

The Life of the Messiah in His Jewish Context

Volume 1

Based upon

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum's

teaching of

The Life of Messiah from a Jewish Perspective

available as a DVD series from

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This work began in 2010, and is based on Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum's DVD series *The Life of the Messiah from a Jewish Perspective*. And Dr. Fruchtenbaum is the primary source for the understanding of the Jewish context of the gospels found herein. The outline and much of the content are taken from His teaching. These are used with his permission.

In 2016 and 2017 Ariel Ministries published the first two volumes of Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum's *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*. Two more volumes are scheduled to be published, along with a single volume abridged version. *Ariel's Harmony of the Gospels* is a companion to these volumes and is also available on their website www.ariel.org.

As my understanding of what he teaches has grown, and my understanding of the gospels themselves has grown, I have edited the text to reflect that new understanding. I have also changed the presentation of the material to suit the needs of my students and my teaching style.

This is still a work in progress as you will be able to observe when you read it. So I trust you will download a more up to date copy from time to time. You can find it at www.lifeofmessiah.vear.info.

I also have a harmony of the gospels that matches these notes. You can find it at www.gospelharmony.vear.info

You can contact me at eric.vear@gmail.com

My hope and prayer is that you will find it useful, both in your own understanding of the Life of the Messiah, and in your teaching of it to others.

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*May God,
Who inspired the gospel writers,
give you understanding of what they wrote.*

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Introduction to the Study

Welcome to our study of The Life of Jesus the Messiah in His Jewish Context, covering events from before His birth through to His death, burial, resurrection and ascension. This study is based upon Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum's teaching of *The Life of Messiah from a Jewish Perspective* at Camp Shoshanah, Ariel Ministries' annual Bible teaching camp.

Organization of Course

1. The Importance of Study Breaksⁱ

You will also find it easier to retain information if you take regular breaks between each study period. During breaks your brain will be integrating what it has learnt naturally and spontaneously building up internal Mind Maps of thought.

You also need to take breaks because your brain finds it easier to remember more from the start and end of a study period than it does in the middle. When you take regular breaks the amount of time in the middle of your study session is reduced and there is less information at risk of being lost in the middle.

Ideally, each study session should last about 45 minutes before you give yourself a 5- or 10-minute break. Go out of the room and think about something else, step out in the fresh air and move around. Whilst you are relaxing your brain will actually be quite busy: it will be sorting through and filing the information you have given it. When you return to your studies, your brain will feel refreshed and you will also find it easier to concentrate.

2. We will meet for approximately two hours each week, from 7:30 to 9:30. And we will divide our time into two 45 minute sessions separated by a break of about 15 minutes to get up and move around, and talk about anything other than what we have been studying. So this is a good time for some supper if we would like.

3. Repetition and Memoryⁱⁱ

There is a specific formula for how often you should go over information in order to fix it in your long-term memory. This is as follows:

1st review Just after you first learnt it

2nd review One day after you first learnt it

3rd review One week after you first learnt it

4th review One month after you first learnt it

5th review Three to six months after you first learn it

If you follow this formula you will permanently memorize what you want to learn – and even start to remember more as your brain will be thinking synergetically about the information it stores and start to make new links between what it knows.

4. So at the end of the lesson we will hand out some homework sheets containing review questions. They will be most valuable to you if you will look at them and answer the questions sometime the next day. They are not a test, and I won't be asking you to read out your answers. They are simply there to help you review what you have learned.

5. We have enough material to occupy us for about 60 evenings which would amount to six ten week terms, and we can be flexible about our meeting schedule.

First Century Jewish Perspective

Bible Schools, commentaries and Bible studies usually give the Greek and Roman backgrounds to the Bible which is useful for some parts of the New Testament.

But the life of Jesus is played out in a Jewish culture – specifically the Jewish culture of first century Israel. And that Jewish context played a vital role in determining both the events that took place and the way things were said. It also influenced the way these things were recorded by the gospel writers. Naturally this Jewish context was common knowledge at the time the gospels were written. That knowledge has been ignored since about the fourth century, although it was never lost.

For example, phrases like “born of water” had a very specific Jewish meaning in first century Israel, but somebody forgot to ask a Jew what it meant, and so you suddenly had a brand new denomination based on that phrase alone. (Adherents of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration include the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican (especially its High-Church and Anglo-Catholic parties), and Reformed churches.)

This study will focus on that Jewish context so that we can better understand what the gospel writers were writing about. It will look at some Jewish idioms or colloquialisms, and it will also give an appreciation of the theological, cultural, political and geographical context into which Jesus entered.

Thematic Approach

Now there are basically two ways to approach the life of the Messiah.

1. Geographical Approach

Perhaps the most common way of looking at Jesus’ life is the Geographical approach which divides Jesus’ life by the various regions in which he acted – such as the “Greater Galilean Ministry”, or the “Later Judean Ministry”.

With this approach the focus is more on where Jesus did what, rather than on the reason or motivation for his actions and teachings.

As a result the gospels are seen as a series of individual events and teachings and we fail to see the correlation between the various events and teachings of his life.

2. Thematic Approach

We will be using a thematic approach to Jesus’ life, and we will see that the gospels have an overall theme with each event relating to the next in a continuous stream of thought.

The theme is: Jesus the Messianic King.

We will see the correlation between the different events of His life. And as we begin to see why Jesus does what He does, and why He teaches what He teaches, we will find a story unfolding which has a major turning point and a climax.

Materials

1. *A Harmony of the Gospels for the study of The Life of the Messiah*

And we will use *A Harmony of the Gospels for the study of The Life of the Messiah*. It consists of the text of the four gospels arranged under headings and sub-headings that assist a thematic study of Jesus' life in His Jewish context. The text follows the order of Luke's gospel and is arranged so that parallel accounts of the same event are side by side. The order of Luke's account is chosen because he claims to have investigated everything carefully and he has written it out in consecutive order. This makes it easier to draw from the various gospels all that the writers report from their different viewpoints.

A copy of this harmony can be found at www.GospelHarmony.vear.info.

2. The Bible

The gospels refer to material found in the Old Testament, and we will be looking up passages of the Bible beyond the gospels, both Old and New Testament, so make sure to bring your with you when you come to class.

3. Outline

The table of contents of the harmony forms a convenient outline for the life of the Messiah.

4. Rules of Interpretation

Appendix 1 of the harmony summarises four important interpretation rules for understanding prophecy and scripture. We will be observing these rules in our study.

Turn to Appendix 1 and look at these for a moment.

5. As the life of Messiah unfolds, there will be opportunity to learn more about particular events, subjects, and doctrines as they are encountered. Ariel Ministries holds a wide range of Manuscripts, books and audio and video files which will cover most of these topics. You can find them at www.ariel.org.

6. Other materials

You will be able to write many of your notes directly into the Harmony. But you might also like to have note book or note pad for extra space.

As I already mentioned, there will be homework sheets. And from time to time I will hand out a chart of some kind. So it would be a good idea to have a way of keeping them together, such as a manila document wallet or a ring binder.

Goal

Our purpose is not to get through the material in a given time, but to let the content of the gospels get into us.

Our goal for this course is threefold:

1. To learn the Jewish context of the gospels, and
2. To recognise in the gospels the story (or overall theme) of the Messiah's life, and especially to recognise the turning point and its significance – significance both for our understanding of the gospels and for our understanding of prophecy and its fulfilment.
3. And in the process to understand and use the rules of interpretation which lead to a sound understanding of the text which in turn results in sound doctrine.

And by the end of the course we will find that a correct understanding of the Life of the Messiah provides the foundation for our understanding of all Scripture.

Prologue § 1-2

A. The Source of Knowledge (Luke's Prologue), § 1, Luke 1:1-4

Now before we begin reading the Harmony, let's get an overview of the four gospel accounts.

Have you ever wondered why each of the four gospels records a different set of events, and sometimes the ordering of events differs between the four gospels?

Why do you think that is?

There are at least two reasons:

1. *Quantity of material*

Have a look at John 21:25 (section 194).

John writes in the last verse of his gospel:

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

So obviously each writer had to be selective in what he wrote.

2. *Audience and theme*

Also, each writer had a specific audience in mind and a theme that he wanted to develop.

So naturally he chose events and teachings relevant to his theme and audience.

For these two reasons the gospels each contain different events and teachings arranged in different orders, and what one includes may be omitted by others.

So now we will introduce each of the gospels, looking at the theme, prime audience, and the background and emphasis of each one.

Hand out the chart: Comparison of the four gospels.

1. **Matthew**

To whom is Matthew writing and what is his theme?

Theme: Jesus the Messiah the King of the Jews

Prime Audience: Jewish believers

Background and Emphasis:

Who was Matthew?

- Matthew was formerly a tax collector for the Roman government.

What was the purpose of his gospel?

- Initially believers could bring their questions to an apostle, but after the dispersion that followed Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 7 they needed an authoritative source for the life

of the Messiah. So he is writing to the Jewish believers of the dispersion, probably between 30 and 44 AD.

- He quotes the Old Testament (Tanakh) over sixty times and makes extensive use of Messianic prophecies to show that Jesus really was the Messianic Davidic King.

This is his purpose: to show that Jesus is the Messianic King.

- What question arises, especially for the Jew, if Jesus is the Messiah?

If Jesus is the Messiah their next question will be: then where is the Messianic Kingdom, where is world peace?

So Matthew writes to show why the Messianic Kingdom was not set up by the Messiah.

And he especially will explain the Messianic Kingdom program.

- He also writes to give necessary warnings about the impending judgment and destruction (70 AD, Matt. 22:7; 23:36-38).

2. Mark

To whom is Mark writing and what is his theme?

Theme: Jesus the Messiah the Servant of Jehovah

Prime Audience: Romans

Background and Emphasis:

- The Romans were more concerned about a man's ability than his lineage.
- The ideal Roman servant was one who receives a command and who quickly carries it out.
- To meet the Romans 'action' mentality, Mark focuses on what Jesus did rather than what he said. The words *immediately, straight away, forthwith* are used forty times. He presents Jesus as a man of action, obediently carrying out the commission given him.
- While presenting Jesus as one who appeals to a Roman mindset, he explains Jewish customs to the Romans in his Gospel.
- Mark also used passages from Isaiah to portray Jesus as the suffering servant of Jehovah. Isaiah's favourite title for the Messiah was "the servant of Jehovah, or the servant of the Lord". Mark used this motif of Messiah as a servant carrying out the mission He was called to perform. In Mk 10:45 he says, "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" (Section 128)
- He was a close friend of Peter and cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10).

3. Luke

Now turn to section 1 of the harmony on page 1 and read Luke's prologue, Luke 1:1-4.

¹*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us,*
²*just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word,*
³*it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning,*
to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus;
⁴*so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.*

What do we learn about Luke's gospel from these verses?

Notice that:

- *Luke's sources*

Luke's sources were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. He probably used both Matthew and Mark. He lived for two years in the land of Israel while Paul was in prison, and would have access to eye-witness people like Mary. And as we see from his gospel, he reveals certain things that only Mary would know about.

- *His work*

Luke's work is described in verse 3. And the ASV puts it this way:

It seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus.

- He investigated everything carefully and *traced the course of all things accurately from the first.*
- Then he wrote it out *in consecutive order.*

- *His purpose*

His purpose was that Theophilus *might know the exact truth about the things he has been taught.*

Theme: Jesus the Messiah the Son of Man

Prime Audience: Greeks who were interested in two things:

- "the ideal man" - disciplined physically and mentally, and
- historical accuracy. So the correct chronological order was important to them.

Background and Emphasis:

- Luke shows Jesus to be disciplined in body and mind and he wrote with historical accuracy. He is the only gospel author to claim to write in chronological order.
- Luke was a physician, close friend of Paul, and possibly the only Gentile author of any part of the New Testament, but most likely Jewish. He was not an eye witness.
- He shows special concern for women and Gentiles and Jerusalem.

He records events about Jerusalem, and the teachings of Jesus about Jerusalem, which are not recorded by Mathew, Mark or John.

He also records things about the Gentiles that were not recorded by the other gospel writers. He came to the Lord through the ministry of the apostle Paul. He travelled with Paul for a while, and Paul of course had a concern and calling for Gentile evangelism.

He also records things about women and the role of women that the other writers chose not to record.

- He emphasizes the humanity of Jesus.

4. John

John makes his purpose clear in 20:31, *but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.* (section 193)

Theme: Jesus the Messiah the Son of God

Prime Audience: The world at large

Background and Emphasis:

- John is a Jewish fisherman, and *the disciple whom Jesus loved*, John 21:20,24
- His emphasis is on Jesus' teachings more than His actions. So in his gospel we have sermons, messages, and teachings of Jesus that are not found in the other 3 accounts.
- While his main theme is Jesus the Messiah the Son of God, he has two sub-themes running throughout his gospel:
 - The conflict between light and darkness. This comes out several times in his gospel account. We will simply point these out in passing without developing this subtheme since we are teaching the Life of Messiah using all four gospels.
 - The second subtheme is that Jesus came for the purpose of teaching about the Father to humanity. And that is why John will spend more time on what He said and what He taught.

It is because of that subtheme that John alone records an incident where a disciple asked him, *"Show us the Father"* and Messiah said, *"If you have seen me you have seen the Father"*. Everything true about the divine nature of the Father is true of the Son, therefore to know the Son is to know the Father.

- John is known for his sevens: 7 signs, 7 discourses, 7 I AM's. There is a list of these in Appendix 2.
- John wrote after Matthew, Mark & Luke and is concerned to record what they left out, although at the end of his gospel he writes (21:25):

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

B. The Pre-existence of the Messiah (John's Prologue), § 2, John 1:1-18

Now we come to section 2, John's Prologue. As we read it, see if it raises any questions for you. – questions about the content, the purpose, or the meaning.

Read John 1:1-18.

Did you have any questions?

Let's see if some of your questions are answered in what follows.

Pre-existence of the Messiah

In his prologue John was concerned about the source of knowledge about the life of the Messiah.

What was John's concern?

John emphasises the pre-existence of the Messiah in his prologue. He was already there before He became human.

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

His subject is the Word.

Logos

And I am sure you already know that in the Greek he is using the word *Logos*. Now the question is:

Why did John choose the word *Logos*? And what did it mean to him?

John seems to assume that the reader would understand the significance of it. Therefore, the usage of *Logos* in this way must have been a familiar concept in the first century.

In Greek philosophy *Logos* embodies two concepts, reason and speech. Consequently this passage is often explained as Jesus being God's expression of those concepts.

By reason He was the very idea of God, and by speech He was the very expression of God.

However John was a Jewish fisherman, not a Greek philosopher!

And he was using concepts of God that were being taught by the rabbis of his day, and also he was building on those concepts based on God's divine revelation.

Personification of the WORD (Hebrew Davar, Aramaic Memra)

What would the rabbis understand by the word "word"?

In Hebrew the word for “word” is “Davar”. In Aramaic it is “Memra”.

The rabbis noticed the personification of “Davar” in the Old Testament and they developed a concept they called by the Aramaic term “Memra” as much of the rabbinic writings were in Aramaic.

We can see this personification in the following passages where the WORD is often found carrying out a commission. As we look up the following verses see if you can notice how the term WORD is personified.

<p>Genesis 15: 1</p> <p>¹ <i>After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."</i></p>	<p>The WORD is personified as revealer.</p>
<p>Psalm 33:4-6</p> <p>⁴ <i>For the word of the Lord is upright, And all His work is done in faithfulness. ⁵ He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the Lord. ⁶ By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host.</i></p>	<p>It is the agent of creation. God spoke the WORD, and what He spoke came into existence.</p>
<p>Psalm 147:15</p> <p>¹⁵ <i>He sends forth His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly.</i></p>	<p>The WORD moves swiftly to carry out God's purpose.</p>
<p>Isaiah 9:8</p> <p>⁸ <i>The Lord sends a message [Davar] against Jacob, And it falls on Israel.</i></p>	<p>The Lord sent the WORD against Jacob to accomplish a specific mission and it falls on Israel.</p>
<p>Isaiah 55:10-11</p> <p>¹⁰ <i>"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹ So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.</i></p>	<p>The WORD goes and returns. It accomplishes Gods desire. It succeeds. It is sent.</p>
<p>Isaiah 45:23</p> <p>²³ <i>"I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.</i></p>	<p>The WORD goes out. It is able to turn back, but will not.</p>
<p>Ezekiel 1:3</p> <p>³ <i>the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and there the hand of the Lord came upon him.</i></p>	<p>The WORD of the Lord came expressly to the prophet.</p>

This table can be found in Appendix 3 of the Harmony.

Six things the rabbis taught about the Memra

Now the Rabbis taught six things about the Memra, all of which are reflected in John's prologue.

1. The Memra was distinct from God, but the same as God. John 1:1-2; Isaiah 9:8

Where do we see this in John's prologue?

¹ *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.*

The rabbis recognised this paradox, but were unable to explain it.

Isaiah 9:8

⁸ *The Lord sends a message against Jacob, And it falls on Israel.*

2. The Memra was the agent of creation. John 1:3; Psalm 33:6

Where do we see this in John's prologue?

³ *All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*

God spoke and it came into being. Genesis 1; Hebrews 11:3

Psalm 33:6

⁶ *By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host.*

3. The Memra was the agent of salvation. John 1:10-12; Hosea 1:7

Where do we see this in John's prologue?

¹⁰ *He [the Word] was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name*

Notice here that:

- 1) The Word came in visible form.
- 2) The world in general did not recognize Him.
- 3) His own Jewish people did not receive Him.
- 4) But individual Jews and Gentiles who recognized Him became the children of God and received their salvation from the One who is the Agent of Salvation. *To them He [the Word] gave the right to become children of God.*

Hosea 1:7

⁷ *"But I will have compassion on the house of Judah and deliver them by the Lord their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses or horsemen."*

4. The Memra is the means by which God becomes visible. John 1:14; Genesis 15:1-17

Genesis 15:1

¹ *After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."*

Where do we see this in John's prologue?

