accounts we learn that specifically planning to come to the tomb was Mary Magdalene, from whom Christ had cast out seven demons. She was as we have seen one of His most faithful followers. The other Mary was the mother of James and Joses. Mark informs us that a lady by the name of Salome was with them. Salome was the wife of Zebedee, and the mother of James and John. From Luke (chap. 14:10) Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (see Luke 8:3), was also with them. Luke only mentions the two Mary's but says other women were there also. This could mean the women Salome and Joanna, but it could have been possible that more than those FOUR women were part of the party who were going to visit Jesus' tomb.

The two Sabbaths had come and gone, the one Sabbath of the 15th of Nisan which was a Thursday, and the weekly Sabbath had come and gone. The ladies had no idea that Jesus had risen from the dead in the early hours of what we call Saturday evening, which to the Jews was the early hours of the first day of the week. Matthew says, "After the Sabbath, and as it began to illuminate or grow light towards the first of the week..." (Matt. 28:1).

Albert Barnes, in his famous Bible Commentary, explains it all this way:

"The word 'dawn' is not necessarily in the originals. The word here properly means, as the first day 'approached,' or drew on, without specifying the precise time. Mark says (16:1, 2) that it was after 'the Sabbath was past and very early in the morning, at the rising of the sun,' i.e., not that the sun was risen, but that it was ABOUT TO RISE, or at the early break of day. Luke says (24:10), that it was very early; in the Greek, DEEP TWILIGHT, or when there was scarcely any light. John (20:1) says, it was 'early, when it was yet DARK,' i.e., that is, it was not YET full daylight, or the sun had NOT risen. The time when they came therefore, was at the break of day, when the sun was about to rise, but while it was yet so dark as to render objects OBSCURE, or not DISTINCTLY visible" (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, single volume edition).

Yes, the ladies had prepared the anointing preservative spices before the weekly Sabbath, had rested on the weekly Sabbath according to the commandment of the Lord, and could hardly sleep all that Saturday night, waiting with great anticipation the time when they would set off for the tomb where Jesus lay. And as John clearly tells us, they were up and walking to the tomb WHILE it was YET DARK, when people and objects could not be well seen.

Now, it would seem, as they were getting close to the tomb, they started to realize in a practical way, that they would not have the physical strength, even among all of them together, to push away the great stone that covered the entrance to the tomb. And

besides that fact, there were soldiers guarding the tomb, so how were they going to get permission to enter the tomb and embalm Jesus' body?

They discussed these two problems, what seemed then, as impossible obstacles to their dreams and plans of showing loving care towards Jesus. They did not know how they were going to overcome those two hindrances to what they wanted to do, but they kept their faith in knowing that somehow God would provide the answer and make their loving deed come to reality.

This is a wonderful example of faith in action, a faith that could remove mountains, but this time in the specific, a faith that could remove a huge stone and remove soldiers guarding it.

God Had Answered The Ladies Prayers

God in heaven saw the faith and love of those women. He had made it all possible for them to be the first to see inside the NOW empty tomb. It is Matthew who records it for us as it had happened. Sometime BEFORE the ladies ever reached the tomb, Matthew put it this way as translated in the KJV, "And behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men" (Matt. 28:2-4).

The key here is the little word "was", the fourth word in as given in the KJV. In the Greek this word is in the "aorist" tense, meaning a single action done and completed in the PAST!

What Matthew actually wrote and said was, "And behold there HAD BEEN a great earthquake...."

Sometime AFTER Jesus' resurrection in the early hours of Saturday evening or the first day of the week (as God counts the beginning of days) and BEFORE the ladies arrived at the tomb, while it was YET DARK, on that Sunday morning, of still the same first day of the week, an angel from God had come down, the soldiers fainted at his sight, and lay as if dead on the ground. The angel then rolled away the stone to the entrance of the tomb. All of this was done because God was honoring the faith and love those women He knew were coming to the tomb that early, but dark, Sunday morning.

Jesus is Not in the Tomb!

The ladies were getting all uptight but excited at the same time, as they were coming around the last corner towards the tomb. When they turned this corner the tomb would be in front of them, but as they thought so would be the stone in the entrance way and the soldiers guarding it all.

What a SHOCK came across all faces, mouths dropped open, eyes blinked twice and three times, they froze in their tracks. None could believe what they were seeing. None could speak for a few seconds. It was as if it was all a dream. Still no one saying a

word, they slowly moved closer to the tomb. Finally they realized it was all very true what they were seeing....the stone had been rolled away, the entrance to the tomb was OPEN, and the soldiers keeping guard....well they were laying on the ground as if they were dead men.

The ladies now looked at each other, puzzled, yes, having joy in their hearts, yes, but also they were scared to some point. For how on earth they thought and said to each other, could this be possible. Then thoughts crossed their mind that some men had already come, killed the soldiers, rolled away the stone to the entrance, and had stolen Jesus' body. Some, with this thought in their minds, fell to their knees and started to weep in sorrow.

It was all too much for Mary Magdalene, she could take no more of all this. She had been faithful in staying with Jesus all the while as He was being crucified on the cross, she had stayed around when all others had forsaken and left Jesus dead on the cross. She had waited and had seen that finally Joseph and Nicodemus had come back to take Jesus down from the tree of death. She had followed them to where they placed Jesus in this tomb. She had helped prepare the embalming spices on the Friday, had patiently waited through the hours of the weekly Sabbath. She had risen while it was yet dark, on the first day of the week, and was now standing here in front of the tomb. The stone had been rolled away, the soldiers were as if dead men. Someone she thought had come and taken Jesus out of the tomb and now no one knew where they had lain Him.

It was all just too much for this Mary. Running with tears falling down her cheeks, away she went, back to Jerusalem, crying her heart out. She ran and she ran, finally making it to where Peter and the disciple that Jesus loved (which most believe it to be John who is relating this to us) were staying.

With tears streaming down her face, she said to them, "My heart is breaking. I've been to where they laid Jesus in the tomb. Someone has taken the Lord out of the tomb, and I am in great agony of mind, for I do not know where they have laid Him" (John 20:1-2).

Peter and the other disciple could really not believe her. They were thinking she was just too emotionally upset at all that had transpired over the last three day. They were to Mary dragging their feet as we might say. She could see they were not really believing her. With another outburst of loud crying, she turned and started back as fast as her legs could go, back to the tomb. Maybe she thought, if she just waited at the tomb someone would eventually come along who would know what had happened to Jesus' body and where it had been taken.

Meanwhile At The Tomb

Back at the tomb, where the other ladies were still in shock and amazement, still very puzzled about what they were seeing and what it all meant. SUDDENLY they saw, sitting on the huge stone that had been over the entrance, the ANGEL of the Lord that had come down previously and had rolled away the stone. He was bright and glorious....they were at first very afraid, but the angel soon calmed them down to a degree by saying to them, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was

crucified. He is not here; for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Yes, I have told you what is truth" (Matt. 20:5-7).

The angel said those words and then he was gone, just vanished out of their sight. The ladies looked at one another wondering if they really had seen and heard what they thought they had just seen and heard. They were not sure, could it really be true they thought. They decided they must enter the tomb and see if Jesus was inside or was really gone. So inside they went, looking around none could see the body of Jesus. Had they indeed seen an angel? Did they indeed hear that angel say Jesus had risen from the dead? The whole thing for them was perplexing. Then as they were thinking and looking, behold SUDDENLY ONCE MORE....not just one angel, but this time TWO angels appeared next to them, in dazzling apparel! They were frightened out of their minds, and bowed their heads to the ground. Once more they did not know what to think, by now it had all become a little too much, their minds were in a spin. Then one of the angels spoke:

"Do not be amazed or frightened. Why do you seek the living among the dead? You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has RISEN, He is not here; see the place where they laid Him. Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise from being dead. He had RISEN! Go, tell his disciples and Peter, that He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him" (Luke 24:4-7; Mark 16:5-7).

The ladies were astonished, still very unnerved by all they had seen and heard. Trembling, they quickly left the tomb. They spoke not a word to each other, but started back to Jerusalem, determined to say nothing about what they had witnessed, for they feared people would think they had gone insane.

As they were just a little way from the tomb, who should they see coming back towards them but Mary Magdalene. She came closer and in passing the other women now returning to Jerusalem, she said to them, "No one will believe what I told them, that someone has taken Jesus out of the tomb, and put Him somewhere else....they just will not believe me."

The other ladies said not a word to her, but passed her by as they set out back to Jerusalem.

Mary Magdalene The First To See The Risen Jesus

Mary reached the tomb still weeping. She looked inside and saw the two angels in white, that the other ladies had just seen. They were sitting where Jesus' body had been laid to rest. One where Jesus' head had been and one where His feet had been. The angels saw Mary looking in and said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She replied, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have put Him."

As she said this she felt that someone was behind her, turning around she saw a man. It was Jesus Himself, but she did not know it was Him. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?"

"Well sir," Mary replied, thinking she was speaking to the gardener, "if you have carried him away, please tell me where you have put Him, and I will take Him away with me, and take good care of Him."

Jesus then said to her, "Mary." Her heart dropped to the bottom of her feet, then sprang back up again. She exclaimed with the biggest smile anyone could possibly give, "Rabboni!" (a Hebrew word). Which meaning is "TEACHER." She KNEW, YES SHE KNEW....IT WAS JESUS! How her heart leapt for joy, she was floating on air, up on cloud nine as we say. She wanted to dance around, dance the fastest and most joyful dance any Jewish girl could possibly do. She wanted to go over and touch Him, hug Him, just to make sure this was a reality, that what she saw with her eyes and heard with her hearing....that it really was her TEACHER, her MASTER, her LORD.

Jesus knew she wanted to come and touch Him, and so said to her, "Do not hold or touch me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:11-18).

We are not given much more than the words above, to explain to us this fact that Jesus had to ascend to the Father before any physical human could touch Him. I will discuss it more as to what it may have been all about, in a short while.