John 1:14

¹⁴ *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.*

In John 1:14 the word "dwelt" in Greek is not the usual Greek word used for "dwelling", but the Greek word used for "to tabernacle" - skeinei. This is derived from the Hebrew word Shechinah, but as there are no "sh" sounds in Greek it became skeinei. The very concept of the word was borrowed from the Hebrew concept. Literally it means the Memra "tabernacled" among us.

In Ex. 40:34 we read, *Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.* So the Shekinah tabernacled with Israel.

Then in the book of Ezekiel, in chapters 8-11, we find the account of the Shechinah of the Lord departing from Israel in four stages. And now, after an absence of about 6 centuries, in the incarnation of Jesus, the Shechinah of the Lord had returned to earth, not in the form of light, fire or cloud but in the form of a man of flesh who tabernacled among us.

Look at the account of the transfiguration in Mark 9:2-8, which you will find in section 85 of the harmony.

The physical body of Jesus veiled His glory - look up Hebrews 10:19-20.

¹⁹ *Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,*
²⁰ *by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,*

So we see the writer to the Hebrews referring to Jesus body as a veil. It was a veil that normally hid His glory.

At the mount of transfiguration, three of Jesus' apostles were allowed to see the Shechinah shine through Jesus' flesh. And this is what John is referring to when he says "*and we saw His glory*" in verse 14.

So again we see a parallel between what John is expressing about the Word and what the rabbis taught about the Memra. The rabbis taught that the Memra is the means by which God becomes visible, and we find that Jesus, the Word is the means by which God has made himself visible.

5. The Memra was the means by which God signed His Covenants. John 1:17; Ex 24:1-11

Where do we see this in John's prologue?

¹⁷ *For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.*

For Example:

- The Abrahamic Covenant Genesis 15:17
- The Mosaic Covenant Ex 24:1-18

- The New Covenant was signed and sealed by Jesus' blood being shed on the cross as described in Hebrews chapters 8-10.

6. The Memra is the agent of revelation. *John 1:18; Genesis 15:1; Hebrews 1:1-3*

Where do we see this in John's prologue?

¹⁸ *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:18)*

Genesis 15:1

¹ *The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." (Genesis 15:1)*

About 100 times in the Old Testament it is recorded that the word of the Lord came to ...

Hebrews 1:1-3 tells us that God has revealed Himself to us in His Son:

¹ *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. ³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

One of the sub-themes of John is that Jesus came to reveal the Father to men.

So we find that the six things the rabbis teach about the Memra are also true of Jesus of Nazareth.

And John's point in these 18 verses is that Jesus is the Memra, the living Word, the second person of the trinity who came to fulfil the Jewish Messianic hope.

I The Introduction of the King, § 3-27

This division concerns the birth narratives, His infancy, baptism, and temptation. It marks God's official presentation of Jesus as the Messianic King.

A. The Arrival of the King (mbs127) § 3 - 19

1. The Genealogy of the King, § 3, Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38

Now we will deal with the genealogies at this point because genealogies deal with origins – where people came from.

When you come across a genealogy in your reading of the Bible, how often do you skip over it and keep on reading?

Have you ever noticed how many of the four gospel accounts give us a description on Jesus' birth?

There are two of them: Matthew & Luke.

Origins

And because of their interest in where people came from they give us an account of the birth of Jesus and they also give us his genealogy.

Two perspectives

Now each of these two gospel accounts of the genealogy and birth of the King has its own perspective, different from the other.

Can you describe some of their differences?

- 1) In Matthew's gospel:
 - a. Joseph plays the active role.
 - b. Angels speak to Joseph, and
 - c. we read about what Joseph is thinking.
- 2) In Luke's gospel:
 - a. Mary plays the active role.
 - b. Angels appear to Mary, and
 - c. we read about what Mary is thinking.

So this context already tells us that Matthew's genealogy is that of Joseph and Luke's genealogy is that of Mary.

Two genealogies

Now the question arises: Why do we need these two genealogies?

After all Jesus is not the biological descendant of Joseph anyway! So why do we need his genealogy?

Traditional answer

The traditional answer goes something like this: Matthew gives us the royal line, while Luke gives us the real line.

What they mean by this is that, according to Matthew's account Joseph was the heir apparent to David's throne and Jesus could have claimed the right to rule through his stepfather as heir apparent.

On the other hand, Luke shows that Jesus himself is a direct descendant of David through his mother, Mary.

However!

However the exact opposite is true!

Rather than giving us the royal line, we will see that the purpose of Matthew's genealogy is to show that if Jesus' claim to kingship was through his adoption by Joseph, i.e. through Joseph's standing, then Jesus could not be king.

If Jesus was in any way the son of Joseph biologically then he could not be king. Nor could he be king by being adopted by Joseph.

Two OT Requirements

To understand Matthew's genealogy we first need to understand that there were two Old Testament requirements for kingship. One was applied to the southern kingdom of Judah with its capital in Jerusalem, and the other was applied in the northern kingdom of Israel with its capital in Samaria.

1) *Descendant of David*

The first requirement was that he must be a descendant of David.

We see, for example, in Isaiah 7 the account of a conspiracy to destroy the house of David and set up a new dynasty, and God's response through Isaiah is "*It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass*".

No one outside the house of David can sit on the throne in Jerusalem.

2) *Divine appointment*

The second requirement was that he must have divine appointment or prophetic sanction.

Anyone who tried to be king without divine appointment would be assassinated.

For example, God told Jehu that his line would be allowed to sit upon the throne of Samaria for four generations and four did so. When the fifth one tried to gain the throne he was assassinated because he did not have divine appointment or prophetic sanction.

The first of these requirements, that the king must be a descendant of David, is especially important to our understanding of the need for two genealogies. And we will see how as we read the genealogy.

a. Matthew's Account of Jesus' Genealogy, Matthew 1:1-17

Women

By the way, Matthew broke with Jewish tradition in two ways: first, he skips names; and secondly, he mentions the names of Women.

Now read the first 6 verses of Matthew's genealogy and notice his reference to women. ...

How many women does he mention?

The four women he mentioned are Tamar (v3), Rahab (v5), Ruth (v6), and Bathsheba (v6 – some translations simply have “her”).

These women were not the most significant in the line of the Messiah. For example, Sarah was left out.

Yet there is a reason for naming these four and not others.

What do these four women have in common?

- 1) They were all Gentiles.

Early in his gospel Matthew hints at a point which he makes more clearly later:

While the primary purpose of the coming of Yeshua was for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, the Gentiles will also benefit from his coming.

- 2) Three of these women were involved in specific sexual sins:

One was guilty of adultery, one was guilty of incest, and one was guilty of prostitution.

Again Matthew hinted at a point he makes clearer later: that Jesus came for the purpose of saving sinners.

Three segments of genealogy

However these are not the key points of this genealogy.

Read verses 6b – 11 of Matthew 1. Then read verses 12 and 17.

Notice how Matthew structures his genealogy into three segments of fourteen generations.

As a result the flow of the genealogy pauses in two places, thereby highlighting two men.

Who are they?

King David in verse 6. And Jeconiah in verses 11 and 12.

Purpose

So in verse 17 Matthew makes sure that the reader notices that Joseph was a direct descendant of David through Solomon, and also through Jeconiah.

Now we know why David is highlighted. The king of Israel had to be a descendant of David.

But why is Jeconiah highlighted? Why is he significant?

The answer is evident from something Jeremiah wrote.

Read Jeremiah 22:24-30.

²⁴ "As I live," declares the Lord, "even though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet ring on My right hand, yet I would pull you off; ²⁵ and I will give you over into the hand of those who are seeking your life, yes, into the hand of those whom you dread, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans. ²⁶ "I will hurl you and your mother who bore you into another country where you were not born, and there you will die. ²⁷ "But as for the land to which they desire to return, they will not return to it.

²⁸ "Is this man Coniah a despised, shattered jar?
Or is he an undesirable vessel?
Why have he and his descendants been hurled out
And cast into a land that they had not known?

²⁹ "O land, land, land,
Hear the word of the Lord!

³⁰ "Thus says the Lord,
'Write this man down childless,
A man who will not prosper in his days;
For no man of his descendants will prosper
Sitting on the throne of David
Or ruling again in Judah.' "

The name Coniah is a short form of the name Jeconiah.

Because of the kind of man he was (Jeremiah 22:13 – 17), God pronounced a curse on him in the days of Jeremiah. The curse has several facets to it, but the last one is so significant that God called upon the whole earth to hear it (v29).

Then in verse 30 the curse is spelled out:

no descendant of Jeconiah will ever have the right to sit on the throne of David.

First requirement to be king

Until that time the first requirement for kingship was membership of the house of David.

From that time onward the requirement was to be a member of the house of David apart from Jeconiah.

And that is why it is so significant that Matthew highlights Jeconiah in the genealogy of Joseph.

Joseph

Joseph was a descendant of David, but through Jeconiah and therefore he was not the heir apparent of David's throne.

Consequently, if Jesus had been the real son of Joseph, he too would be disqualified from ever sitting upon the throne of David.

And also, because Joseph is not the heir apparent to the throne, Jesus could not claim the right to sit upon David's throne by virtue of his adoption by Joseph.

So, by no means can Jesus claim a right to the throne of David through Joseph.

That is why, unlike Luke, Matthew began his gospel with the genealogy:

His purpose is to present the Jeconiah problem,
and then to solve it by means of the virgin birth.

Virgin birth

Read Matthew 1:16.

The virgin birth is the emphasis in the Greek text, where it says

"Mary, by whom Jesus was born".

The word *"by whom"* is feminine singular showing that Jesus was born of Mary only and not Mary and Joseph.

Matthew then continues his gospel with an account of the virgin birth.

Theme

Also notice in verse 16 Matthew points to his theme, and the purpose of the genealogy, when he says:

Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

His theme is: Jesus the Messiah, the king of the Jews.

So he opens his gospel with the genealogy proving that Joseph is not and could not be the father of Jesus, the Messiah.

And he ends the genealogy with a pointer to the virgin birth which he is about to describe.

b. Luke's Account of Jesus' Genealogy: Luke 3:23-38

Luke has a different theme and begins his gospel with the virgin birth and then gives Mary's genealogy in chapter 3.

Unlike Matthew, Luke followed strict Jewish custom and procedure in that he mentioned no women and he skipped no names.

First question

The rule against naming women in a Jewish genealogy raises an obvious question:

If you wished to trace a woman's line but could not use her name, how would you do it?

The answer under Jewish law is, "You would use the name of her husband".

Second question

But that raises a second question:

If the husband's name appears in both his own genealogy and that of his wife, how could someone tell which one was which?

The answer is quite simple.

In the English language we do not use the definite article before a proper name. We don't say "the Susan". However in both Greek and Hebrew this is quite allowable.

Every name in Luke's genealogy has the definite article, "the", in front of it, except one, the name of Joseph. Someone reading the original language can tell by the missing "the" that this is not Joseph's line but the line of his wife, Mary.

Mary's father

Now read verse 23 of Luke 3.

In the NASB here it reads correctly, "*being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Heli*". Now Heli was Mary's father.

The Jewish Talmud refers to Mary by her Jewish name, Miriam, and calls her "the daughter of Heli", just as Joseph is called the son of Heli here in verse 23.

The rabbis, when they read this genealogy, knew by the missing definite article that this was not the genealogy of Joseph, but was that of his wife, Miriam or Mary, and so referred to her as "the daughter of Heli".

First requirement for kingship

Now the question we haven't answered yet is this:

Does Jesus meet the two requirements for kingship?

We can answer the first part of that question from Luke's genealogy. He begins with his own time and worked back into history.

Now read verse 31.

Here we find that Mary was a descendant of David through his son Nathan. And Jeconiah, as we saw in Matthew's genealogy, was in the line of David's son Solomon, not Nathan.

As a result, Mary did not have the blood of Jeconiah running through her veins. She was a descendant of David apart from Jeconiah.

Since Jesus was the real son of Mary, he too is a descendant of David apart from Jeconiah.

Therefore he fulfilled the first Old Testament requirement for kingship:

He was a member of the house of David, apart from Jeconiah.

Second requirement for kingship

However, that doesn't solve the entire problem. At this point of Jewish history there were a great number of other Jews who were descendants of David apart from Jeconiah. So Jesus was not the only one to fulfil this requirement.

Why should he be the king and none of the others?

The answer lies in the second Old Testament requirement for kingship, that of divine appointment.

And when we get to section 5, the announcement of His birth to Mary, we will see that Jesus also fulfils that requirement.

And since, by virtue of His resurrection, He now lives forever, He will have no successors.

c. Titles of the Messiah

Before we leave the genealogies, we should notice that they contain four of the many titles of the Messiah.

Read Matthew 1:1 and Luke 3:38.

What are the four titles of the Messiah found here?

In Matthew 1:1 he is called the son of David and the son of Abraham.

In Luke 3:38, he is called the son of Adam and the son of God.

Significance

What is the significance of each of these titles?

And each title emphasises a different aspect of his person.

- 1) Calling him the son of David means that Jesus is the King.
- 2) Calling him the son of Abraham means that he is a Jew.

These happen to be the particular themes of Matthew's gospel. Matthew emphasises the Jewishness and the kingship of Jesus: He is the King of the Jews.

That is why it is Matthew alone who records the coming of the wise men asking the question:

Where is he that is born the King of the Jews? (Matt. 2:2).

- 3) His third title is the son of Adam. This title emphasises that Yeshua was a man.

Luke's theme

This happens to be the particular theme of the gospel of Luke. Luke's theme throughout his gospel is Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of Man.

That is why only Luke records such things in his human development as: how he grew up, how he gained his knowledge, and his subjection to parental authority.

More than the others, Luke emphasised how he was hungry and how he was tired.

All of these things are trademarks of his humanity.

Jesus the son of Adam means that he was a man.

- 4) His fourth title is the son of God.

This means that Jesus is God.

From a Jewish frame of reference, being the son of God means that He is God.

John's theme

This is the theme of the gospel of John. John's theme is: Jesus the Messiah, the son of God.

That is why John began his gospel with the words,

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

And at the end of his gospel John records Thomas finally saying to Jesus,

"My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Between these passages John emphasised continually the deity of the Messiah – Jesus is God.

These four titles portray the Messianic person as the Jewish God-Man, the King.

d. Conclusion

We have learned that there were two requirements for kingship in the Old Testament:

- Membership of the house of David apart from Jeconiah.
- Divine appointment.

In Matthew's account we see that, although Joseph is a member of the house of David, he is not and could not be Jesus' father because he is of the line of Jeconiah.

In Luke's account we see Jesus is of the line of David apart from Jeconiah and therefore meets the first requirement for kingship.

The second requirement, divine appointment, will be met in section 5.

2. The Advent of the King, § 4-11

a. *The Annunciation of the Birth of John to Zacharias, § 4, Luke 1:5-25*

Read verses 5-7.

Names

There are two key individuals in this section: Zacharias, whose name means “God Remembers”, and Elizabeth, which means “the oath of God”.

Their names together emphasise that “God remembers his oath”, and when we get to section 8, the birth of John, we will see a play upon the names of these two people.

Believers

We see from verse 6 that Zacharias and Elizabeth were part of the believing remnant of the day. They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.

(1) The Service of Zacharias as Priest

Read verses 8 – 10.

Divisions of priests

What was the “*division of Abijah*”?

In 1 Chronicles 24, King David divided the tribe of Levi into 24 courses or divisions.

There was

- 1 high priest
- 24 Chief Priests
- 24 Divisions of common priests

Each division would take turns for a period of 2 weeks to take care of the daily functions of the temple rituals.

Duties of priests

The duties of the common priests were chosen by lot and it was quite possible for a priest to have only one chance in his entire lifetime to function in the temple for a two week period.

Zacharias was a common priest of the division of Abijah.

Function

Zacharias’ function for two weeks, twice a day, was to burn incense (v9).

Every morning and evening he took a hot coal from the Altar of Sacrifice outside the building in the courtyard and brought that hot coal into the first room of the Temple building, the Holy Place. He then set that hot coal down on the altar of incense that stood in front of the thick curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place.

After setting the coal down he dropped some incense on it causing a sweet smelling smoke of incense to ascend and penetrate through the thick veil into the Holy of Holies to be a sweet-smelling savor, a sacrifice to the Lord within the Holy of Holies.

Jewish legend

Because of the incident that occurred in Leviticus 10 when the two sons of Aaron burned incense improperly and were smitten dead, the teaching of the rabbis in the days of Zacharias was that if the priest burned incense improperly then he would also die right there.

There is a Jewish legend that before the priest went into the Holy Place, a rope was tied on his leg in case he was stricken dead so that his body could be pulled out by that rope.

But before death would come, an angel, the Angel of Death, would appear standing on the right side of the Altar of Incense.

While Zacharias burned incense we see in verse 10 the whole multitude waiting outside were in prayer.

(2) The Appearance of the Angel

Read verses 11-17.

An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense.

Fear

How did Zacharias respond when the angel appeared to him?

Zacharias was troubled: because of what he had been taught he expected to die. *Fear gripped him.*

However, the message of the angel was not one of judgment and death, but one of blessing and new life to come.

Joy

Although they remained childless and had grown elderly, the angel announced to Zacharias that his wife would conceive and bear a son. And they would *have joy and gladness.*

He was to call the son's name John (v13). In Hebrew that name is Yochanan, which means "grace".

John

Then the angel told him some things about the son he would father.

Five times in verses 15 – 17 the angel says "*he will ...*", followed by a verb describing either what John will be or what he will do. Then the list ends in verse 17 by declaring his purpose.

So in these verses we learn about:

- John himself,
- his task, and
- the purpose of his task.

There are 6 things in all. Can you list them?

i. *John's position: he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, v15*

ii. *John is to be a Nazarite from birth, v15*

The Nazarite vow was usually voluntary.

Only two people in the Old Testament were called to be Nazarites from birth: Sampson & Samuel. Sampson proved unfaithful to his Nazarite vow, but Samuel proved faithful.

Now John the Baptist is the third person appointed to be a Nazarite from birth. This is why he will drink no wine or liquor. Nazarites abstained from anything of the grape.

iii. *He would be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb, v 15*

iv. *His task will be this: He will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God, v16*

He would begin a repentance movement and many Jewish people would turn from their sin to God by means of the preaching of John.

v. *It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, v17.*

His task in particular was to be the Messiah's forerunner and to be the herald of the King. He was to prepare the way for the Messiah.

vi. *to make ready a people prepared for the Lord, v17*

The purpose of John's task was to have a group ready that were repentant and ready to believe on the Messiah once the Messiah was identified.

Acts 19:4

⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

(3) The Doubt of Zacharias

Now read how Zacharias responds in verses 18-20.

After being told all this good news, what was his response?

After being told all this good news,

Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.

And the question was an expression of his unbelief. “How will I know that this is true?”

And because he spoke in unbelief Gabriel responded that Zacharias would speak no more until the birth of his son and the fulfillment of the promise. And so it happened.

(4) People waited

Read verses 21 – 22.

Because the conversation with the angel had taken so long, the people outside were wondering what had become of him.

If the legend about the rope was true, perhaps they were beginning to tug on the rope to see if there was any response.

When he did come out they recognised that he had seen a vision, but he was unable to tell them about it because he was mute.

(5) Promise fulfilled

Read verses 23 – 24.

Here we see that the promise was fulfilled and Elizabeth rejoiced that her reproach had been taken away.

b. *The Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus to Mary, §5, Luke 1:26-38*

(1) The Appearance of the Angel

Luke records how the angel Gabriel was sent to Mary to inform her about the coming birth of the Messiah.

Read verses 26 – 29.

Six months

Verses 26 – 27 read:

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

Luke begins “*in the sixth month*”. The sixth month of what?

He has just finished saying that Elizabeth became pregnant.

So now, six months after Elizabeth became pregnant with John, the same angel, Gabriel, who had announced the birth of John to Zacharias, now announced the birth of Jesus to Mary.

Mary

What do we learn about Mary from these verses?

- At this point Mary was living in Nazareth in Galilee.
- Luke clearly emphasizes that Mary was a virgin.
- She was betrothed to a man named Joseph, who was of the house of David.

Mary, of course is an Anglicized form of her name. In Hebrew her name was Miriam.

In verse 28 the angel said to her, *Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.* She was greeted by the angel as one who had received special grace from God in that she was going to become the mother of the Messiah.

According to verse 29, *Mary was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.*

(2) Gabriel's Message to Mary

Now read the angel's message to her in verses 30-33.

The message was that she would conceive and bear a son in her virgin state. God would become a man in the person of Yeshua, her son.

The angel then announces several things concerning this Son of Mary.

- *Name*

His name would be Yeshua, which in our language is translated as Jesus.

Yeshua means “to save”, “salvation”, or “saviour”. As Joseph would be told, the child was to have the name “Salvation” because He would *save His people from their sins*.

- *God*

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. This means He would be God.

- *King*

And the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. Here is the fulfilment of the second of the two Old Testament requirements for kingship: divine appointment. He is the only one who fulfilled both Old Testament requirements.

- *Forever*

He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end. Since He, by virtue of His Resurrection, now lives forever, He will have no successors.

(3) Mary's Question

At this point Mary raises a question. Read verse 34.

How can this be, since I am a virgin? (NASB)

The ASV has a more literal translation of her question: *How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?* And the word “know” here is a Jewish idiom for sexual intercourse between a man and a woman.

Zacharias' question was different: *How will I know this?* Or “How can I be sure this is going to be so?” Zacharias' question was arising out of unbelief or doubt.

But Mary did not question the angel's word. Her question was not, “How will I know this is true?” Her question was merely a matter of “how.” The question was seeking knowledge: How will this happen in light of the fact that she is a virgin?

In verse 35 the angel answers that very question:

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.

It will come about by the power of God at work through the Holy Spirit.

And there will be two consequences of this:

- the child will be holy, that is sinless; and
- He will be the son of God, that is, he will be deity, he will be God.

A misconception

Notice here that the child will be holy because of the overshadowing power of the Most High. A common misconception is that the virgin birth was the only possible way to keep Jesus from inheriting the sin nature. Those who hold this go on to teach that the sin nature is transmitted through the male only. But the text does not teach this. The reason the child is holy is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The reason for the virgin birth is simply that this is the way God chose to do it, not because it is the only way he could do it!

God hinted at the virgin birth in Genesis 3:15, and clearly stated in Isaiah 7:14 that the Messiah would be conceived in the womb of a virgin. This would be the unique credential of the Messiah.

Elizabeth

Read verses 36 – 37.

Gabriel also told Mary that her cousin, Elizabeth, was pregnant and already six months along.

(4) Mary's Submission

Having the prophecy and the answer to her subsequent question, the passage ends with Mary's response.

Read it in verse 38:

And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Mary submits herself to the will and care of God, which is wise in light of three things:

- *Stoning*

The Old Testament penalty for a betrothed woman who was found to be pregnant was to be stoned to death. Mary would have to trust God that the death penalty would not be applied to her.

- *Expulsion and ostracism*

She had to trust God concerning the reaction of the community. She was in danger of being expelled from the community and ostracised for the rest of her life.

- *Divorce*

She had to trust the Lord concerning her relationship with Joseph. Joseph, being a righteous man, did contemplate divorcing Mary in light of her pregnancy.

She trusted the Lord to work out all these important things.

(5) Summary of the angel's message to Mary

- The Incarnation would be a man
- His name was to be Yeshua, or Jesus
- He would be great
- He would be the Son of God, which means He would be God
- He would fulfil the Davidic Covenant.

The Davidic Covenant promised four eternal things, all of which will be fulfilled by Jesus according to the angel:

- An eternal throne
- An eternal house or dynasty
- An eternal kingdom
- An eternal descendant

The first three are guaranteed because of the fourth: the seed of David culminates in a Person who is himself eternal.

Note again that the angel's announcement that *the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David* means that Jesus fulfils the second Old Testament requirement for kingship: divine appointment.

c. *The Visit of Mary to Elizabeth, § 6, Luke 1:39-45*

Read Luke 1:39 – 45.

Luke writes, "*Now at this time ...*". What time was that?

Immediately after the angel had spoken to her, Mary chose to go in haste from Galilee to Judah to visit Elizabeth, who was 6 months pregnant.

What happened when Mary greeted Elizabeth?

When Mary greeted Elizabeth the baby leapt in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

And in Lk 1:15 we are told that John *will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb*.

What does it mean to be *filled with the Holy Spirit*?

Being filled with the Holy Spirit means being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

And being controlled by the Holy Spirit, she gave a prophetic utterance.

1. First, in v42, because Mary was specially favoured by the God, she was blessed among women.
2. Second, a special blessing to the baby Mary was now carrying in her womb.
3. Third, notice what Elizabeth already knew when Mary greeted her.

Elizabeth already knew who that baby was, because she said,

and how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me.

By the way, Mary is only the mother of Jesus' humanity, and not of his divine nature. That is something he has had for all eternity past.

Here Elizabeth is recognising Mary to be the mother of the Messiah.

4. Fourth, she pointed out that as soon as the sound of Mary's greeting reached her ears, the baby leaped in her womb for joy.

And so we conclude that John was filled with the Holy Spirit at this moment.

5. Fifth, Mary was blessed because she believed there would be fulfilment of what the Lord had spoken to her.

Again we see here the evidence of Mary's believing what the Lord spoke to her through the angel.

This section shows the extent of Mary's faith and faithfulness.

d. *The Song of Mary, § 7, Luke 1:46-56*

Mary's response is to burst out in song. Read Luke 1:46 – 56.

And this shows two things:

1. It shows the extent of Mary's personal spirituality; and
2. It shows her knowledge of the Scripture because her song is very similar to Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

¹Then Hannah prayed and said,
"My heart exults in the Lord;
My horn is exalted in the Lord,
My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies,
Because I rejoice in Your salvation.
²"There is no one holy like the Lord,
Indeed, there is no one besides You,
Nor is there any rock like our God.
³"Boast no more so very proudly,
Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth;
For the Lord is a God of knowledge,
And with Him actions are weighed.
⁴"The bows of the mighty are shattered,
But the feeble gird on strength.
⁵"Those who were full hire themselves out for bread,
But those who were hungry cease *to hunger*.
Even the barren gives birth to seven,
But she who has many children languishes.
⁶"The Lord kills and makes alive;
He brings down to Sheol and raises up.

⁷ “The Lord makes poor and rich;
 He brings low, He also exalts.
⁸ “He raises the poor from the dust,
 He lifts the needy from the ash heap
 To make them sit with nobles,
 And inherit a seat of honor;
 For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s,
 And He set the world on them.
⁹ “He keeps the feet of His godly ones,
 But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness;
 For not by might shall a man prevail.
¹⁰ “Those who contend with the Lord will be shattered;
 Against them He will thunder in the heavens,
 The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
 And He will give strength to His king,
 And will exalt the horn of His anointed.”

In her song, Mary makes two main points:

1. firstly, she begins by declaring that God is her saviour; and
2. secondly, she ends declaring that the one who is coming, the Messiah, was coming to fulfil God’s promises to Abraham.

And the song can be divided into two parts: what God did for Mary; and what God would do for Israel.

(1) What God did for Mary

She begins, *my soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour.*

The kind of people who need a saviour are sinners, so this statement clearly shows that Mary was a sinner. This is contrary to the teaching of those who teach that Mary was perpetually sinless. She declared that God was her Saviour, showing that she was saved by God from her sins.

Then she uses the word, “for”, three times, emphasising that she was praising God because of what He had done for her.

i. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bonds slave

She had a humble state because, economically she was on the poverty level, and socially she lived in Nazareth, a town that had a poor reputation. Nevertheless, God looked on her with grace.

ii. For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed

In spite of her low beginnings, from then on all generations would call her blessed because she was the mother of the Messiah.

iii. *For the Mighty One has done great things for me*

And the greatest thing was that she was going to be the mother of the Messiah.

Mary concludes this section of what God did for her by praising God:

And holy is His name. AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.

(2) What God would do for Israel

In the second part of her song (v51-55), where she declared what God would do for Israel, she used the term “he has” seven different times.

- i. *He has done mighty deeds with His arm;*
- ii. *He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.*
- iii. *He has brought down rulers from their thrones,*
- iv. *And has exalted those who were humble.*
- v. *he has filled the hungry with good things;*
- vi. *And sent away the rich empty-handed.*
- vii. *He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever.”*

Notice that she connects the coming of the Messiah with the Abrahamic Covenant. She will give birth to the One who will fulfil the Abrahamic Covenant.

Mary returns home

This passage ends in verse 56:

And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.

These three months were the 7th, 8th, and 9th months of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. So Mary left Elizabeth’s home just before John was born.

We are not told why she left before John’s birth, but perhaps it was to avoid attracting attention to herself at this point.

By this time she was herself three months pregnant and still in an unmarried state, though betrothed to Joseph. When John was born, as we will see, it aroused great attention in the town and perhaps Mary did not wish to draw any of that attention to herself.

e. *The Birth of John, § 8, Luke 1:57-80*

Read Luke 1:57 – 66.

(1) The Birth of John

Excitement

When Elizabeth gave birth the whole town was stirred up and her neighbours and relatives rejoiced with her because she had been barren for so long and now gave birth to a son.

Jewish tradition

Now in Jewish tradition, even to this day, a male child is not named at birth, but is only named on the eighth day, the day of his circumcision.

The Jewish custom today is to name the child after a relative who has already passed away. However, the custom in Jesus day was different. They did name the child after a relative, but the relative did not have to be dead, so all the people who came to the circumcision of John assumed that the parents would name the child Zacharias, after his father.

Naming John

Since Zacharias was unable to speak, Elizabeth took the initiative and pointed out that he would not be named Zacharias, but would be named John (v60). This was contrary to Jewish custom as her neighbours pointed out in verse 61: *“There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.”*

The neighbours then tried to go over Elizabeth’s head, assuming that Zacharias would certainly follow Jewish tradition and would overrule his wife. *They made signs to his father* (v62). The fact that they made signs implies that not only did Gabriel strike Zacharias mute, but also deaf.

Since he could not speak at this point, he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, *“His name is John”*, confirming what Elizabeth has said. Although it was contrary to Jewish custom, they named the child John in obedience to the command of the angel.

In response to his obedience, Zacharias’ tongue was loosed and he was able to speak, and he praised God.

News spread

Because of these peculiar events, the stories spread all over the country (v65-66). People recognised that something unique had taken place. They knew that God was with John and that he would have a special role in God’s plan, although they did not know what it was.

(2) Zacharias’ Prophecy

Verse 67 states that *Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied.*

And his prophecy can be divided into two sections: verses 68-75, where he spoke of the Messiah; and verses 76-80 where he spoke of his son, John.

i. Regarding the Messiah

Read verses 67 – 75.

Covenants

Zacharias also connects the coming of the Messiah with the Jewish covenants.

1. In verse 69, the Davidic covenant: *And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant.* 2 Sam. 7:11b-16; 1 Chron. 17:10b-14.

1 Chronicles 17:10–14 (NASB95)

^{10b} *And I will subdue all your enemies. Moreover, I tell you that the Lord will build a house for you.* ¹¹ *“When your days are fulfilled that you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up one of your descendants after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom.* ¹² *“He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever.* ¹³ *“I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you.* ¹⁴ *“But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.” ’ ’ ”*

2. In verse 73, the Abrahamic covenant: *the oath which He swore to Abraham our father.* Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21.

Genesis 12:1–3 (NASB95)

¹ *Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”*

Genesis 17:6–8 (NASB95)

⁶ *“I have made you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. ⁷ “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. ⁸ “I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”*

3. And verse 77 is a reference to the New Covenant: *To give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.* The remission of their sins was to be a product of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:34).

Jeremiah 31:31–34 (NASB95)

³¹ *“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. ³³ “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

Od remembers His oath

Earlier it was pointed out that the name, Zacharias, means “God remembers,” and the name Elizabeth, means “the oath of God.” Here is a play on the meaning of both names. The last line of verse 72 states: *And to remember His holy covenant.* And the first line of verse 73 states: *the oath which He swore to Abraham our father.* The two names together teach that God remembers his oath.

Physical salvation

In verses 71 & 74 Zacharias sees the physical salvation of Israel from her enemies. This is something which the prophets foretold, and which Israel is expecting the Messiah to accomplish. See for example Ezekiel 28:25-26; 34:23-31.

Ezekiel 28:25–26 (NASB95)

²⁵ *‘Thus says the Lord God, “When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and will manifest My holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob. ²⁶ “They will live in it securely; and they will build houses, plant vineyards and live securely when I execute judgments upon all who scorn them round about them. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God.” ’ ’*

Ezekiel 34:23–31 (NASB95)

²³ *“Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. ²⁴ “And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the Lord have spoken. ²⁵ “I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶ “I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing. ²⁷ “Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure on their land. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ “They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid. ²⁹ “I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victims of famine in the land, and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore. ³⁰ “Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,” declares the Lord God. ³¹ “As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God,” declares the Lord God.*

Spiritual salvation

Verse 75 speaks of Israel serving God *in holiness and righteousness*. This will be the result of their spiritual salvation which is also the subject of verse 77.

Summary

So the coming Messiah will bring both a physical and a spiritual salvation to Israel, and it will happen according to the promises of the Davidic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, and the New Covenant.

ii. Regarding John

Read verses 76 – 79.

In verse 76, Zacharias spelled out exactly what John's task was going to be:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways.

This says two things about John.

1. First, he will be a prophet of God. John was the last of the Old Testament prophets. A prophet was one who received direct revelation from God (Deut. 18:18), and John received it.
2. Secondly, he was to *go before the Lord*, and in fulfillment of Malachi 3:1, he was the Messiah's forerunner and the herald of the King.

Malachi 3:1 (NASB95)

¹ *"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.*

Morning star

Then, in verse 78 he says:

Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us.

The term "*sunrise*" is a reference to the "sun of righteousness" of Malachi 4:2.

Malachi 4:2 (NASB95)

² *"But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.*

It paints a picture of the morning star signalling the coming of the day. Even so, John will be like the morning star that will precede the coming of the sun of righteousness.

Two groups to benefit

Now when the son of righteousness arrived, He was to benefit two different groups of peoples.

Notice the change of pronouns in verse 79:

TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, to guide our feet into the way of peace. Notice “those”, and “our”.

“Those” refers to the Gentiles *who sit in darkness and the shadow of death*. The Messiah will benefit them because it was prophesied that He will be the light of the Gentiles (Isaiah 9:2). They were in darkness because they did not have the light of divine revelation.

Isaiah 9:2 (NASB95)

² *The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.*

“Our” refers to the Jewish people. He will bring peace to Israel.

John’s development

The passage ends in verse 80 summarizing John’s development. He grew both physically and spiritually, and *he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel*.

Growing up in the desert meant that he was separated from the Judaism of his day. This in turn meant that when his message finally came it was different from the Judaism of his day.

John was called to be the forerunner of the Messiah and the herald of the King.

f. *The Announcement of the Birth of Jesus to Joseph, § 9, Matthew 1:18-25*

Virgin birth

Read Matthew 1:18 – 25.

What does Matthew emphasise here?

His emphasis is clearly on the virgin birth, and he emphasises it three different times.

1. First, in verse 18 it says: Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. This makes it very clear that she was pregnant before there were any sexual relations between Joseph and Mary.
2. The second time this is emphasised is in verses 22-23:

Now all this took place to fulfil what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us."

The fact that Matthew is quoting from Isaiah 7:14 clearly shows that first century Judaism understood Isaiah's prophecy to speak of a virgin birth.

For Matthew of course, this is the solution to the problem of the Jeconiah curse (Jer. 22) raised by his genealogy.

3. The third time the virgin birth is emphasised is in verse 25:

but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

Even after the wedding ceremony they had no sexual relations whatsoever until after the birth of Jesus.

The very word *until* points out that after Jesus was born they did have sexual relations. This statement falsifies the claim of one section of Christendom that teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary.

In fact Mary produced at least six more children, four sons and at least 2 daughters according to Matthew 13:55-56.

Mary's trust

In § 5 about the announcement of the birth of Jesus to Mary, we noted that in submitting to God, Mary would be trusting Him to work out her relationship with Joseph, because Joseph would naturally assume the obvious: that Mary had been unfaithful.