Mary was ecstatic, overjoyed, she had seen the Lord and He had talked to her. Mark is the one Gospel writer that records that Mary Magdalene was the first human person that Jesus appeared to. Part of the reason as to why it was to Mary Magdalene that He first appeared must be the fact that she not only loved Him so much, but was probably the leader among the women to (1) stay near His cross all the time, even after His death. (2) follow Joseph and Nicodemus to see where they laid Jesus (3) determine to buy spices and prepare them and come and anoint Jesus' body, while it was yet dark in those early hours of the daylight portion of the first day of the week.

All of this, what took place as the sun was about to rise on that first day of the week, during the feast of Unleavened Bread in 30 A.D. is a wonderful testimony to the devotion and love of some of the women among Jesus' disciples.

Mary Magdalene was off as fast as she could go, like being chased by a wild bear. She was off to do as Jesus had instructed her to do. The joy she was feeling made her legs move and run like never before in her life. Soon she had caught up to the other ladies who were already making their way back to Jerusalem. She told them what had happened to her at the tomb, and how Jesus had appeared to her, and talked to her. All were now beginning to see they had not been in a dream, not imagining things. They realized too many things had happened, and so it was indeed a reality. They then recalled how Jesus had spoken in the past about how He must suffer at the hands of sinners, be put to death, but rise again after three days.

It all began to click together for them, their minds becoming clearer and clearer on everything. Yes, now they knew it was all true what they had witnessed, they now knew Jesus was ALIVE, that He had been RAISED from the dead, and was alive forever more. They had a deep fearful awe for God and His power and great joy at the same time.

Jesus Appears To All The Women

All the ladies who had come out early that Sunday morning and had experienced all that they saw and heard, and Mary Magdalene now having seen Jesus, were busy talking about it all, and relating many stories of Jesus as they had in the past followed Him at times when He preached and taught and healed people. Oh, how busy they were talking about it all as they made their way back to Jerusalem to tell everything that had happened to Jesus' other disciples, especially to the eleven. They had no idea what was about to take place.

Suddenly, out of the blue, Jesus met and appeared to them, saying, "Hail!" How splendid, how grand, how royal it was. All of the ladies knew it was Jesus, no question about it. They all ran up to Him and falling at His feet, taking hold of them, they worshipped Him.

Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go into Galilee, and there they will see me" (Matt. 28:8-10).

You will notice when Jesus appeared to all the ladies, He allowed them to touch Him! Yes, they took HOLD of His feet!

He would not, shortly before, allow Mary Magdalene to touch Him, for He had said to her that He had not yet ascended to His Father in heaven, but NOW He does allow them all to touch Him. There is ONLY one answer. In the time when He appeared to Mary Magdalene and the time He appeared to all the women making their way back to Jerusalem, He had ascended to heaven, appeared before the Father and had returned to earth.

Jesus The First Of The First Fruits

What seems like a strange happening, Jesus going to heaven, and back again in a relatively short time, before anyone was allowed to touch Him, may be answered in the symbolism of what the priests did at this time, even on this day, Sunday morning, in the Temple.

God through Moses, had given instruction to Israel that the new year harvest of barley grain could not be started to be gathered in UNTIL the first cutting of it had been done and presented or offered in the Temple by the priests, on the first day of the week, DURING the feast of Unleavened Bread.

It is also very interesting that the Sadducees, cut the first sheaf of the new barley grain harvest AFTER the weekly Sabbath had ENDED, hence a first day of the week cutting, or what we call Saturday evening. Then they ground it up, put it in a basket or container

of some kind, and waved it around while holding it, in a Temple ritual early on the first day of the week (our Sunday) during the feast of Unleavened Bread.

All of this it would seem, Jesus fulfilled. He was resurrected in the first hours of the first day of the week, or Saturday evening, after the weekly Sabbath had ended. As Mark records for us, "Now when He was risen early the first day of the week....."(Mark 16:9). Risen within the first hours of the first day, which in God's counting of days, begins at evening time (Genesis 1). Indeed it is just not possible that the disciples did not know WHEN Jesus had been resurrected to life. Many must have asked Him, and He must have told them, for there would be no reason for Him not to tell them.

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15, that Jesus is the FIRST of the FIRSTFRUITS, and others will be at His coming. All in the first resurrection at the coming of Jesus in glory back to this earth, will be "firstfruits" to God the Father. The day of Pentecost is to be held on the first day of the week, our Sunday.

Jesus ascended to heaven, to the Father, on the first day of the week, and back again on that same day. Before he ascended no human person could touch Him, but after ascending He did allow people to touch Him.

The whole symbolism is just to coincidental to ignore. Jesus was the wave sheaf in type. He was the FIRST to ever be raised to glorified, immortal life. He was the first of the firstfruits to God the Father from the human population of the earth. Those in the first resurrection will be "firstfruits" according to the apostle Paul. The feast of Pentecost, which pictures the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the first New Testament church, is on the first day of the week.

Jesus fulfilled the wave sheaf offering. It was being offered in the Temple right at the time He was ascending and descending to the Father and back again to the earth, on that morning of the first day of the week, during the feast of Unleavened Bread. He was in heaven for that short period of time, to be accepted as the spiritual human/resurrected wave sheaf before God the Father.