Angelic message

Indeed, verse 19 states: *And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.* Joseph had already made up his mind to divorce her privately, concluding that she had been unfaithful. It is at this point that the angel appeared to him with a message containing three essential points (v 20-23):

1. First, he was to proceed with the wedding, even though she was pregnant.
2. Secondly, he was to believe Mary's story that the child has been conceived by the Holy Spirit, and not through an immoral relationship.
3. Thirdly, he was told:

She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

God's plan

In other words, as Matthew emphasises in verses 22 and 23, what was happening was according to God's plan which he announced through the prophet Isaiah (7:14).

Yeshua

As Mary was told, so Joseph was told that the child's name was to be Jesus, though no one in Mary's line or Joseph's line had that name. Jesus and John had this in common. A name was given that no one else had on either side of the family.

The name Jesus in Hebrew was actually Yeshua, which comes from a root meaning "to save". And according to the angel, the reason he was given this name was that he shall save his people from their sins.

Joseph's obedience

Joseph's response was to obey the command of the angel in every point (verses 24 & 25). He married Mary, kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son, and he named him Jesus.

g. *The Birth of the King, § 10, Luke 2:1-7*

Read Luke 2:1 – 7.

A decree issued by Quirinius commanded all to be enrolled for tax purposes in their own city. Since both Mary and Joseph had their origins in Bethlehem rather than Nazareth, they were forced to go down to Bethlehem, even though Mary was in the advance state of pregnancy. But this was in keeping with prophecy, for Micah 5:2 tells us it was only in Bethlehem that the Messiah was to be born.

Based upon what Luke tells us, together with Matthew, and historians like Josephus we are able to pinpoint fairly accurately the year in which Jesus was born. There are a number of specific clues (see Appendix 4 of the Harmony):

1. Herod died in 4 BC and when Jesus was born Herod was alive. Therefore Jesus was born before 4 BC.
2. The exact date of the census decreed by Quirinius (Luke 2:2) cannot be determined, but it was probably issued after the year 8 or 7 BC when Herod came into disfavour with Augustus. Mary was with child when she and Joseph went up to Bethlehem in response to the decree. So Jesus was born after 8 BC.
3. Josephus recorded that Herod left Jerusalem in 5 BC, never to return. He spent the final months of his life in Jericho and died there. We know from Matthew 2:7,16 that the wise men met with Herod while he was still in Jerusalem, so that must have been sometime between the years 8 BC and 5 BC, before Herod left Jerusalem for Jericho.
4. Furthermore, Josephus also stated that Herod was away from Jerusalem fighting a war throughout the year 8 BC. Therefore the wise men could not have met him during that year. They must have met Herod sometime during the years 7 BC and 6 BC.
5. In Matthew 2, Jesus is already about 2 years old and Herod was still in Jerusalem. So Jesus was 2 years old sometime during the years 7 BC and 6 BC.

Putting all these clues together, the conclusion is that Jesus was born some time during the years 7 & 6 BC. It was probably closer to 7 BC, because Jesus was approximately 2 years old at the time the wise men arrived and this was prior to 5 BC when Herod left the city.

When Jesus was born, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. This will prove to be something significant as we will see in the next section.

h. *The Announcement to the Shepherds, § 11, Luke 2:8-20*

Now we come to section 11, The Announcement to the Shepherds.

Read Luke 2:8 - 20

Shekinah Glory reappears

Something very significant happened on the night when Jesus was born. What was it?

In verse 9 we read that *the glory of the Lord shone around them*.

This is the Shekinah glory appearing in one of its more familiar Old Testament forms, in the form of light. The Shekinah glory had not appeared to Israel for about six centuries. Ezekiel describes the departure of the Shekinah Glory from Israel in Ezekiel chapters 8 – 11.

And now the Shekinah glory appears to announce the birth of the Messiah to the Jewish shepherds.

Angelic message

At the same time an angel also appears for the purpose of interpreting the light and giving them a message.

And the angelic message to the shepherds includes three things.

1. Do not be afraid of what you are seeing.
2. They are told that a saviour has just been born.

Israel has had many saviours in her history. In the book of Judges, the judges of that book were all saviours.

What makes this one different? The answer is his third point at the end of verse 11.

3. This one is Christ the Lord. This is the Messianic Saviour.

The sign

And now the shepherds are instructed to go and find the child, but there are many babies in Bethlehem.

How could they know they have found the right one?

Verse 12 says, "*and this is the sign unto you*".

The word sign by itself does not always require the miraculous, but it minimally requires something unusual, something out of the ordinary to serve as a sign.

And there are two elements in this sign.

1. Number one, you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes.
2. And number 2, lying in a manger.

Stable cave

The fact that the baby will be lying in a manger tells the shepherds not to look into private homes, but to look inside stables.

Now stables were not separate buildings like the western farmers have, but caves in the hill country where Bethlehem was located were used for housing animals on bad weather days. If it was not a bad weather day, they could be kept outside.

And being shepherds by profession they would know where these stable caves are. So they knew where to look.

God is using their profession to help find these caves.

Why was He born in a stable cave? As section 10 shows, when His parents came into Bethlehem looking for better accommodation, there is no room for them in the “Holy Day Inn” and so they had to find different accommodation, and what they found was a stable cave.

But that is not the complete clue. There is more.

Swaddling cloth

The clue also says you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes.

That is not merely baby cloth. The same word is used of burial cloth. You will find a baby wrapped in burial cloth.

Now why burial cloth?

Because interspersed among the caves were caves that were used for burial purposes. So, in these burial caves, in niches, in the walls as you can still see to this day, they would store burial cloth.

If a person died within the town, they would bring the body out, wrap the body up in strips of cloth from the cloth stored in the stable caves, and then take him to be buried, either in a different cave, or in a cemetery below the ground.

Because he was born in a stable cave, Mary and Joseph had to make use of that which was most readily available, and what was readily available was burial cloth.

Symbolism

And the symbolism should not be missed.

On the first day of his life he was wrapped with the same kind of cloth that they will wrap him in again on the last day of his life, with burial cloth.

And that shows the purpose of his birth. All of us here were born to live. This one here was born to die, and it is signified by being wrapped in burial cloth.

Angels

At this point, in verse 13, a host of angels become visible with a twofold message in verse 14.

1. Concerning God: Glory to God in the highest, and
2. Concerning man: on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.

Hymns

Many of our popular Christmas hymns, while they are rather nice songs, in other ways they are not always accurate Biblically. One such hymn says, “hark the herald angels sang”. Notice, in verse 13, it does not say they sang it, they merely said it. It was a proclamation made, but not put to music.

First Jewish worship of the Messianic King

As a result of these two clues they were able to find the right child, and in verses 15 – 20 we have the first recorded Jewish worship of the Messianic King, initiated, notice, by means of the shekinah glory.

Mary treasured all these things

Now verse 19 says, *Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.*

And Luke is the one who recorded this, noticing the women's side of things. Later on she will reveal these things to Luke.

3. His Infancy and Childhood, § 12-19

a. *The Circumcision, § 12, Luke 2:21*

Read Luke 2:21.

Notice, as it was with John so it will be with Jesus, what happens to the herald will happen to the king.

Although they know what the name is, they do not officially give him the name until he is 8 days old. *When eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.*

Two covenants

Now circumcision was commanded under two Old Testament covenants: First of all the Abrahamic Covenant, and later again by the Mosaic Covenant. None the less they carry the same meaning for the persons involved.

In the Abrahamic Covenant circumcision was intended for Jews only and for those who were part of the household of Israel. Circumcision under the Abrahamic Covenant was a sign of that covenant, a sign of Jewishness.

In the Mosaic Covenant it was obligatory for both Jews and Gentiles. Those Gentiles who would wish to partake of the covenantal blessings would have to undergo circumcision. It was the means of submission to the Law.

That is why Paul warns the Galatian Gentiles that if they submit to circumcision they have to keep the whole Law, and not just this one commandment.

Jesus

And Jesus was circumcised under both covenants, the Abrahamic covenant which made it a sign of His Jewish identity, and under the Mosaic covenant, the means of submission to the Law.

Today

With the Messiah's death the Mosaic Covenant came to an end.

Today there is no basis for circumcising any one, either Jews or Gentiles, on the under the Mosaic Covenant.

But the Abrahamic Covenant is an on-going, eternal covenant. It still requires Jews, even Jewish believers to circumcise their sons on the eight day.

Timothy & Titus

So while people condemn Paul for circumcising Timothy, the Bible itself makes no such condemnation. Now, in Acts 15 Paul would not allow the circumcision of Titus. In Acts 16, he himself initiates the circumcision of Timothy.

What is the difference?

Timothy had Jewish origins and Titus did not, which put Timothy under different covenantal obligations.

Parental obedience

Now one more thing about circumcision: It shows the faith and obedience of the parents, not the child. If at the age of 8 days the child had a choice to make he would probably choose to forego the experience. That is one reason why baptism is not the anti-type to circumcision. Baptism is to show the faith and obedience of the one being baptised, not the parents. In the Bible, the anti-type to circumcision of the flesh is the circumcision of the heart, not baptism.

CIRCUMCISION		
Basis (Covenant)	Obligatory for	Meaning
Abrahamic Covenant	Jew Only	Sign of Jewishness
Mosaic Covenant	Jews & Gentiles	Submission to the Law

b. *The Presentation, § 13, Luke 2:22-38*

Read verses 22 – 24.

Verse 22 says: *when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed.* This specifies that this happened 40 days after he was born.

Reasons

In keeping with the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 12), if a woman gave birth to a baby girl she is unclean for 80 days and then she undergoes the cleansing process.

When she gives birth to a son she is unclean for 40 days and then undergoes the cleansing process.

Because it was Mary's first-born son, she goes to the temple in Jerusalem for two reasons:

1. *Purification of Mother*

The first reason is for the ceremonial purification of the mother.

And the offering she provides in verses 23-24 is a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. One was used for a sin offering and one was used for a burnt offering.

House of David – a Stump

But the fact that she offers up birds shows her economic status, because you were only allowed to offer up birds if you could not afford anything better.

This shows that they were on the poverty level.

And that fulfils, for example, Isaiah 11:1, where he prophesies that the Messiah will appear only when the mighty House of David has been reduced to a stump compared to what it was in Jesse's day.

2. *Redemption of First Born*

The second purpose was for the redemption of the first born because the first born of both humans and animals belonged to God (Exodus 13:11-15).

And therefore the kosher animals would be sacrificed. For un-kosher animals there would be a substitute sacrifice.

And for the firstborn human males there would be the payment of a price for his redemption.

That is the purpose of this visit: to cleanse the mother, and to provide the redemption of the first-born male.

Encounter

But when they arrive they have an encounter with two individuals.

Again notice that this is Luke's account giving us a woman's and a Gentile perspective.

Simeon

Read verses 25 – 35.

The first one is Simeon in verse 25, who *was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel.*

He was a member of the remnant of that day, a believer.

And God had revealed to him that, no matter how old he might get, he would not die until he sees the Messiah personally. He recognises in this forty-day old baby the fulfilment of that promise.

So now he is ready to die.

Yeshua

He says in verse 29:

Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples.

Now keep in mind here he was not speaking English, and he wasn't speaking Greek, he was speaking Hebrew, and there is a play upon words here.

The play upon words has to do with his statement: *my eyes have seen Your salvation.*

In Hebrew the name, Yeshua, means salvation. If you just add another character to the end of the same root word it becomes Yeshuah, which means salvation.

So my eyes have seen your Yeshuah, your Jesus.

A Light to the Gentiles

Notice, in verse 32, that he is coming to benefit the same two groups that Zacharias sang about.

1. *A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES.*

Again, the Gentiles were those sitting in darkness with the shadow of death. Upon them the mercy and the light will shine.

2. *The glory of Your people Israel.*

A Sign to be Opposed for Israel

Up until now all this has been positive, but now he has something negative to say to Miriam, to Mary, in verse 34.

Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed.

The point is that he will become a new point of division in the Jewish family.

1. For those who believe: a rising.
2. For those who don't believe: a falling.

He will prove to be the stone of stumbling and the rock of offence, and one against whom people will speak.

Sword

Then he says:

—and a sword will pierce even your own soul— to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

And the sword will begin to pierce in section 61-64 when she sees the leaders of Israel rejecting him, and it will pierce its deepest when she sees him hanging on the cross.

Yet the death of Jesus is essential so that the hearts of people could be revealed.

Anna

Read verses 36 – 38.

The second encounter is with a woman, as Luke will report.

Anna is the Hellenised form for the Hebrew Hannah.

She was a prophetess.

Notice what tribe she was from: Asher. This is supposed to be one of those so-called ten lost tribes. She is not lost. She knows where she is. And the concept of the ten lost tribes is simply a myth, and Jewish people today come from all twelve tribes.

Notice how old she is. She is over a century old, because she had been a widow for 84 years. She was married for 7 years previously to that. And so by this point she is over a century old.

Luke 2:37 (NET)

*She had lived as a widow since then for eighty-four years.*¹

tn *Grk* “living with her husband for seven years from her virginity and she was a widow for eighty four years.” The chronology of the *eighty-four years* is unclear, since the final phrase could mean “she was widowed until the age of eighty-four” (so BDAG 423 s.v. ἔως 1.b.α). However, the more natural way to take the syntax is as a reference to the length of her widowhood, the subject of the clause, in which case Anna was about 105 years old (so D. L. Bock, *Luke* [BECNT], 1:251–52; I. H. Marshall, *Luke*, [NIGTC], 123–24).²

¹ Biblical Studies Press. (2005). *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Lk 2:37). Biblical Studies Press.

² Biblical Studies Press. (2005). *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible*. Biblical Studies Press.

Messiah

And she also recognises in this 40-day old baby the messianic person. And in verse 38, she *continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem* – to the believers, to the members of the remnant.

c. *His Infancy, § 14 - 16*

Now we come to his infancy, beginning with the visit of the magi in section 14.

(1) In Bethlehem, § 14, Matthew 2:1-12

When I first studied this passage it began to raise some questions in my mind. And the more I thought about the passage the more questions it raised.

As we read this passage, see what questions it raises for you.

Read verses 1 – 12.

Questions

Questions raised by this section:

- What are magi?
- How many were there?
- Why was all Jerusalem troubled?
- Who were the magi talking to in verse 2?
- Where is the east?
- Why Jerusalem? Why did they choose to come to Jerusalem?
- How do they know:
 - About a king of the Jews?
 - About the Jewish concept of the Messiah?
- Why do they want to worship a Jewish king?
- What is this star?
- How did they know it was His star? Or, what do they mean by calling it His star?
- How did its appearance indicate to the magi that the king of the Jews had been born?

Number – Jerusalem Troubled

First of all, in verse 1, how many magi were there?

Notice we don't know how many there were – there were at least two because the word is plural – maybe 2, maybe 20, maybe 200, maybe 2000, we don't know.

But there were enough of them to cause the whole capital to be stirred with excitement. We read in verse 3:

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

That implies more than just two or three.

Magi

Now what are magi?

Our Christmas song calls them kings, and they are pictured on Christmas cards as kings, but they are not called "kings" anywhere in the passage.

They are called "magi", or wise men. It is a word that means astrologer.

East

They came from the east. Where is the east?

It is Mesopotamia or Babylon.

What we have here is an unknown number of Gentile astrologers coming from the east, from Mesopotamia, from Babylonia to Jerusalem with their question: where is he who is born the king of the Jews?

More questions

And this raises even more questions, such as:

1. Being Gentiles how would they even know about a Jewish messianic concept?
2. Even knowing about the birth of a Jewish king, why would they want to come and worship him?

After all there were Jewish kings in the Old Testament and Babylonian astrologers in the Old Testament, and they didn't want to worship Jewish kings then, why now?

3. And does this passage authenticate a form of Christian astrology when the Bible forbids any such dabbling?

Star

Now how did they know about a Jewish Messiah?

The first clue is in the second half of verse 2: by the star that they saw in the east.

What was this star?

The basic rule of interpreting the Bible is simply this: We always interpret the Bible literally unless there is something in the context that tells us we cannot take it that way.

What do we learn from the text about this star?

Do you notice anything unusual about it that might cause you to think it is not an ordinary star?

There are five things about this star that tell us it is not an ordinary star.

1. *His Star*

First of all, the star is called *His star*. Notice the possessive pronoun at the end of verse 2.

Why should one star in the sky be singled out as His star?

This was uniquely Messiah's star in a way that is not true of any other star He himself created. This is His private star.

2. *Appears and Disappears*

Secondly, the star appears and disappears on at least two occasions. At least twice it appears and disappears – maybe more than that, but minimally two times.

First we are told that it appeared to them in the east.

Then we are told that it appeared to them in Jerusalem.

3. *Moves East*

Thirdly the star moves from east to west. Its second appearance is west of its first appearance.

4. *Moves South*

But fourthly it also moves from north to south, guiding them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.

5. *Hovers over the House*

And then fifthly, it comes down and hovers over one house in Bethlehem.

Any little star that would hover over one house in Bethlehem would end up destroying this entire planet!

Shekinah

So this is not an ordinary star as we think of a star. Its behaviour is unique – different from any other star.

Now the Greek word for star has a root meaning, which is radiance or brilliance.

What we have here is the same as what we have with the Jewish shepherds: the Shekinah Glory in the form of a light up in the heavens, somehow signalling to them that this is the birth of the messianic King.

Magi's Profession

Now keep in mind that in those days astronomy and astrology were not separate disciplines. If you studied one you knew the other. If you were a student of astronomy, you were also a student of astrology. These were not separate sciences.

So if anybody would notice a new light up in the heavens it would be these men. This was their profession.

And just as God used the profession of the Jewish shepherds to find the right stable cave, he now used the profession of these astronomers to notice a new light up in the heavens.

That is the first clue. They saw the star, which was God's Shekinah Glory, and they recognised it as the Messiah's star.

Daniel's prophecy of the Messiah

But being Gentiles, how would they know about a messianic king?

Of all the prophecies about the first coming of the Messiah, of which there are quite a few, only one gives a timetable for the first coming, and that is Daniel 9:24-27 where Daniel spells out how many years will transpire before the coming of the Messiah.

And unlike other books of the Old Testament, the book of Daniel was not written in Israel. It was written in Babylon.

In fact, half of the book of Daniel is not Hebrew, the Jewish tongue, but is Aramaic, the tongue of the Babylonians.

And as you read through the book of Daniel, you will see two things that become relevant to Matthew chapter 2.

1. First of all, you will notice that Daniel became the head of the Babylonian school of astrology, but not because he practiced astrology. As a Jew loyal to the Mosaic Law he would not dabble into astrology. He became the head only because of the lack of spirituality and insight of Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar noticed some unique abilities that Daniel had and he made the assumption that Daniel was a superior astrologer and made him the head of the whole Babylonian school of astrology.

But he never received any revelation from the stars, only the creator of the stars, the God of Daniel.

2. The second thing is that one day Daniel saved the lives of all the wise men of Babylon, because when they could not interpret the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had, he sentenced all of them to be executed.

Among the ones who were sent to be arrested and executed was Daniel.

He asked for an audience with the king and interpreted the king's dream, and by so doing he saved the lives of all the others.

And no doubt this resulted in many of them turning away from worshipping the stars and beginning to worship the creator of the stars, the God of Israel.

And they had in their possession a book written by their former head, Daniel, to give a timetable for the first coming.

So when they saw this new light up in the heavens, and the timing was right, they took that to be the sign that the king has been born.

Balaam

Now, while Daniel did give a timetable for the first coming, he did not connect the coming with the concept of a star.

So how did they know the star was related to the coming of the Messiah?

For that there is one other Babylonian connection. And it is found in the book of Numbers chapters 22-24, the story of Balaam.

Now Balaam's reputation was: whomsoever Balaam blesses will be blessed, and whomever he curses will be cursed.

Because of his reputation the king of Moab hired Balaam to curse the Jews, and four times he went up on a high mountain and looked down on the Jewish encampment, and four times he opened his mouth to curse the Jews, but all four times God took over his tongue and he ended up blessing the Jews instead.

In these four blessings he issues several messianic prophecies, including the one in Numbers 24:17:

A star shall arise out of Jacob to whom the sceptre of kingship will be given.

It was Balaam who connected the Messiah with a star and kingship, and as a result you have both the star connection and the kingship connection.

And by profession Balaam was an astrologer. Twice we are told he also came from Babylonia – Numbers 22:5; Deuteronomy 23:4.

From the Balaam connection they knew that a star would be the sign of His coming, and from the Daniel connection they knew when to expect Him, so when they saw the light in the heavens they took that to be the sign and they went to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem

Now why Jerusalem? Why did they go to Jerusalem?

As this context shows, while they had the knowledge of Daniel they didn't have the knowledge of the book of Micah.

Micah 5:2 prophesied that Bethlehem, not Jerusalem, would be the place of his birth.

But they did not know this. For them the logical place for the Messiah to be born would be the Jewish capital, and that was Jerusalem, not Bethlehem.

And to Jerusalem they came, causing a stir, a stir that reached the ears of Herod the Great.

Herod

Now for his own reasons he calls in the Jewish leaders who tell them about the Micah 5:2 prophecy in verses 5 & 6. And verse 7 says Herod privately called the wise men to learn of them exactly what time the star appeared. How long has it been since the star first appeared? As section 15 points out in verse 16, it appeared two years earlier. So again notice, by now Jesus was already two years old. For his own reasons Herod sends them to Bethlehem to find the child and report back to him.

How to find Him in Bethlehem?

But as they head down for Bethlehem, their next question is: how do you find one particular two year old? Do you go from house to house, door to door? If you see one how do you know it is the right one?

Well the star that previously disappeared now (in verse 9) re-appears:

and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.

It now moves north to south.

No need to go from house to house, or door to door. The light came down to show them where the child was now living.

And verse 11 says they came into the house. Not a stable cave where the shepherds found him, but now in a private home.

Gentile Worship

And here in verse 11 you have the first recorded Gentile worship of the messianic King.

Both the first Jewish worship and the first Gentile worship were inaugurated in the same way, by means of the Shekinah Glory.

Gifts

They leave behind three types of gifts, each of which contains symbolic meaning.

1. Gold is a symbol of kingship. He is a king.
2. Frankincense is a symbol of deity. He is God.
3. Myrrh is a symbol of death and sacrifice.

The kingship is found in Daniel 2; the frankincense in Leviticus 2:2; 5:11; and the death and sacrifice in Mark 15:23; and John 19:39.

The first line of the Christmas song is not Biblically correct: “we three kings of orient are”. The last line is: “God and king and sacrifice”.

Now they were to report back to Herod, but in verse 12 they were warned by God in a dream not to do so. And they returned to Babylonia by a different route.

(2) In Egypt, § 15, Matthew 2:13-18

Now Matthew's theme of kingship is Herod's fear.

Read Matthew 2:13 – 15.

Flight to Egypt

This is Matthew telling us the story from Joseph's perspective, and an angel appears to Joseph warning him to flee the city. And so they flee into the land of Egypt where they live for the next year or two.

We already know they are on the poverty level. How would they get the money to travel and live there for that length of time?

The answer is the gold, frankincense and myrrh. They finally have some resources.

Herod

While historically he is called Herod the Great, Arnold calls him Herod the Paranoid. In his older age he became more and more paranoid, always afraid that somebody out there was trying to take his throne away.

Because of his suspicions he killed three, maybe four of his own sons. He also killed his favourite wife, Maryumni, because of suspicions of conspiracy.

Now Cesar Augustus, who was Cesar in those days once said in light of Herod's actions, it was safer to be Herod's pig than Herod's son. Herod was a nominal convert to Judaism and so he did not eat pork, so if you were Herod's pig you were in pretty safe hands. But to be Herod's son was an occupational hazard.

Slaughter of babies

Read Matthew 2:16 – 18.

Now he has concluded that there is a two year old boy in Bethlehem conspiring to take his throne away. So he sends his army into Bethlehem to kill every male child from the age of two years and under.

Why two years?

Because verse 16 tells us that is the information he got from the wise men – how long ago the star first appeared to them.

(3) In Nazareth, § 16, Matthew 2:19-23; Luke 2:39

Read Matthew 2:19 – 23.

Matthew says: *when Herod died*, which occurred in 4 BC, so about 1 or 2 years after Joseph and the family fled to Egypt.

Once again Matthew telling the story that an angel appears to Joseph informing him and telling him to return to the land.

Archelaus

Now no single son of Herod got all of his inheritance, but it was divided among three of his sons, one of which was Archelaus, who receives Samaria and Judea.

As bad as Herod was, Archelaus was considerably worse in many ways. In fact, at the time of his crowning he had 3,000 Jews killed. It was done in the temple compound during Passover.

Nazareth

Galilee was under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, who was a milder man. And so Joseph chooses not to go back to Bethlehem, but to go to Nazareth.

And that creates a negativism later on because while Judeans looked down upon Galileans, Galileans looked down on the people from Nazareth.

And the saying, “can any good thing come out of Nazareth” was a common saying of that day.

The rabbis used to say, if you want to get rich go north, if you want to get wise go south. There were no rabbinic schools in the Galilee at that period of time. That began only after the first Jewish revolt failed.

All rabbinic schools were in Judea, and that is where you would get your wisdom.

And so, being from Nazareth will create a future negativism, even one of his future disciples will say: “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”

(4) Four Different Ways the New Testament quotes the Old

Questions

Have you ever wondered what it means when the New Testament says that some event was to fulfil what was spoken by one of the prophets?

Has the Old Testament passage quoted ever raised questions for you as to how it is relevant, or how it is fulfilled?

What do we mean when we say that a particular event is the fulfilment of prophecy?

The reason we have these questions stems from the fact that the authors of the New Testament, being Jewish themselves, quoted from the Old Testament in exactly the way that the Jewish people of the first century would quote the Scriptures.

Four different ways to quote the Old Testament

In sections 14-16 we have come across several quotes from the Old Testament. And now is a good time to look at them again to see how many different ways the New Testament quotes from the Old.

There are four different ways the New Testament quotes from the Old.

And in each case we will read the Old Testament passage and then the New Testament passage that quotes from it.

And as we do, look out for what the Old Testament passage is saying in its own context.

Then we can compare that with what the New Testament is describing.

1. Literal prophecy plus literal fulfilment

Now turn to in your harmony to section 14 (Mathew 2:1-12) where he quotes Micah 5:2 in verses 5 & 6.

Also look up Micah 5:2.

² *“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”*

What is Micah saying?

What is the literal meaning of this verse in its context?

The literal meaning of Micah 5:2 is that whenever the Messiah is born he will be born in the town of Bethlehem.

Furthermore, it specifies, not the Bethlehem of the Galilee, but the Bethlehem of Judah.

Now the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of Judah is the literal fulfilment of literal prophecy.

The literal prophecy is that the child will be born in Bethlehem.

The literal fulfilment occurred when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Notice that Micah's prophecy makes only one point – when the Messiah is born, He will be born in the Bethlehem which is in the territory of Judah. The birth of Jesus fulfils this point perfectly.

This first category is called: **Literal prophecy plus literal fulfilment.**

2. *Literal plus typical*

The second category is called: **literal plus typical.** In this category the Old Testament is quoted to show that the person or event or object in the Old Testament is a type of something in the New Testament.

Now go down to section 15 and look at verse 15.

Here Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1 where he says, "*out of Egypt did I call my son*".

Read Hosea 11:1.

¹ *When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.*

And notice two things.

a. Who is the son that God called out of Egypt?

Israel.

b. Is this a prophecy?

No. He is referring to an event that took place in past history.

What is Hosea referring to in this verse?

He is referring to the time of the Exodus. Read Exodus 4:22-23.

²² *"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, "Israel is My son, My firstborn."'* ²³ *So I said to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn."*

Here we see that from God's perspective Israel as a nation is the son of God.

And so the literal meaning of Hosea 11:1 refers back to the exodus when God took Israel out of Egypt, which was already a historical event by the time Hosea wrote his book.

Now, back in Matthew's text, he has been describing how it came about that Jesus came to be in Egypt. And when He returned to Israel then once again God brought His Son out of Egypt, only this time it was His unique messianic Son.

And so the verse is quoted not as a fulfilment of prophecy. The quoted text was not a prophecy to begin with. It is quoted as a type.

A type is an historical event, person or thing which in some way is a pattern or picture of something future.

And the exodus of Israel out of Egypt was a type of the messianic son also coming out of Egypt.

And that is an example of literal plus typical.

3. *Literal plus application*

The third category is called: **literal plus application**. Meaning a **literal event or prophecy plus an application (or point of similarity)**.

This you will see in the same section, § 15, in verses 17 & 18, where he quotes Jeremiah 31:15.

Turn to Jeremiah 31:15 and look at the context.

It is not dealing with a prophecy per se, nor is it a long history as it was for Hosea 11. It's a current event of Jeremiah's own time.

Jewish young men taken into captivity

What he is referring to is the event where the Jewish young men were being taken into Babylonian captivity. The fighting had already ended. And now all the POW's were being taken north to Babylon.

And as they were going north from Jerusalem they were going by the town of Ramah. Ramah is where Rachel was buried. If you go to Israel today, they take you to Bethlehem to show you Rachel's tomb. That, however, is an incorrect location. She is actually buried near the town of Ramah.

Rachel weeping

And Rachel in the Old Testament also became the symbol of Jewish motherhood. And the Jewish mothers of Ramah came out weeping for sons they will never see again.

As Jeremiah observed the scene of Jewish mothers weeping for sons they will never see again he makes that statement:

"A voice is heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more."

So again, the literal meaning of Jeremiah 31:15 refers to young men being taken into captivity while the mothers of Ramah were weeping for sons they will never see again.

One point of similarity

Sometimes the New Testament author sees that there is one point of similarity between what he is describing and something in the Old Testament.

And because of that one point of similarity the verse is quoted and applied to what he has described.

And the point of similarity here is that once again you have Jewish mothers weeping for sons they will never see again.

Everything else is quite different.

What happens in Jeremiah happens in Ramah, north of Jerusalem. What happens in Matthew is south of Jerusalem in Bethlehem.

Furthermore, in Jeremiah these sons are not dead, they are merely taken into captivity. Whereas in Bethlehem the sons are dead.

Furthermore, the sons in Jeremiah were young men who were POWs, formerly fighting men, whereas the sons in Bethlehem were infants two years old and under.

Everything is quite radically different, but you have that one point of similarity: Jewish mothers weeping for sons they will never see again.

And the verse is therefore quoted and applied to the recent event.

This is literal plus application. A literal event from the past applied to a recent event.

Another example

That, by the way, is how the Joel 2 passage and the Acts 2 passage fit together.

Read Joel 2:28 – 32 and Acts 2:16 – 21.

Joel 2:28–32 (NASB95)

²⁸ *“It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. ²⁹ “Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. ³⁰ “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke. ³¹ “The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. ³² “And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape, As the Lord has said, Even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.*

Acts 2:16–21 (NASB95)

¹⁶ *but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ ‘And I will grant wonders in the sky above And signs on the earth below, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. ²⁰ ‘The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood, Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. ²¹ ‘And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’*

How much of what Joel spoke about actually happened in Act 2?

Not one thing of his prophecy happened in Acts 2.

And the one thing that happened in Acts 2, the coming of the Spirit resulting in the speaking of languages or tongues, Joel did not even mention.

What is the one point of similarity between what Joel wrote and the events in Acts 2?

The one point of similarity between Joel and Acts 2 is an outpouring of the Spirit resulting in an unusual manifestation.

But the manifestations of Joel are different from those of Acts 2.

So, again, what happens in Acts 2 Joel did not mention. And what Joel did mention is not happening in Acts 2.

And furthermore Joel says the Spirit will be poured out on all flesh, in that context all Jewish flesh. But in Acts 2 only 12 men, or at the most 120 people, but no more than that, which hardly fulfils the necessity of all flesh.

And so the fulfilment of Joel 2 is still future, waiting for Israel's national salvation when these events occur.

But there is one point of similarity again: an outpouring of the Spirit resulting in an unusual manifestation, and the text is quoted as an application.

Literal plus application.

4. *Summation*

Then we come to a fourth category called: **Summation**.

A summary of many prophecies plus a literal fulfilment.

This is found in section 16 at the end of verse 23:

to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

No such prophecy

You can hunt through every single page, every single phrase in the Old Testament and you will find no such prophecy. (And those who want to point to Isaiah 11:1 will find only one word that has a similarity, otherwise there is no point of similarity between Isaiah 11:1 and Matthew 2:23).

Summary of Prophets

Now, where you have a situation where it says, "*spoken by the prophets*", and you don't have an exact quotation, it fits into a fourth category.

He is not trying to quote what a specific prophet said, he is simply summarising what the prophets had to say.

And normally the clue, although this will not be true in every specific case, but it will be true in most cases, is when the word prophet switches from singular to plural.

Now go back to section 14 and notice verse 5, “*written by the prophet*” singular. The section 15 verse 15, “*spoken by the Lord through the prophet*” singular. Verse 17, “*by Jeremiah the prophet*”, singular. When you come to section 16 and verse 23: “*spoken by the prophets*”, plural.

So again, he is not trying to quote a single prophet as he has up until now, he is simply summarising what the prophets had to say.

Nazarene

Now what was a Nazarene in the first century Jewish context?

A Nazarene was someone who was despised and rejected.

And as we mentioned previously, people living in Nazareth always had to live with this stumbling block because, while Judeans looked down on Galileans, Galileans looked down upon the people of Nazareth.

And the saying “what good thing can come out of Nazareth” was a common saying of that day.

In fact they used to tell Nazarene jokes back then in place of other types of jokes that we tell today.

Was Jesus a Nazarene in that sense? According to the prophets like Isaiah 53, 49; Psalm 22, among others, he was a despised rejected individual. And that is captured in the term “a Nazarene”.

And Jesus was just that.

How to understand NT quotes of the OT

And so, when you see the New Testament quoting the Old Testament, you first of all have to go back to the Old Testament original and see what the verse means in the Old Testament context.

Then you can see whether it was:

1. A literal prophecy followed by literal fulfilment,
2. Whether it is a literal event or thing that ends up in a typology, (and a major part of typology is in the book of Hebrews where he talks about the Aaronic priesthood, the Melchisedekian priesthood, the Kadesh-Barnea incident, the tabernacle, the temple, the blood sacrifices. He does not deny there was an Aaron, there was a Melchisedek, a tabernacle, a temple – these are all types of a New Testament event. Here you have literal plus typical).
3. Where you only have one point of similarity then it is an application of that passage.

(In fact that is the most common way that pastors operate today. If they are expositors they will first of all explain what that passage means in its context and then they will give an application to a modern day situation, not implying that that was what the prophet was speaking about. It is only based upon a point of similarity.)

4. And then fourthly, if you cannot find such a quote that is a good indication that it is a summary.

And so that is the way that you can determine how these various passages fit.

Rabbinic concepts

Now these were common rabbinic concepts, which they used when they quoted the Hebrew Bible. And there is a term the rabbis used, Pardes, which is an acronym.

- Pshat – the simple basic meaning of the text, which corresponds to literal prophecy plus literal fulfilment.
- Remez – a hint or suggestion, which corresponds to literal plus typical.
- Drash – exposition, which corresponds to literal plus application.
- Sod – secret or hidden, which corresponds to summation.

And so we find the New Testament authors, who were Jewish and familiar with the use of these four ways of using the Old Testament, also make use of these rabbinic concepts when they quote from it.

d. His Boyhood

(1) His Growth, § 17, Luke 2:40

Luke is the only one who gives us the summary of his human development.

The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

Not much detail, but it summarises his human development from the age of four to the age of twelve. Whatever else we want to know about his human development will have to be found in other sources.

From the Biblical accounts we know that he grew up in a Jewish home comprised of Bible believing parents who were faithful to obey the Mosaic Law.

So he grew up not only in a Jewish home, but a spiritual Jewish home of that day.

Training in a spiritual Jewish home

Now the way Jewish boys were trained in those days:

- They began to study the Scriptures at the age of 5 in the Jewish schools.
- At the age of 10 they would begin to study the rabbinic traditions known as the oral law (which I will explain a bit later)

- At the age of 12 they would be apprenticed to a specific profession.