The ladies who had come to that tomb, that early morning, were now exhilarated, elated, stimulated with heartened spirit of mind. They had seen and touched the risen Christ. They were told to go and tell Jesus' other disciples who were in Jerusalem. This they would do gladly, but would anyone believe their words?

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

More Disciples See Jesus

The Ladies Tell The Eleven That Jesus Appeared To Them

The group of ladies that had come out that early Sunday morning were close to being back in Jerusalem. In the meantime, the soldiers that had been struck unconscious by the angel who came to roll back the great stone over the entrance to the tomb that Jesus had been put in, were now awake. A few other soldiers had arrived to take their shift of guarding the tomb. They were all looking into the empty tomb, and realizing Jesus was gone. They, of course, had no idea what had taken place. They hurried off and made it back into Jerusalem before the ladies did. Straight to the chief priest they went, telling them the tomb that Jesus was in, was empty, and the stone had been rolled away from covering the entrance.

The chief priests were in shock, the worse possible thing as far as they were concerned had actual come to pass. They immediately called for the members of the great Jewish Sanhedrin to assemble. After some debate on what now to do in this situation, they decided to give money to the soldiers and have them say, "Go, tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were sleeping.' And if all what has taken place comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him with some story that will keep you out of trouble."

And so the soldiers took the money and did as they were directed. The Gospel writer Matthew says that, that story has been spread among the Jews to this very day (Matt. 28:11-15).

The ladies finally arrived back in the city of Jerusalem. Straightaway they found where the eleven apostles were staying.

"We have seen Jesus," they excitedly and loudly proclaimed. "He is alive! He has been resurrected to glorious immortality," they continued.

The apostles looked at each other, then back at the ladies, saying nothing. The women could sense they did not believe them.

"Jesus appeared to us out of the blue, and we worshipped before His feet, actually holding and touching His feet," the women shouted back at the apostles. "It is true, He is ALIVE, He is ALIVE," some of the women proclaimed.

Some of the eleven men finally said, "No, it cannot be, you have imagined it all. You have been so emotional since Jesus was crucified, that you just think you have seen Jesus. If He has been resurrected, why would He appear to you first, and not to us, His chosen eleven apostles? You are all just dreaming!" (Luke 24:9-11).

Mary Magdalene looked over at Peter and John, and said, "I was there standing and weeping as I looked into the tomb, and it was empty, then two angels were there and they told me Jesus had risen from the dead. Then I saw, who, at first, I thought was the gardener, and I asked him that if he had taken Jesus, to tell me where he was. He then spoke, and I knew it was Jesus. And it was! I'm telling you Jesus has been resurrected, and is ALIVE. Go and see, the tomb is EMPTY!"

Peter looked at John and said, "Alright John, let's go to the tomb and see if what happened to the women and Mary Magdalene happens to us."

Both men were pretty good runners, but John was the better. He out ran Peter to the tomb. Looking in he saw the linen cloths lying there but no body of Jesus. John did not go into the tomb. Simon Peter arrived, and he did go inside the tomb. He saw also the linen cloths lying there. The cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head was there but neatly rolled up and lying in another place in the tomb. Jesus' body certainly was NOT there.

John, finally decided he needed to go inside the tomb also, and he did. For John it was all proved as the women said. He knew within himself, that Jesus indeed had been resurrected to life.

None of the apostles yet understood the Scriptures that Jesus would rise from the dead. But John knew in his heart that Jesus was indeed alive.

Peter on the other hand, though having to admit Jesus was not in the tomb, still could not believe Jesus had been resurrected to immortal life.

They both returned to the other nine apostles. John kept his inner belief to himself. Peter was not convinced that Jesus was alive and had appeared to the women. The other nine could not be convinced either no matter how the women insisted it was true. The apostles went to their homes or places they were staying in Jerusalem (John 20:3-10). And Simon Peter was alone for a while, to think upon all he had see and heard from the women who had been to the tomb earlier that morning.

Jesus Appears On The Road To Emmaus

Later in that day two disciples were going to the village named Emmaus, about seven miles west of Jerusalem. They were talking to each other about all the things that had happened, from Jesus' betrayal in the garden of Gethsemane, during the night of the 14th of Nisan, to the crucifixion on the afternoon of the 14th, to the guard watch being set in front of the tomb in the early hours of the 15th of Nisan. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus drew near to them and started to walk along the road with them. But their eyes, we are told, were kept from recognizing Him.

Jesus said to them, "What is this conversation about, that you are having with each other."

One of them, by the name of Cleopas, answered, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem this Passover feast time, who does not know the things that have happened in the last number of days?"

And Jesus said, "What things?" And answering him they replied, "Why, concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deeds and words before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one, the Messiah, the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since all this happened, since he was crucified, placed in a tomb, and a watch of soldiers, set guard over it, to keep people from taking Jesus' body. Moreover, some women of our company, have amazed us today. They were at the tomb early this morning and did not find his body in the tomb; and they said they had seen angels that told them that Jesus was alive again. Some of those with us in Jerusalem went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said, empty, but Jesus did not appear to them. So we doubt their story is true that the women told us in saying he had appeared them."

Jesus now looked at them with pity and amazement at the same time, and said, "O foolish men and so slow of heart to believe ALL that the prophets have spoken! Was it not written, and was it not God's plan, that the Christ should SUFFER these things and then enter into GLORY?"

Then Jesus, beginning with the books of Moses (first five books of the Bible), and all the prophets, interpreted to them ALL the Scriptures concerning Himself. It was a lesson in Bible study like they had never heard before, their hearts beating faster and faster with every explanation of all that was written about the Messiah Christ that was to come.

They walked on and got closer to the village of Emmaus. Jesus made out that He was going to walk further, but they constrained Him, saying, "Please stay with us, for it is towards evening and the day is far spent." So He went in to stay with them.

The two men prepared a meal. When Jesus sat down to eat with them, He took the large loaf of bread and blessed it and broke it in pieces, and gave some to each man (remember in those days they did not have "sliced" bread, so people at meal times literally had to break the bread into pieces).

Immediately their eyes were opened and they KNEW it was JESUS! Then He just VANISHED out of their sight!

Oh they were ecstatic with joy and praise. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts BURN within us when he talked to us and opened to us the Scriptures? Yes indeed! Praise be to God, we have SEEN Jesus. He is ALIVE!"

Those two men forgot about eating, they were not hungry any more, eating a meal was now the furthest thing from their minds. They put their sandals back on and headed as fast as they could go back to Jerusalem. They knew they had to tell the eleven apostles that Jesus had appeared to them.

When they got back to Jerusalem they found ten of them in one place again. Much had happened they were not aware of. The soldiers had been telling people that some of Jesus' disciples had stolen away His body to make it look like He had been resurrected. Of course what the women that morning had witnessed had not just been kept to themselves or the eleven, it was now pretty common knowledge as to what they said they had seen and heard, so to the people hearing the soldier's story, they thought that Jesus' disciples were indeed up to trickery. Many Jews were very angry and ready to do harm to the eleven apostles. They thought it would be safer for them to all be together in one room, with the doors and windows barred shut.

Then, what the two men coming back to Jerusalem did not know was that before they arrived and before the apostles were together as one group again, Jesus had appeared to Simon Peter.

We are NOT told anywhere in the New Testament exactly when and how and what was said between Jesus and Peter. We are only told that Peter had seen Jesus. Peter was still in doubt about everything, though he saw for himself that the tomb was empty, he still was not convinced by the women that Jesus had been resurrected to eternal immortal life. Sometime before the two men arrived back in Jerusalem from Emmaus, it would seem Jesus appeared to Peter, and so ended Peter's doubts about all the events that had taken place that Sunday during the feast of Unleavened Bread.

The two men from Emmaus came running into where the apostles were gathered, and before they could get a word out about Jesus appearing and talking with them, the apostles, with loud excited voices said, "The Lord HAS RISEN indeed, and has appeared to Simon (Peter)!"

Then the two men told the ten apostles (Thomas was not with them for some reason) the fascinating episode that they had been part of, and how their eyes had been opened to recognize Jesus when He had blessed and broke the bread.

There was by now, little doubt in the minds of all those disciples in that room in Jerusalem, that Jesus was alive once more, and was alive in a glorified immortal sense (Luke 24:13-35).

Jesus Appears To Them In Their Closed Up Room

John records that it was the same first day of the week, and at evening, of that same first day. Now, you are thinking how can this be possible, when God starts a day at evening (Genesis 1)? Should John not have written it was the SECOND day of the week and at evening?

There are two reasons why John wrote it the way he did. First, it could well have been that John was using ROMAN time (12 midnight to 12 midnight for a day, as most of us in our countries that we live in, do). Then that evening of the first day, would indeed in Roman time language still be the first day of the week.

On the other hand if John was using Jewish or God's counting time for a day, there are times when the Almighty Himself counts the EVENING as PART OF the PRECEDING

day. We find an example of this in Exodus 12:18, 19. God is talking about the feast of Unleavened Bread (verse 17), and as this and many other Scriptures prove and teach, the Israelites were to eat no leaven, but only unleavened bread for 7 days, from the start of the 15th (at evening time) to the end of the 21st (at evening time) of the first month of Nisan or Abib. But in this verse in Exodus 12, God puts it this way to them, "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at EVEN, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month, at even. Seven days shall no leaven be found in your houses....in all your habitations shall you eat unleavened bread" (Exod. 12: 18, 19).

We know from verses like Leviticus 23:6, that the feast of Unleavened Bread was for 7 days, from the 15th to the 21st inclusive. During those days they were to eat unleavened bread only, seven days of no leaven bread but only unleavened bread.

Yes, in this instance, the evening was PART OF the previous day. God can do things like this you know, if He wishes. He can throw a curve ball now and again among all the straight fast balls, the basic true balls. Genesis 1 is the basic true ball of how God counts days 99% OF THE TIME, but now and then He pulls a curve ball, just to keep you on your toes.