Now if they were going to follow their father's profession they would stay at home.

If they were going to learn another profession they would be sent away from home to stay with someone that would train them in this new profession. This would begin at the age of 12.

If they were to continue to study the scripture and become rabbis, they would be sent to a specific rabbi to be trained for the rabbinate. This would continue from the age of 12 to the age of 30 when they would be ordained.

- At the age of 13 they would receive Bar Mitzvah.

No doubt Jesus underwent the basic training. At the age of 5 he began the study of the Scriptures; at the age of 10 he began to study rabbinic tradition. At the age of 12 he would make a decision concerning his occupation.

That brings us to § 18.

(2) The Visit to Jerusalem, § 18, Luke 2:41-50

Read Luke 2:41 – 50.

Now sometimes you have people saying this visit was for his Bar Mitzvah. However, Bar Mitzvah occurs at the age of 13, not at the age of 12. But they are following a basic tradition of that day.

Parents' obedience to the Law

Notice it says in verse 41 that his parents went every year to Jerusalem at the feast of Passover, which again shows their clear obedience to the Mosaic Law.

There were three festivals out of 7 that they could not observe at home. Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles had to be observed wherever the tabernacle or temple stood, and ultimately that became Jerusalem.

And the parents went every year to the festival, showing their obedience to the Mosaic Law.

Jewish tradition

And it was a tradition that once a son reached his 12th birthday, he was to be taken to Jerusalem for the observance of the Passover that comes after his 12th birthday, in preparation for the Bar Mitzvah that will happen at the age of 13.

And this they do.

Travel

When you travelled in those days you travelled in groups.

So when they left the city they made the assumption that Jesus was with the group.

After travelling a whole day, and coming to the first night's campsite, they realised he was missing.

It would take a whole day for them to get back to Jerusalem. And once they returned they also took three more days before they finally found him.

In the temple

And in verse 46 we read:

Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers.

The word 'teachers' here refers to those who were experts in the interpretation of the Mosaic Law. He was sitting with those who were experts in the Mosaic Law, *both listening to them*, in the sense that he understood what they were saying, *and asking them questions*.

Amazement

Verse 47 says:

all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

Why were they amazed?

Normally a 12 year old would not be able to understand these things or raise the right questions.

Furthermore, they all knew the Nazareth school system was not very good anyway.

Jesus' understanding

Where did Jesus get this understanding and His ability to ask good questions?

Training by His Father

His Jewish upbringing alone does not explain how he knows all that he knows by the age of 12.

We can find an answer to our question in the Old Testament.

So take your Bibles and turn to Isaiah chapter 50.

Isaiah's favourite title for the Messiah is "The Servant of Jehovah", or "The Servant of the Lord". He has several "Servant of Jehovah" passages that run throughout the book.

And the one that is relevant to us right now is found in chapter 50:4-9. We will read verses 4-6.

Isaiah 50:4-6 (NASB95)

⁴ *The Lord God has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.*

⁵ *The Lord God has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient Nor did I turn back.*

⁶ *I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.*

Daily discipleship

The key verse here is verse 4.

As he was growing up, morning by morning, in the wee hours of the morning, he was awakened by God the Father who took him aside to personally train him for his messianic mission. He was disciplined by God the Father individually on a daily basis.

His suffering

In verse 5, when he learned that his mission included a great deal of physical suffering he did not rebel against what was being taught.

And in verse 6, when that day came he says: *I gave my back to those who strike me*. He didn't try to shield his back from the whipping scourge. Nor did he shield his face from those who would pull out his beard, because he was uniquely trained for this mission.

Two natures

Keep in mind that with Jesus we have one person with two distinct natures: a human nature and a divine nature.

As to his divine nature, he was always omniscient and knew everything.

However, as to his human nature, he had to undergo the same learning experience that we undergo. In addition, He had a unique experience of being trained by God the Father.

So, by the age of 12 he clearly understood his sonship relationship with God the Father.

Mary

Now, when his mother finally sees him, she is naturally greatly relieved, but she temporarily forgets who He is.

And she says to him in a typical Jewish mother's way: *Son, why have You treated us this way?*

Jewish mothers

Now, if you know the Jewish community well, you know the tendency of the Jewish mothers is to try to control their kids by laying guilt trips upon them.

In fact, I was once told the difference between a Jewish mother and an Italian mother.

An Italian mother says to her kids: if you don't finish your food I will kill you.

A Jewish mother says: if you don't finish your food I will kill myself.

And this is typical of the way that Jewish mothers make their sons feel guilty.

The story goes: how many Jewish mothers does it take to screw in a light bulb? Just one who says: that's all right children, I'll just sit here in the dark.

And if a mother buys her children two shirts for Hannaker or something, when he puts one on she will say to him: didn't you like the other one?

Mary's question

And notice here that Mary does the same thing: *why have You treated us this way? Didn't you know that your father and I were searching for you in great distress?* (NIV) – trying to lay a guilt trip on him.

Jesus' answer

His answer in verse 50 is:

“Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?”

His Father

Now, Jesus makes a couple of points here.

First he reminds her that his real father is not Joseph. His real father is the Heavenly Father. Therefore, knowing that, she should have known exactly where to look for him: in the temple compound, in the house of his Father.

His occupation

Now why would knowing that His Father was God mean that they should have known He was in the temple?

A more literal Greek rendering would be: *Did you not know that I had to be about my Father's business or occupation.*

She should have realised that he would be about his father's occupation.

Why?

Remember he is 12 years old, which is when the Jewish son chose the specific occupation he would pursue.

And the point He makes to her is this: She should have known where to look for him, and she should have looked for Him in the house of His Father because He will follow His Father's occupation.

So, on the one hand He did follow his foster father's occupation and became a carpenter. But on the other hand, He also followed His heavenly Father's occupation, and that's why He will be found in the temple compound.

So the events of Isaiah 50:4-9 show us what happens here. And we see the results of His training described in Isaiah chapter 50.

By the age of 12, He clearly recognised his sonship relationship with God the Father and chose to follow His heavenly Father's profession.

...

A week of Messiah's life

We don't often have all the details of the day to day course of His life, but now and again we are given a few more day by day details.

Luke 2:41 says: *They went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover*

Verse 43: *after spending the full number of days*. These are two days: the day of the Passover, and the day of Unleavened Bread.

Verse 44 says they travelled a full day's journey to the first campsite. That would be the third day.

In verse 45, they returned, and that is the fourth day.

Then verse 46 says it took them three more days to find him. That would be days 5 – 7.

So here we have a full week. There are a couple of other times we will see a full week, but it is very unusual.

(3) His Development, § 19, Luke 2:51-52

⁵¹ *And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.*

⁵² *And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

Notice three things here.

1. Here is an example that shows that subjection is not a question of superiority or inferiority.

It is a matter of divine order.

Here in verse 51 is the superior sinless God-Man subjecting himself to two sinful inferiors, two sinful human beings because subjection is a matter of divine order.

Likewise in the husband-wife relationship, it is one co-equal subjecting himself to another co-equal because it is a matter of divine order.

2. *His mother treasured all these things in her heart.*

She pondered what all these things meant, and ultimately she concluded that her son was the messianic God-man.

3. Notice in verse 52 he develops in the same four areas that all of us have to develop in.

- a. He develops mentally – he increased in wisdom.
- b. He develops physically – he increased in stature.
- c. He develops spiritually – he increased in favour with God.
- d. He develops socially – He increased in favour with men.

These are the same four areas we must develop in as we grow up.

That summarises His human development from the age of twelve to about the age of 30 or more

B. The Herald of the King, § 20-23

1. The Message to John, § 20, Mark 1:1; Luke 3:1-2

Good news

Now if I said to you, “I have good news to tell you,” what would you be expecting me to tell you about?

You would not know. Why?

You would not know what I was going to talk about because there is no context for the statement.

If you were in the besieged city of Jerusalem and I said, “I have good news to tell you,” what would you be expecting me to tell you?

You would expect me to tell me about the defeat or retreat of the enemy, or at least that I had found food we didn’t know about before.

Gospel

Read Mark 1:1.

What is the meaning of the word, *gospel*?

The term *gospel* means “good news.”

And what is the content of the good news?

Again, the content of the good news can only be determined from the context.

Even in the gospel accounts, the content of the good news will not always be the same. In particular, it will not always be the same as the gospel that the apostle Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 15:1 – 4.

Gospel of Jesus Christ

What do we learn from this text about the content of the gospel that Mark is writing about here?

It concerns *Jesus Christ*. This is not a given name and surname. Jesus is His name, which means Saviour. And Christ means Messiah. He is the Messiah.

And He is *the Son of God*, which is a messianic title.

This is good news.

We will learn more about this gospel as we continue our study.

Historical detail of Luke

Read Luke 3:1 – 2.

Notice Luke’s historical concerns as he records both the timing of this event and who was ruling where at the time.

And based upon all the information he gives us it would now be the year AD 26 and the crucifixion will be in AD 30.

The word of God came to John

At the end of verse 2 he says:

the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

The term used for *word* is different from the term, *logos*, we saw earlier in John's prologue.

The word he uses here is *rheima*, which is the spoken word.

Logos is the wider term that refers to either the written word, the spoken word, or the incarnate word. From the context we can tell which one it is referring to.

Rheima is a subset of *logos*: the spoken word.

John hears the spoken word of God telling him to begin the mission for which he was born.

This fulfils the promise made to his father, Zechariah, that his son would be a prophet.

2. The Message by John, § 21, Mark 1:2-6; Matthew 3:1-6; Luke 3:3-6

prophecy fulfilled

Read Mark 1:2 – 3.

Mark's theme is Jesus the Messiah, the Servant of Jehovah.

Notice here how he makes reference to Isaiah, because that will be the background out of which he writes concerning the ideal servant.

He quotes from both Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 since both these prophecies are fulfilled by John. These are both literal prophecy plus literal fulfilment.

John's message

Read Matthew 3:2 and Mark 2:4.

The content of John's message is three things.

1. Repentance – *Repent* in Matthew verse 2.

Repentance is not feeling sorry for one's sin. Rather, it is a change of mind, a radical reorientation of world view, a turning from sin to God.

2. His teaching is kingdom centred: they were to repent *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*.

The motivation for their repentance was the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. And by kingdom he meant the messianic kingdom foretold in the Jewish Scriptures.

This is what his Jewish audience would have understood. Had he meant something different, such as a spiritual kingdom, he would have needed to explain it.

He is proclaiming that the messianic kingdom is at hand, that it is imminent.

3. Those who respond to John's message undergo a baptism of repentance.

Exactly what baptism means in a Jewish context we will discuss when we get to section 24. So we won't discuss it here.

Just keep in mind that baptism was a very common Jewish practice long before it became a church practice. Nor did it begin necessarily with John. It was a common Jewish practice for centuries before the time of John.

Elijah

Read verse 4 of Matthew's account.

Here we are told that he dresses like Elijah.

Earlier we are told that he came in the spirit and power of Elijah, and now we are also told that he dresses like Elijah.

And we will see more references to Elijah a bit later.

Response

And he immediately gets a lot of attention.

Read Matthew verses 5 – 6:

- ⁵ Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan;
⁶ and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

Although he is in the desert area, in the Jordan river, just north of the Dead Sea, he gets quite a large following rather quickly.

3. The Explanation by John, § 22, Matthew 3:7-10; Luke 3:7-14

That leads us to section 22, the explanation by John.

Read the Matthew passage.

What do you think of John's response to the Pharisees and Sadducees? Doesn't it look like a strange way to respond to someone who is coming for baptism?

Two stages of investigation

When our eyes are open to see it, we often find the New Testament portraying something that was a common occurrence in first century Israel. This is one of those occasions.

And what was common in first century Israel, and is coming out in this passage, is that whenever there was any kind of messianic movement of significance the leaders of Israel would investigate it in two separate stages.

1. The first stage is the stage of *observation*.

In the first stage a delegation was sent out to do nothing but observe.

At this stage they could raise no questions, they could raise no objections. They could only observe what was being said, taught and done, but nothing could be verbalised out loud.

After a period of observation, they were to go back to Jerusalem and give a report, and issue a verdict.

The verdict was to answer the question: is the movement significant, or is it insignificant?

If the movement was considered to be insignificant the matter was dropped.

But if they said it was significant, then came the second stage.

2. The second stage is the stage of *interrogation*.

And now a second delegation was sent out, but this time they would raise questions, and they would raise objections, looking for a basis to accept or reject a person's claims.

Investigation of John

Now because John came preaching the concept of the kingdom, which had messianic overtones, what happens here in section 22 is the first of these two stages, the observation stage.

In verse 7 of Matthew he says in the NASB:

when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism.

Now the Greek preposition translated *for* by the NASB is *epi* and (followed by the accusative as it is here) it means *upon, unto* or *to*. The NASB also ignores the personal pronoun. It simply leaves it out.

Here the ASV has a more accurate translation:

when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism (ASV).

They were not coming to John to be baptized! They were coming to his baptism to make observations!

And when we get to section 57 we will see that the Pharisees and Sadducees were not baptized by John. So when they came to the baptism of John it was not for the purpose of being baptized by John.

This is the observation stage: They are observing what he is claiming, what he is saying, and what he is doing.

The wrath to come

What is the *wrath to come*?

The *wrath to come* refers to the Day of Jehovah, also called the Day of the Lord, in the Hebrew Bible. This is the period of the outpouring of divine judgment that will precede the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

We have Abraham for our father

Why does John say to them, *do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'?*

When the Pharisees say *'We have Abraham for our father,'* they are referring to the common teaching of the rabbis that all Jews will enter the messianic kingdom.

When the Messiah comes all Jews will be resurrected and all Jews will enter into the messianic kingdom. And so merely being a descendant of Abraham, they say, will qualify them for entry into the kingdom.

John is warning them against relying on this teaching.

The basis of the judgement

What will enable them to escape the wrath to come?

The way to escape the coming wrath is to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

In other words, it is the nature of their fruit that will determine their future.

Entrance into the kingdom is actually on the basis of an internal righteousness from God that is evidenced by our fruit.

What they observe

Verses 10-14 of Luke's account show us what these Pharisees and Sadducees and members of the Sanhedrin begin to observe.

Read Luke 3:10 – 14.

What is the common thread in the examples given here?

What they observe is John instructing people to do what goes contrary to their nature and what goes contrary to their office.

- For example, in verse 10, when the multitudes ask, "what shall we do?" he says to them: if you have two coats, give one away. Whatever you have double of, share it with others.

It is a tendency for people to want to hoard and collect things, and he tells them to keep what is essential for them to meet their needs, and what is left over should be given away.

- Verse 12 concerns the tax collectors.

Tax collectors were despised and ostracized, so why would a Jew take up the job of a Roman tax collector?

They chose to take the job because Rome would allow them to get away with collecting more funds than were necessary. And they would become wealthy by keeping the extra.

Now John tells them in verse 13: *Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.*

And so the very reason they entered the job of tax collector is now to be rejected. They can continue to be tax collectors, but not to collect more than what is allotted by the authorities.

- As for the soldiers in verse 14, why would Jewish soldiers become mercenaries in the Roman army?

Because as part of an occupying army they could also become rather wealthy by taking spoil.

Now he tells them not to take money from anyone by force and not to practice what they became soldiers to do.

This is not dealing with defending the country; this is dealing with becoming wealthy through the spoils of war.

So John is telling people to do things that were contrary to their nature, and were contrary to their office.

And when this group went back to report to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, as we will see later, the movement of John the Baptist is considered significant.

At this point he underwent the stage of observation, and what happens to the herald will happen to the king.

4. The Promise by John, § 23, Mark 1:7-8; Matthew 3:11-12; Luke 3:15-18

Read Luke's account here, Luke 3:15-18.

Question

Verse 16 says that *John answered and said to them all...*

Who was he answering and what was their question?

The people, the crowd that had gathered, who *were in a state of expectation*. And they were all wondering if John was the Messiah.

So what John is about to say is an answer to their question wondering if he was the Messiah.

Answer

Notice the word *but* in verse 16.

In his answer to the crowd's wondering John draws a contrast between himself and the Messiah, and there are two aspects to the contrast.

Can you see them?

Contrasting might and worth

First the Messiah is mightier than he and he is not even worthy to untie the thongs of the Messiah's sandals.

Contrasting baptisms

The focus of this passage is on the different kind of baptism that the Messiah will do.

Unlike John's baptism with water, the One coming after him will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with Fire.

And exactly what he means by that is spelled out in his next statement. The Greek grammar features a sentence with two parts, each of which is subsequently explained.

Winnowing fork

What is the purpose of the winnowing fork?

Firstly, He will use it to *thoroughly clear His threshing floor*. In other words, everyone will be baptized one way or the other.

Wheat

Secondly, as the threshing floor is cleared, there will be a separation of the wheat and the chaff.

Who are the wheat?

The wheat represents those who are to be baptised by the Spirit. And they are the believers, and they will be gathered into the barn.

While some interpret the barn to be heaven, within Matthew's gospel it is better to interpret it as the messianic kingdom since much of Matthew's focus is on the messianic kingdom.

The apostle Paul writes about the baptism of believers in I Corinthians 12:13.

¹³ *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

Chaff

And who are the chaff?

The chaff represents those who will be baptised by the fire, and in Matthew's gospel the chaff focuses on those who never believe. These are the ones who will be thrown into unquenchable fire.

Unquenchable fire is fire that will never be extinguished. It will go on forever. It is the Lake of fire of Revelation 20:11-15.

And so the kind of baptism which will be applied to unbelievers is the baptism of fire.

Summary

There is no middle ground. There is no purgatory. Everybody is baptised either by fire, or by the Spirit.

Those who believe on the Messiah will have the baptism of the Spirit and will be gathered into the messianic kingdom.

And those who reject the Messiah will have the baptism of unquenchable fire.

Focus

And Luke says in verse 18:

So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people.

What does this imply?

Luke records here the content of John's message in summary form and he had many other things to say.

But this was the main point of his message and the focus of John's ministry is the coming of the Messiah.

C. The Approval of the King, § 24-27

Here we find three events that confirmed that Jesus was approved by God: His baptism, His temptation, and the testimony of His herald, John.