It was the evening time of the first day of the week, and the eleven, well actually only ten (because Thomas we are told was not there with them, for whatever reason, which we are not told) plus the two from Emmaus were all together in a room that had the doors shut, bolted tight. They were there for fear of the Jews.

There they were talking over the great and wonderful events that had taken place in the last 12 plus hours. Then....just there....no doors opened, Jesus STOOD IN THE MIDST of them! He said, "Peace be with you." Immediately He showed them His hands with the nail hole scars and the gash in His side where the soldier's spear had been thrust. They knew it was Jesus and not some demon playing tricks. They were delighted to see the Lord. Jesus again said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I said you." And after saying this He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Maybe sounds a little strange to you. Jesus breathed on them as typifying that the Holy Spirit had been with them in many ways in the past, for that set them apart from those Jews who could not understand because it was not given to them to understand. Then the breathing on them for the Holy Spirit signified the Holy Spirit would be continually with them, and even as a direct begettal IN their mind on the coming day of Pentecost. And all of that we shall soon find out about as we proceed through this Bible Story in the book of Acts.

What about Jesus saying that what sins they retain shall be retained and what they forgive shall be forgiven?

When is it that ministers or disciples of Jesus have the power to retain or forgive sins. Probably in the main when they are leading someone to baptism, or having to determine the attitude of someone when they request to be baptized, for baptism is the

forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ. People who are going to baptize in the name of Jesus, must, with the help of the Holy Spirit, determine the person or persons have truly come to understand what being a disciple of Christ means, and that they understand sin, and what they are requesting to be forgiven from. Sometimes people are ready for baptism and sometimes they are not. If they are, then sins will be forgiven. If they are not ready, then sins will be retained, until they are ready for baptism.

Jesus was telling those disciples that the Holy Spirit would be guiding them as they worked with, served, helped, and led others towards baptism and salvation.

Thomas, called the Twin, was not with them that evening when Jesus came, so they had to tell him later that they had seen the Lord. But Thomas said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print marks of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe!" (John 20:19-25).

Would Thomas get his chance to do what he said was the only way that he would believe that Jesus was alive from the dead? We shall see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

The Disciples Finally Believe Jesus Is Immortally Alive

Thomas Gets To See Jesus

The Gospel of John says it was "eight days later." Now the Bible uses "inclusive" counting and it uses "exclusive" counting. If John was using "inclusive" counting then that first day, when Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, the other women, to Peter, and then the other nine disciples, was day number one....eight days later was then a another Sunday. If John was using "exclusive" counting, then day number one was a Monday and day number eight was a Monday.

So either a Sunday or Monday, ALL eleven disciples, including Thomas, were together in the same room as before, with the doors (the Jews were still in an angry mood towards them) shut tight. But the doors shut, made no difference for Jesus. He was now glorified, and doors being shut...well He had no need of doors. He could appear anywhere He desired. Those born of God, made immortal, have the power to beam themselves wherever they will, shall we say, de-molecule their atoms as invisible and put those atoms back together as physical, wherever and whenever they desire.

The eleven disciples were together behind closed doors, and in the blink of an eye, Jesus stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you."

The apostles were STARTLED and even frightened that they thought they were seeing a spirit or a ghost.

Here we need to understand a few things that the Bible in an overall ways teaches. We can see in the Bible that God has the power to make Himself flesh and bone (it was God that came to Abraham and had a meal with him, in Genesis 18), and God can show His glorified form, His back parts (because no man can live if they saw His glorified face and front parts (see Exodus 33:11-23), to a human, if He so chooses.

Angels, the good righteous ones, who obey and serve God, can also appear to humans as flesh and bone. We have many examples of this throughout the Bible. And Paul told us to entertain strangers, for in so doing some have entertained angels and did not know it (Hebrews 13:2). The other two person that came with the Lord to Abraham (Genesis 18) were angels. They went on to Sodom and Gomorrah. They actually took hold of Lot at one point and pulled him back into the house (see Genesis 19:10).

Angels can then transform themselves into flesh and bone if they need to. But the fallen angels, or those known as "demons" in the Bible, are NEVER ever said to be able to do such a transformation, as to become flesh and bone. They can only appear to mankind as a "spirit" or "ghost" type. And they have and still do, appear to people as a "spirit." If you were able, or if they allowed you to walk up to them and reach out to touch them, you would touch nothing, your hand or arm would just pass right through them, come out the other side, and you would feel nothing.

God has NOT given the RIGHT or the POWER for fallen angels or demons to appear as flesh and bone, and we can be mighty thankful He had not, for they do enough evil damage on this earth as it is, without having the power to transform themselves into flesh and bone. Just think what a mess, much bigger and faster than we could ever imagine, we would be in, if demon spirits could appear as flesh and bone people. We would never know which human was really a demon spirit. That is a frightening thought just to imagine, but praise the Lord He has never allowed demon spirits to appear as flesh and bone humans, only as "ghost" type phantoms.

When Jesus now appeared, HE just stood in the midst of the apostles (in a split second not there, and the next split second there among them), they were frightened, thinking they were seeing an evil spirit, looking like a Jewish man, looking in fact a lot like Jesus.