1. At His Baptism, § 24, Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-23a

The baptism of Jesus marks the last act of his private life and the first act of his public life.

Read Matthew 3:13 – 17.

Jewish baptism

Here we need to discuss what baptism was among the Jewish people, because the church has picked up baptism, and as we will see, in subsequent centuries the church lost its vision of what baptism was about.

The Key Words:

1. Mikvah – the place of immersion
2. Tvilah – immersion. This is the Hebrew word for baptism.

In Jewish circles immersion was the only practice, and today it is the only practice.

And so when a Gentile converts to Judaism he undergoes a process of immersion.

In Jewish circles there is no sprinkling, and there is no pouring. Only immersion is practiced in Jewish circles.

3. Bapto – to dip, to dye.

Used of a piece of cloth dipped into a dye. When you pull it out it has changed its colour, it has changed its identification.

4. Baptidzo – to immerse (the more intensive form).

This is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew Tvilah.

The English word

The English word, baptize, is derived from a transliteration of the Greek word. The first translators of the Bible into English were reluctant to translate the word because the church already practiced sprinkling. So they transliterated the Greek word instead.

Immersion

The meaning of the word in both Hebrew and Greek is immersion.

Identification

The meaning of the act or ritual is identification.

So when a person underwent immersion he identified himself with a person and/or a message or a group.

A new identification always meant a break with the old identification.

So for example, when a Gentile converted to Judaism he was breaking away from his former pagan idolatry, and now identifying himself with the God of Israel and the Jewish people.

A new identification always meant a separation from the old identification.

John's baptism

And when John came with his baptism,

1. those who were baptised by him were identified with John's message and
2. they were making a commitment: whoever John points out to be the Messiah, upon Him they will believe.

This is the identification of John's baptism. You can see this reflected in Acts 19:4:

⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

Believer's baptism

For believers' baptism we identify ourselves with the death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah. Romans 6:3 – 4.

All baptisms

The meaning of all baptisms is identification.

What differs from one baptism to the next is who or what you identify yourself with.

New Testament baptisms

Therefore, in the New Testament the only kind of baptism that is practised is immersion.

Furthermore, in the New Testament you only find baptism of those who already have believed. There is not one case of infant baptism anywhere in the New Testament.

Purpose for the baptism of Jesus

Now, when Jesus comes to be baptised, Matthew's account in verse 14 says that John would have hindered him because he recognises this One has no need for repentance, but Jesus insists on undergoing the ritual.

So the question is: why did Jesus submit himself to baptism?

Let me give you 6 reasons, four of which come out of the context and two of which come from other passages.

1. To fulfil all righteousness.
To be identified with righteousness, specifically the righteousness of the Law of Moses because He will fulfil all the required demands of the Mosaic Law.
2. To be identified with John's message: the preaching of the Kingdom.
John's message was about the kingdom of heaven, and therefore Jesus' baptism by John would identify him with John's kingdom message.

3. To identify himself with the believing remnant being prepared by John.

Remnant

The remnant is a technical term in the Scriptures.

First of all, there is all Israel, all Jews, all who are descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now within the larger Israel there was always a smaller Israel, which the prophets called the remnant of Israel. These were the Jews who actually believed what God had revealed through Moses and the Prophets.

The point of division

Isaiah talks about the remnant in Isaiah 8, for example. He describes what distinguishes the remnant from the non-remnant. The remnant believes what God has revealed through Moses and the Prophets, while the non-remnant rejects it and pursues idolatry and occult practices.

Isaiah 8 also points out another point: When Immanuel comes he will become the new point of division between the remnant and the non-remnant. And for the remnant he will be a sanctuary, something precious. For the non-remnant he will be the stone of stumbling and the rock of offence.

The remnant was at times rather small. In Elijah's day only 7,000 people were members of the believing remnant and the vast majority were idolaters. And it continues to be small into the New Testament times.

Now, with the coming of John, the remnant will consist of those who are responding to John's message.

Jesus' identification

And by undergoing baptism He identifies himself with this group being prepared by John at this point of time.

4. To be made publicly known to Israel.

I'll come back to that in a moment.

These first four come from the context of the baptism.

5. To be identified with sinners.

2 Corinthians 5:21:

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

6. To receive His anointing by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:38:

“You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Triune God

Let's go back to the fourth reason: to be publicly made known to Israel.

In the context of the baptism the whole triune God makes His appearance.

1. *The Son*

The Son is the person of the Messiah Jesus who is in the water undergoing the immersion.

2. *The Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit comes in visible form in the form of a dove.

Notice what the second half of verse 16 says:

and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him.

And to make sure we do not think it is a ghostly form that had the mere appearance of a dove, Luke is a bit more specific. Luke says in verse 22:

the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove.

Now the question is: why did the Spirit take on the form of a bird, and why the specific bird of a dove?

There is a Jewish background here.

Bird

The first time the Spirit is mentioned is in Genesis 1:2, where it says:

the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters.

And the Hebrew word used is Merechefet. The Hebrew word, merechefet, is used of a mother bird hovering over her eggs just before they hatch.

And so Moses presents the Spirit hovering over the waters just before the “hatching” of the dry land.

And so, as far as the Genesis account is concerned the Spirit is pictured as doing the work of a bird.

Dove

But in the Midrashim, a collection of rabbinic writings, it was the rabbis who defined what kind of bird it was. It was a dove.

So in the Jewish mindset of that day the Spirit would be connected with a dove.

And so for that reason He comes in bodily form as a dove and descends upon the Son.

3. *The Father*

Now while the Son and the Spirit are visible in some form, God the Father is only present by His voice.

In Matthew verse 17:

and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

This is the way the Father chose to make himself known, identifying his son with the messianic son of Psalm 2.

Why a voice?

Why did he do it this way?

Here again there is something involving the Jewish mind set.

Bat Kol

The Hebrew Bat Kol literally means the daughter of a voice. It became the technical term for God's voice when he spoke out of heaven.

In Jewish theology the prophetic voice ceased with Malachi and God no longer spoke through prophets as of Malachi.

The next prophet they were expecting to arrive on the scene would be Elijah the prophet who would tell the Jewish people about the coming of the Messiah.

Between Malachi and Elijah's second coming there will be no prophet. But this did not mean that God was silent. Periodically God would simply speak out of heaven, but not give a long discourse. What he would say would be one or two sentences and no more.

So in rabbinic writings you have a lot of Bat Kols, a lot of voices from heaven making a simple declaration.

And so in the Jewish mindset this would fit quite well: The Father speaks out of heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Summary

And so everything fits the Jewish context of that day, with the Spirit as a dove, and the Father's voice from heaven.

In summary, two things happen at Jesus' baptism:

1. He was identified audibly by God the Father to be the Messianic Son, and
2. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit for service.

Jesus' age

Read Luke3:23a.

Luke points out that he was about 30 years of age. And people often skip the word "about". He was not exactly 30. He was about 30. He was closer to 32 or 33 already.

2. Through the Temptation, § 25, Mark 1:12-13; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13

In section 24 we saw the approval of the King through His baptism. Here in section 25 we see the approval of the King through His temptation.

Divine plan

Read Matthew 4:1 – 2; Mark 1:12 – 13; Luke 4:1 – 2.

Who has a role in these verses? And what role or roles does each one play?

Jesus

went into the wilderness

led / impelled by the Spirit

to be tempted by the devil / Satan

fasted forty days and forty nights

tempted by the devil / Satan

full of the Holy Spirit

led around by the Spirit

Holy Spirit

Led, impelled, and filled (controlled) Jesus

Satan

Tempted Jesus

Who is in control here?

The Holy Spirit is in control, leading Jesus into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted.

Purpose

Now, what was the purpose of the temptation?

Both God and Satan had their purpose.

What was Satan's purpose?

Satan's purpose is to cause him to sin in order to disqualify him from making the atonement.

What was God's purpose?

God the Father has just declared to Israel that Jesus is His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased.

And now from God's perspective the purpose of the temptation is to prove the sinlessness of the Son.

Correlation

Notice the correlation between this section and the previous one.

In section 24:

He was declared to be the Son of God.

He was baptised to fulfil all righteousness.

In section 25:

He will be told to prove he is the Son of God.

That righteousness is going to be tested.

Representative roles

1. Believers

We will read the rest of this section in a moment, but before we do, notice that He is tempted as our representative to show us how we should deal with temptations.

- a. We see this from Hebrews 4:15 which says:

... One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

What does it mean when it says that He was tempted *in all things* as we are?
What does it mean by *all things*?

Have you ever been tempted to change stones into bread?

No. We will never be tempted to do that because Satan won't waste his time tempting us to do things we cannot do anyway.

For us, this would not be a real temptation.

But for Jesus it was a real temptation because He could change stones into bread.

On the other hand, He was not tempted to waste His whole day watching soap operas on television, or surfing the internet.

So again the word does not mean that he suffered every type of temptation that we do any more than we suffer every type of temptation that he did.

- b. Rather, the word translated ‘*all things*’ refers to areas. So He was tempted in all areas or in every way that we are tempted.

And in 1 John 2:16 we see that there are three areas of temptation:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

- i. *The lust of the flesh.*

Read Luke verses 3 – 4.

Which of the three areas of temptation is this?

The temptation to change stones into bread occurred at the end of a forty day fast. At this point his flesh was hungry.

It was the will of God the Father to satisfy His hunger at this point of time, but it was not the will of God for Him to use his messianic power for self-gratification.

This was a temptation in the area of the lust of the flesh.

- ii. *The lust of the eyes.*

Read Luke 4:5 – 8, where he is shown a satanic vision.

Which area of temptation is this?

This is the lust of the eyes. Jesus could see all of the kingdoms of the world, and Satan says, I will give you my authority over all these kingdoms if you will worship me.

Does Satan have the authority to give all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus?

Yes, we read in verse 6 that “it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish”.

Now is it the will of the Father for the Son to rule over the kingdoms of this world?

Yes, this is in fact God’s intention, but how did God intend Jesus to achieve this?

The means of obtaining the authority to rule over all the kingdoms of this world will be by the cross and not by means of worshipping Satan.

And Satan was using a short cut to this messianic goal, avoiding the cross.

This is a good example of illegitimate means to obtain legitimate ends. (The end does not justify the means!)

And again, this is temptation in the area John calls *the lust of the eyes*.

iii. *The pride of life.*

Now read about the third area of temptation in Luke 4:9 – 12.

He is taken to the pinnacle of the temple at the south east corner, the highest point from top to bottom. And Satan says to him, if you really are the Son of God, prove it to me by jumping off. If he jumped off and floated down people would declare him to be the Messiah. So prove to me that you are the Son of God because Psalm 91 does say if the Messiah stumbles the angels will catch him so he cannot be hurt before his time.

This is a temptation in the area of the pride of life, because He was asked to prove that He was the Messiah.

- c. So he did suffer temptation in the same three areas in which we are tempted, but in His case, without sin.
- d. Read Luke verse 13.

When the devil had finished every temptation, meaning all three areas, he left Him until an opportune time.

The word, *every*, is the same Greek word translated *all things* in Hebrews 4:15. And again it means *in all areas* or *in every way*. When the devil had finished tempting Jesus in all three areas, he left him.

That illustrates another teaching, that if we resist Satan he will flee from us.

But it also points out that every victory is temporary. Notice the last phrase: *until an opportune time*. Eventually he will come back and tempt us again.

Spiritual warfare is not a one-time battle. It is a life-long conflict.

- e. From this account we learn the proper way to deal with temptation.

Notice what he does not do. He does not practice any of the practices such as you see on TV (TBN). He doesn't call Satan any names. He doesn't renounce him. He doesn't bind him. He doesn't walk around him 7 times.

He simply quotes Scripture relevant to the issue in question.

The biblical principal is found in James 4:7.

⁷ *Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

If one resists Satan, he will flee, and resisting always comes by Scripture.

The spiritual battle can be won by doing just two things:

- i. Study the word of God, and
- ii. Apply it, that is, submit to it.

Now, we have seen that Jesus is tempted as our representative to show us how we should deal with temptations.

2. *Israel*

But what is often missed is that He also plays another representative role in His temptation.

In His temptations Jesus was representing Israel.

In this section we can see five points of similarity between Israel and Jesus:

a. *Son of God*

First, the use of the term “Son of God”. Israel is called the Son of God in Exodus 4:22-23 & Hosea 11:1.

b. *Wilderness*

Both testings occur in the wilderness. 1 Cor. 10:1-13 points out that the journey in the wilderness was a time of testing.

Now He is being tested and tempted in the wilderness or desert.

c. *40*

The figure 40. For Israel it was 40 years. For Jesus it was 40 days. Numbers 32:13.

d. *The Holy Spirit*

The presence of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 63:11 – 14 points out that the Spirit was present with Israel in the wilderness.

Isaiah 63:11–14 (NASB95)

¹¹ Then His people remembered the days of old, of Moses. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them, ¹² Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, Who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name, ¹³ Who led them through the depths? Like the horse in the wilderness, they did not stumble; ¹⁴ As the cattle which go down into the valley, The Spirit of the Lord gave them rest. So You led Your people, To make for Yourself a glorious name.

The first verse of each of these gospel accounts points out that the Spirit was with him in the wilderness.

e. *Deuteronomy*

When Jesus quotes from the Old Testament He only quotes from one book, the fifth book of Moses, the book of Deuteronomy.

Why is that?

Deuteronomy is not merely repeating what Moses wrote previously, but is actually God's covenant book with Israel. It is a covenantal arrangement.

And so, because Jesus represents Israel in His temptation, He quotes only from the book of Deuteronomy.

Now, the point of all this is to show that where Israel as a nation had failed, the ideal Israelite, Jesus the Messiah, succeeded.

And He became Israel's substitute, not only in these temptations, but also as the final substitute, the final sacrifice for sin.

Recorded order of temptations

If you take time to read the two accounts, you will notice that the order of the temptations is different between the two accounts.

And so, to put the events in chronological order, we follow Luke's account because Luke alone claims to put his account into chronological sequence.

Matthew's order is different because he simply follows his theme, and because his theme is kingship and the kingdom he saves the temptation about the kingdoms of the world for last.

But Luke puts it in the correct order as these temptations occurred.

3. By His Herald, § 26-27

a. *Testimony of John before Leaders, § 26, John 1:19-28*

Read John 1:19 – 28.

Questions

Does this passage raise any questions for you?

Who are *the Jews* who sent the priests and Levites to Him?

Why were they sent to question Him?

Jews

Notice the word Jews here. Weren't they all Jews? Who then is John referring to as Jews?

John will use the term Jews a total of 71 times. But he uses it in three different senses.

- i. Sometimes he means Jewish people in general, the sons of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob.
- ii. Sometimes he will mean Judeans in contrast to Galileans.
- iii. And sometimes he will use it of the Jewish leaders.

And how can we know which way he is using it?

The context tells us in which way it is being used.

Jewish leaders

Now what do we find in this context?

From this passage we see that *the Jews* have sent a delegation to John to question him and bring back their answers, and they are also described as Pharisees in verse 24.

So it is the leaders of Israel who have sent this delegation to John.

Purpose

And this delegation is asking questions of John, whereas the first delegation that came to him asked no questions.

So this is the second stage of their investigation. The first stage was observation. The second stage is interrogation.

Now they have come back to John and this time they are raising questions, and three times we are told this is an official delegation from Jerusalem.

1. The first time is in verse 19: This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"
2. The second time is in verse 22: Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us?
3. The third time is in verse 24: Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

So three times we are told this is not just people standing by raising questions. It is an official delegation to find out exactly who John claims to be. And this is the interrogation stage of their investigation.

Obviously they have concluded that John's ministry has significant messianic implications.

John's identity

What is the substance of their questions?

John denies being three things.

1. He denies being the Messiah in verse 21: *I am not the Christ.*
2. In verse 21: *"What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not."*

Notice he denies being Elijah. Here is the third basic connection with Elijah. He comes in the spirit and power of Elijah. He dressed like Elijah. But now he denies being Elijah. There will be other connections further on in our study.

3. Then they ask him: *"Are you the Prophet?"*

Notice the definite article, not *a* prophet, but *the* prophet. So they are referring to a particular prophet, meaning the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:18.

¹⁸ *'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*

The rabbis made that a unique prophet but didn't identify him with the Messiah.

Again John answers "no".

So he is not the Messiah; he is not Elijah; he is not the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:18.

And so then they ask the open question, who is he? And he responds:

"I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

And the point is: he is the forerunner of the Messiah; he is the herald of the King.

Messiah in their midst

And in verse 26 he says: *among you stands One whom you do not know.* John, of course, knows who the Messiah is, but he is not ready to make him known publicly yet. But he is standing there in their midst. And John is not even worthy to undo this person's sandals.

What happens to the herald will happen to the King

So at this point he has undergone the second stage of investigation, the stage of interrogation.

And again, what happened to the herald will also happen to the king.

b. Testimony of John to Jesus, § 27, John 1:29-34

Read John 1:29 – 34.

The Lamb of God

A day passes as we see in verse 29: The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said,

“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! “

There were two concepts of the lamb in the Jewish minds of the first century.

1. The Passover Lamb of Exodus 12.
2. The Messianic Lamb of Isaiah 53:7.

*⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its
shearers, So He did not open His mouth.*

And by calling him the lamb he identifies him with the Passover Lamb and he identifies him with the Messianic Lamb of Isaiah 53.

Humanity & deity

He points out in verse 30: *“This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’* As to his humanity, of course, Jesus is six months younger than John. But as to his deity, he preceded John.

Purpose of John’s ministry

The reason he began his ministry of baptism is found in verses 31-33: He was told in a previous revelation that one day, while he is baptising someone, he will see the Spirit of God descending on him, and that will be the Messiah himself.

Now obviously, he already knew who Jesus was, but the coming of the Spirit when Jesus was baptized was the authenticating sign.

The Introduction of the King is complete

This completes the Introduction of the King, which is the first major division of the life of Jesus, the Messiah, from a Jewish Perspective.

In the next division, we will examine the works and words of Jesus, as well as the reactions of His hearers, in the context of the Jewish culture of that day.