Christ said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do you have questions in your heart about what you are seeing? See, look, my hands and my feet, that it is myself; come handle me and see; for a spirit ghost has not flesh and bones as you see that I have."

"And while they still were in a disbelief for joy and wonderment, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and He took it and ate it before them.

A spirit ghost it would seem cannot do such a thing. Another impossibility God has proclaimed on demon spirits. Yes evil spirits can only do certain things, God has not allowed them to do other things that could deceive the human race even more than they are deceived already by their own human nature and Satan's influence. Good righteous spirit angels as we can see from Genesis 18 and other places, can appear as flesh and bone, and eat a meal with humans. They, being righteous and faithful to God, would NEVER with those miraculous attributes use them to harm or deceive the people of this earth.

Jesus now looked over at Thomas, and said to him, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; put out your hand and place it in my side; do NOT be FAITHLESS, but BELIEVING!" And Thomas answered, "O my LORD, and my GOD!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? BLESSED are THOSE who have NOT SEEN and yet BELIEVE" (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:26-29).

Thomas got his chance to see Jesus and believe. We who have come AFTER all this, after Jesus returned to the Father in heaven, have not seen Jesus in this manner, but Jesus said those who have not seen Him but BELIEVE anyway, are truly BLESSED. One day, when Christ returns, we with millions of others, will see Jesus, we will be able to see Him as flesh and bone, and also as spiritually glorified, in His GLORIOUS POWER form, that is portrayed to us in Revelation 1:11-15. We will be able to see Him from a frontal view, not just the back parts as Moses was only allowed to see, but we shall see His face, and we shall live, because we then shall also be in our glorified spiritual bodies, we also shall be able to appear to humans as flesh and bone, as being a part of the very family of God.

Jesus departed from them. A few days went by and they were reminded by the women who had gone to the tomb that very early morning, on the Sunday during the feast of Unleavened Bread, that Jesus had said He would go before them to the Galilee area, and so meaning they, the apostles should go there also. In fact Jesus had instructed the women to tell the apostles to go to Galilee.

So they all set off for the land of Galilee. Some of them at least, maybe all of them, were at or very near the shore of Tiberias. Sometimes the Sea of Galilee is called Sea of Tiberias, after the name of the Roman emperor Tiberias Caesar. There was also a town situated on the south west shore of the Sea, called Tiberias.

On one particular day Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee (James and John), and two others of Jesus' disciples were together, seven of them.

Simon Peter said to the others, "I am going fishing." The others said to him in reply, "We will also go with you." Perhaps all seven of them were or had been fishermen before they were called by Jesus to be His apostle.

They proverbially hung a sign on the door "gone fishing" and went. But though they toiled through the night, they caught not one fish.

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach, maybe because of the morning mist, or the dimmed morning light, or because they were about one hundred yards off shore, they did not know that it was Jesus standing there. He shouted to them, "Fellows, have you any fish?" They shouted back, "No, not one." Jesus replied with, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." So they did, and within a minute they were not able to haul the net in because of the number of fish in it.

Then John said to Peter, "It is the Lord you know!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his top clothes, for he was stripped down to his under garments, for the hard work they had been doing all night long. He jumped into the sea and headed for the shore. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not that far from land, about a hundred yard's away.

When they got onto the land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, being cooked, and bread to one side. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have caught." So Simon Peter went aboard the boat and hauled the net of fish ashore, full of large fish, in fact there was exactly a hundred and fifty-three fish, and though so many, the net was not torn.

Peter no doubt was either given strength from God to haul this net of fish from off the boat to near where the fire was, or the inspiration of the moment shot his natural adrenaline up sky high.

Jesus said to them, "Come, and have some breakfast." None doubted who He was, because they knew it was indeed the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so also with the fish. It is recorded that this was the THIRD time Jesus appeared to the apostles, after He was raised from the dead. The first was to them,

when Thomas was absent, then 8 days later, when Thomas was present, as we have seen. The third time then was this time here, at the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Words From Jesus To Peter

After they finished eating breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you LOVE me more than these others here?" Peter said to Jesus, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

"Then feed my little lambs," Jesus answered.

A second time He said to Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you LOVE me?" Peter replied, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Christ then told him, "Tend to my sheep."

Jesus said to Peter the THIRD time, "Simon, son of John, do you LOVE me?" Now Peter was grieved because He said to him the THIRD time, "Do you LOVE me?" And Peter answered saying, "Lord, you KNOW EVERYTHING, you KNOW that I LOVE you." Jesus said to him, "Then FEED my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young you clothed yourself and walked wherever you wanted to; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you but not with clothes, and carry you where you do not want to go."

Jesus said this to show in parable language that Peter would, when older, be taken by the authorities and led to execution. And history tells us that is exactly what happened to Peter. He was finally put to death by crucifixion. Peter is it claimed asked to be crucified up-side-down, saying he was not worthy be to crucified like his Lord was.

After Jesus said this to Peter, He ended by saying, "FOLLOW me."

Maybe it was deliberate on Jesus' part to ask Peter THREE times if he LOVED Him, for Peter had DENIED Jesus THREE times, you will remember. Peter was to be a LEADING apostle, not head apostle as some claim, but certainly a leading one, and so it was fitting that Jesus told him three times to take good care of the sheep of Jesus' fold, the ones who would come to believe IN and ON Jesus the Christ, as their Master and Savior.

Peter turned around and saw following Jesus and himself, John, to whom Jesus had a special kindness towards. John was the one who leaned across Jesus' chest at the Passover supper meal on the evening of the 14th of Nisan, and had asked, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw John, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man, what is going to happen to him when he gets older?" Jesus replied, "Look, if it is my will that this man remains until I come again, what is that to you? It is really none of your business. You follow me and do the work I've given YOU to do."

After these words from Jesus, the story went around and was spread among the followers of Jesus that John was NOT to DIE! But, Jesus did NOT say to him that he

was not to die, but only, "IF it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

Jesus was just pointing out to Peter that it should be of no concern what other apostles and disciples were doing per se, or how they would end their lives in death, the kind of death they would die. Peter was told what HIS would be like, from Jesus Himself, and that was ALL that he was told. Jesus never told any other of the ten apostles how they would die, and so He never did say that John would remain alive until He would come again to earth from heaven. I guess not, for if that was the case, then John would still be alive today, and be over 2,000 years old (John 21:1-23).

Jesus Appears To The Eleven On A Mountain In The Galilee Area

Jesus told the eleven to go to a certain mountain and stay there until He would appear to them. They did, and in due time Jesus did exactly as He said He would. He appeared to them, and when they saw Him they worshipped Him. But it is recorded that some of them doubted. They were still in "shock" mode so to speak, for it had never be known that any human person ever rose from the dead INTO IMMORTAL GLORIFIED LIFE!

Jesus came close to them and said, "ALL authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. I want you to go therefore and make disciples from all nations of the earth, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. I want you to TEACH them to OBSERVE ALL that I have COMMANDED YOU; and I will be with you always, even to the END of the age."

It is fitting that people be baptized INTO the Father, He is the Supreme one, the one who is the HEAD of all, even of Christ (see 1 Cor. 11:3). It is fitting that people be baptized INTO the Son, for He is our SAVIOR. It is fitting that people be baptized INTO the Holy Spirit, for it is with the Holy Spirit that God leads, guides, directs, inspires, and gives power and a sound mind to all His children. The Holy Spirit is the very divine nature of God that imparts the germ of ETERNAL LIFE to all who come to the Father through Jesus.

We baptize by the name of, by the AUTHORITY of Jesus, but we should baptize people INTO the Father, then Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ.

We also notice Jesus was here making it very clear that OBEYING the commandments, all that Jesus commanded, which was also the commandments of the Father, for Jesus had said He spoke nothing that was not given to you from the Father, and Jesus made it clear that man was not to live by physical bread alone, but by EVERY WORD that came from the mouth of God, which is the WHOLE Bible - see again Matthew 4:4 (Matt. 28:16-20).

It was time for the disciples to return to Jerusalem. For Jesus told them He would ascend back to heaven from that area and that they needed to be in Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father, for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on them in a mighty and in a great POWERFUL way.

John the apostle, says in his Gospel that Jesus throughout His ministry did MANY OTHER signs in the presence of the disciples, which have never been recorded by

anyone. So many other things Jesus did and said that, John says, if they had all been written down he supposes that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written (John 20:30, 31; 21:24, 25)

Now of course John uses a figure of speech here, and means that the amount of books needed to contain all that Jesus did and said, would be larger than any Library on earth, maybe as large as all the large famous Libraries of the earth put together. But God has given us enough of the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ for our knowledge and for our salvation at this time. Who knows maybe in the age to come the New Testament Gospels may be increased in size and contents to contain much more of what Jesus did and said while on earth as a human being.

Back In Jerusalem

After the disciples were in Galilee and Jesus appeared twice to them (at least two times that is recorded for us), it was time to return to Jerusalem, for Jesus would say his final goodbye to them, as He went back to heaven to sit at the Father's right hand. He also instructed them for the last time in a personal way. By the time 40 days had passed from Jesus' resurrection to His ascension back to heaven, the disciples were fully and finally convinced that Jesus was indeed raised from the dead to glorious immortality. All of this and Jesus' ascension into the clouds and then back to be with the Father, we shall cover when we go through the book of Acts.

The Appearances Of Jesus After His Resurrection That Are Recorded

In or around Jerusalem

- To Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18)
- To the other women (Matt. 28:8-10)
- To Peter (Luke 24:34)
- To ten disciples (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25)
- To the eleven including Thomas (Mark 16:14; John 20:26-29)
- At His ascension (Mark 16:19, 20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:4-12)

To the two disciples on the road to Emmaus

(Mark 16:12, 13; Luke 24:13-25)

Twice in Galilee

(Matt. 28:16-20; John 21:1-24)

To five hundred all at once

(1 Cor. 15:6)

To James and the apostles

(1 Cor. 15:7)

To Paul on the road to Damascus

(Acts 9:1-6; 18:9, 10; 22:1-8; 23:11; 26:12-18; 1 Cor. 15:8)