II The Authentication of the King, § 28-56

We now come to the second major division of the Messiah's life, in which we will see the authentication of the King.

Jesus begins to present Himself to Israel as the promised Messiah and authenticates Himself with miracles, signs, and wonders.

This is the time when He goes from city to city and synagogue to synagogue, offering the messianic kingdom to Israel.

To receive the messianic kingdom, Israel must accept Him as the Messianic King.

During this period of time, He is opposed by the Pharisees.

There are two subdivisions in this division of His life:

1. First we will see the acceptance of his person in § 28-36;
2. And then we will see the authority of the king in § 37-56.

A. Acceptance of His Person, § 28-36

1. In the Belief by the First Disciples, § 28, John 1:35-51

Here is another section that raises question in the curious mind!

As we read it, see what questions arise for you?

Read John 1:35 – 51.

The first day

Another day passes, and once again John identifies Jesus to be the Lamb of God.

What happens now is that two disciples of John leave John to become disciples of Jesus. And the first two are John, the author of the gospel, and Andrew, the brother of Peter.

A strange interchange

There is an interchange here that is quite strange until you realise the Jewish background behind it.

They are simply following him for a while, and finally, in verse 38, Jesus comes out with the question: "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Where do you live?"

What are you seeking? What are you looking for? And the answer: where do you live?

Jewish practice

This fits the way someone became a disciple of a specific rabbi.

If a man was to become a disciple of a specific rabbi, he would follow the rabbi around for a while – not too close so as to become a bother, but not too far away to be noticed. It might be a matter of hours or days.

But eventually the rabbi would turn around and ask the same question Jesus did: “What are you looking for?” And the response is to be: “Where do you live?”

If the rabbi said “that’s none of your business” it meant that he was rejecting the person as a disciple.

But if he said, “come and see,” that meant he was accepting him to be a disciple.

The first two disciples – John & Andrew

And in verse 39 Jesus says: “Come, and you shall see.” And this marks the point that these two men become disciples of Jesus.

Simon Peter

In verse 40, Andrew has a brother who becomes a bit more famous, Simon Peter. He tells Peter in verse 41 “*We have found the Messiah.*” And he brought him to Jesus.

And so, on this first day he has the first three of his twelve apostles.

The second day

Then another day passes

Philip

And this time He Himself sees Philip and He calls him to discipleship and Philip becomes the fourth disciple.

Nathanael

Now the story of the fifth disciple is very interesting.

Read verse 45:

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

Notice the response of this future disciple when Philip mentioned the place of Nazareth.

Nathaniel expresses the typical Galilean attitude: “*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*”

Philip doesn’t argue the issue but tells him to *come and see*.

Another strange conversation

And then you have another strange conversation going on.

Read verse 47 again.

How does Jesus respond to Nathanael's approach?

He makes a proclamation:

an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile.

This is the first time the two men actually meet!

Nathaniel is surprised by this and responds:

How do you know me?

And Jesus answered:

Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.

And notice Nathaniel's response in verse 49:

Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.

Isn't that a rather strange conversation?

Is that how you would respond to such a question?

If I came up to you and said I saw you sitting underneath the plumb tree I don't think you would respond, "Man, you must be the King of Israel, you must be the Son of God." That would not be a normal conclusion to draw.

And yet Nathaniel responds this way to Jesus simply saying: "I saw you under the fig tree."

Why?

Based upon that simple statement, why does Nathaniel conclude that Jesus has to be the King of Israel and the Son of God?

Let's look more closely.

An Israelite indeed

Notice that initially Jesus does not call him by name, but by title (v 47):

An Israelite indeed in whom is no deceit. (ASV, et al)

Now, who was the first one to be named Israel?

The first one named Israel was Jacob.

What was Jacob's story?

Jacob had to flee his home because of one act of deceit.

Often you hear that he lived a life of deceit, but that is not true. He performed only one act of deceit, deceiving his father. And even that was at the instigation of his mother.

Because of one act of deceit, the first Israel, Jacob, had to flee the household.

And now we see here one of Jacob's descendants, also an Israelite indeed, but this one has no deceit.

Fig tree

And of course this is the first time the two men meet.

So Nathaniel wants to know: *"how do you know me?"*

And then Jesus answered: *"when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."*

Now, what is significant about being underneath the fig tree?

Keep in mind that in those days it was not possible for everyone to have a copy of the Scriptures. Scrolls were few and far between.

So what Jewish people did was to go to the synagogue school. The reader would read the text and they would memorise it. Repeating and memorising, repeating and memorising.

And then the common rabbinic teaching was that the best place to meditate on what you memorised is underneath a fig tree. And we find recorded in the Talmudim that different rabbis held their classes under fig trees.

So Nathanael being underneath the fig tree was not something unusual.

An Israelite indeed, under the fig tree

And Jesus telling Nathaniel that he saw him underneath the fig tree wasn't an accidental remark.

By seeing him underneath the fig tree and by calling him an Israelite indeed, what Nathaniel began to realise is that Jesus knew the passage of Scripture that he was meditating on.

He was meditating on the same passage of Scripture in Genesis 28 where Jacob was fleeing from the household of Isaac because of that one act of deceit.

This becomes a bit clearer as we continue.

Jesus' response

Now Jesus responds to him in verse 50:

"Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Now where else in the Bible do you read about the angels ascending and descending upon the earth?

In Jacob's dream in Genesis 28, the dream he had the first night after he left home.

Putting it all together

So if you put the whole section together:

Jesus knew the very Scripture that Nathaniel was meditating upon.

He was meditating on Genesis 28, the chapter on Jacob fleeing and having his dream of angels ascending and descending.

And so what Nathaniel realised is that Jesus could read his mind.

And because He could read his mind He must indeed be who he claims to be.

So Jesus remark, *"I saw you underneath the fig tree,"* is not just an idle comment.

It indicated that He knew the very passage Nathaniel was meditating upon, and therefore Nathaniel concluded:

"You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel."

2. The Belief through the first Miracle, § 29, John 2:1-11

This is the first of John's 7 signs.

Seven days

Once again we see a full week transpiring. Go back to § 26. Here we have the first day.

- § 27, John 1:29 *The next day* is the second day.
- § 28, verse 35 *Again the next day* is the third day.
- Verse 43 *The next day* is the fourth day.
- § 29, in verse 1 three more days pass, making a full week.

So, once again a full week is recorded.

The wedding at Cana

Read John 2:1 – 11.

So there is a wedding that takes place in a town called Cana, about 7 miles north of the modern day Cana.

And Jesus comes to the wedding and brings with him the five disciples he has with him.

Now keep in mind that a Jewish wedding feast lasted for 7 days, and so there are 7 days of festivities.

And the normal pattern was to serve the better wines at the beginning. Then once people have had a bit too much and their taste buds are not so sharp they would serve the lesser wines.

A terrible thing happened that should never happen at any Jewish wedding. They suddenly ran out of wine.

And Mary comes to him with the statement that they have run out of wine, and why she came to him is not clear. Maybe she is implying that the reason they ran out of wine is that he brought these five extra men.

He says to her in verse 4: *"Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come."* The ASV puts it *"Woman, what have I to do with thee"*

The Greek is literally, *"Woman, what to me and to you?"* (which is an idiom).³

³ Biblical Studies Press. (2005). *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible*. Biblical Studies Press.

Woman

The term *Woman* is Jesus' normal, polite way of addressing women (Matt 15:28, Luke 13:12; John 4:21; 8:10; 19:26; 20:15).

But it *is* unusual for a son to address his mother with this term.

The custom in both Hebrew (or Aramaic) and Greek would be for a son to use a qualifying adjective or title.

Is there significance in Jesus' use here?

It probably indicates that, once he had embarked on his public ministry, a new relationship existed between Jesus and his mother. He was no longer primarily only her son, but the "Son of Man."

What to me and to you

Furthermore, by saying "what do I have to do with you?" he is saying that she no longer has any parental authority over him. So if he does it he will do it out of the need to honour the parent, not out of the need to obey the parent.

The phrase, "*what to me and to you?*" is Semitic in origin. The equivalent Hebrew expression in the Old Testament had two basic meanings: (1) When one person was unjustly bothering another, the injured party could say "What to me and to you?" meaning, "What have I done to you that you should do this to me?" (Judges 11:12, 2 Chronicles 35:21, 1 Kgs 17:18). (2) When someone was asked to get involved in a matter he felt was no business of his, he could say to the one asking him, "What to me and to you?" meaning, "That is your business, how am I involved?" (2 Kings 3:13, Hosea 14:8).

My hour has not yet come

When you see this statement (*My hour has not yet come*) it is usually made in reference to his coming death.

But here the point is that this is not the time or the place for Him to begin His public miracles. The place for him to begin His public miracles would be in Jerusalem, not little Cana. And the time, as we will soon see, will be the Passover.

Water pots

Jewish people cannot eat anything until they first wash their hands, and because this is a 7-day festival there will be frequent washing of hands, and so there are great water pots of stone used for their washing rituals before eating.

These water pots are filled with water, and by the miracle he performs it is turned into wine.

Furthermore, the wine in these pots is far better than the wine first served. And so the one who served the food was commended (although he probably didn't know why) for serving the better wine last rather than first which was the normal pattern.

Results

What were the results of this miracle?

The answer is found in verse 11.

1. First of all, John points out *He manifested His glory*.

How did it manifest His glory?

Because it shows his power to create.

He bypassed all the processes of growing the grapes and pressing the grapes and giving them time to ferment.

2. And secondly, *His disciples believed in Him*.

They had already accepted him to be the Messiah, but now that faith in His Messiahship is confirmed.

Now verse 11 says:

This is the beginning of his signs.

This is the first miracle He performs: turning water into wine.

In Psalm 104:15 the drinking of wine is a symbol of joy:

Psalm 104:14–15

¹⁴ *He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth,* ¹⁵ *And wine which makes man's heart glad, So that he may make his face glisten with oil, And food which sustains man's heart.*

3. The Sojourn in Capernaum, § 30, John 2:12

This is strictly a family journey, though it will later become his ministry headquarters.

4. The Possession of the Temple – the First Passover, § 31, John 2:13-22

Read John 2:13 – 22.

Passover

Verse 13 mentions the Passover.

This is the first of four Passovers mentioned during his public ministry. And four Passovers make up three years.

He was baptised somewhere between 4 and six months previously, and that is why we consider his ministry to last about three and a half years.

But his public ministry lasts exactly three years from this Passover until the last Passover.

Ideal time

Passover in Jerusalem was the ideal time and place to begin His public ministry.

Jews from all over the world were gathered in Jerusalem. And according to Josephus there could be up to two and a half million of them.

And afterwards the news of his ministry would be carried with them all over the world.

He sees two things

When He comes to the Passover, what does He find in the temple?

He sees two things: those who are selling sacrifices, and those who are changing money.

Annas

This was all the business of one man, Annas. Annas was a Sadducee and he turned the temple compound into a private family business. He made his sons the treasurers, and his sons-in-law assistant treasurers.

And Josephus, a first century historian, defines him as being a hoarder of money, very rich, and despoiling the other people by violence. Any common priest that would object to the actions that he performs would be beaten up.

Selling Sacrifices.

According to the Mosaic Law they had the perfect right to bring their own sacrifice into the temple compound.

However, it had to be without spot or blemish, and therefore it had to be inspected by the priesthood before it could be sacrificed.

If you chose to bring your own sacrifice the priests, who were working on behalf of Annas, would simply find something wrong with your sacrifice.

You had two options. You could go back home and get another one, and if you lived near Jerusalem that would be possible. But if you lived up in Galilee, which was a three-day journey, a six-day round trip, that would not be practical.

So in one part of the temple compound they had these stalls erected with sacrificial animals already stamped with the Sadducees stamp of approval.

You could purchase your sacrifice from them and they were sold at highly inflated prices. And the money went into the pockets of Annas and his family.

Money changers

The second thing is the money changers, because the Passover time is the time when everybody had to pay their half shekel temple tax.

Now because the Romans were ruling the country they were using Roman coins as legal coins. But Jews could not use that money to give to the temple treasury because they had images of the Caesars.

And so they had to change the money into temple currency. And there was always a service charge that was charged in the exchange, and this also went to Annas and his family.

And the Pharisees did not like this either and in the Pharisaic writings it is called the Bazar of the sons of Annas.

Jesus

How did Jesus respond to what He found?

Jesus, using his authority, begins to drive the sellers of sacrifices out and overturning the money changers' tables.

He even pulled out a whip and began scourging them out of the temple compound.

They have turned the house of God into a house of merchandise.

In verse 17, the disciples applied to this the statement of Psalm 69:9:

For zeal for Your house has consumed me.

More literally this is "My zeal for your house will be the cause of my destruction".

Sadducees

The Sadducees then come to him and ask by what authority does he do these things.

He gives a cryptic answer in verse 19:

Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

He is talking about his body, but at this point they do not yet understand what he is saying.

They pointed out that the temple was already 46 years in the building. In fact, it won't be completed until about six years before it was destroyed in AD 70. So could he rebuild all this in three days?

By the way, in the year 67 AD the Pharisees got upset at what these people were doing and they raided the temple compound, overthrew the money changers' tables, drove out the sacrifices, and they cleansed it. Three years later the whole temple compound was destroyed in the year AD 70.

5. Acceptance in Judea, § 32, John 2:23-3:21

Now we're going to listen in to a conversation that took place between Jesus and a ruler of Israel.

This conversation takes place right at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

At the age of about 32 or 33 years, Jesus was baptised by John in the Jordan river. At that time, God the Father identified Him as *My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased*.

Then, when it was nearly time for the Passover, we find Jesus in the temple casting out the money changers and those who sell oxen and sheep and doves.

Passover in Jerusalem was the ideal time and place to begin His public ministry.

Jews from all over the world were gathered in Jerusalem. And according to Josephus there could be up to two and a half million of them.

And afterwards, when the Passover was over and the people returned home, the news of His ministry would be carried with them all over the world.

a. Faith in His Signs

Read John 2:23 – 25.

²³Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. ²⁴But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, ²⁵and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

John doesn't give any details of these particular miracles.

At the end of his gospel he writes,

John 20:30–31 (NKJV)

30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;

31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

At this particular Passover Jesus begins His public ministry by doing two things.

1. He begins to publicly claim to be the Messiah.
2. And He begins to perform miracles in public.

During the first half of His public ministry, from section 32 to section 61, the purpose of His miracles is: to serve as signs for Israel, to get Israel to make a decision concerning His messianic claims.

Based on what He says and what He does, Israel will be able to decide whether or not He is the Messiah, the One Who will come and establish His Kingdom here on earth as foretold by the prophets.

(In sections 61- 64, as we will see later, He will change the purpose of His miracles.)

In order to enable Israel to make this decision, the miracles He performed from the beginning of His public ministry until the time that their decision was made were intended to authenticate two things:

1. *His person:*

His miracles authenticated His person.

They demonstrated that He is the Messiah the prophets spoke about.

2. *His message:*

And His miracles authenticated His message.

He is offering to Israel the kingdom spoken of by the Jewish prophets.

If they will accept Him as the messianic king, then they will see the kingdom established in their day.

But no such kingdom could be established until they first own Him to be their messianic king.

b. *The Explanation to Nicodemus*

John records seven discourses. This is the first of them, the discourse on the new birth.

A Pharisee

Read John 3:1.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

The Jewish reader in the first century would learn a lot about Nicodemus from this simple statement. And both of these descriptions of Nicodemus are essential to our understanding of his conversation with Jesus.

Calling him a Pharisee right away tells us about his beliefs.

Even today, we use such one-word titles to describe where people happen to be theologically, or which theological camp they belong to.

Today's example

For example:

If you call someone a Baptist, what does that mean?

One of the fundamentals of the Baptists is that immersion is the only proper mode of baptism.

And only those old enough to believe, and who have believed, qualify for baptism.

If you call someone else a Presbyterian, you are saying something different.

Here is someone who believes that infants are allowed to be baptised.

And also, as to the mode of baptism, he believes that only 'a little dab will do you', a few drops of water is sufficient water for baptism.

There are certain fundamentals that make one a Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopalian, and so on.

Fundamentals of Pharisees

The same principle applies to the term Pharisee.

There are certain fundamentals that will make you a Pharisee, and distinguish you from a Sadducee, an Essene, a Zealot, or from some other branch of Judaism of that day.

And in a moment we will look at some of the fundamental beliefs of a Pharisee which help us to understand what is being said in this conversation.

A ruler of the Jews

The second thing John points out about Nicodemus is that he was a ruler of the Jews. In other words, he was a member of the Sanhedrin.

This is also important to note, as we will soon see.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus

Now read verse 2.

²*this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."*

Notice the reason Nicodemus comes to Jesus. He has seen the signs that Jesus is doing and he has concluded that He has *come from God as a teacher*, and that *God is with Him*.

In fact, he uses the first person plural, "*we know that You have come from God as a teacher.*"

Therefore, he is not alone in this conclusion about who Jesus is.

And the signs Jesus is doing to authenticate His person and His message have been effective.

Unless one is born again ...

Now listen to how Jesus responds to him.

Read verse 3.

³*Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

How does Jesus respond to Nicodemus' conclusion that He has *come from God as a teacher*, and that *God is with Him*?

He begins to teach Nicodemus, and He does so with authority.

Truly, truly

The word *truly* here is the Greek word *amen*, which is actually a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning to be firm, steady, or trustworthy.

And Jesus is the only one in the New Testament to use the word at the beginning of a sentence. And it could be rendered, “I who am the Amen [Truth itself] tell you as a most certain and infallible truth.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Unless one is born again

And then Jesus says to him, unless one is born again, or anew, or born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Now the question is: why does Jesus begin the conversation with this statement?

And the answer lies in one of the fundamental teachings of the Pharisees in that day.

All Israel has a share in the age to come

They taught, and I quote:

“All Israel has a share in the age to come.”

What they meant by that statement is this: Merely being born a Jew would give someone automatic rights to enter God’s Kingdom.

That is not true for the Gentiles. If a Gentile wished to qualify for God’s kingdom he would have to do one of two things.

1. One option is to obey the 7 laws of the Noahic Covenant found in Genesis chapter 9.
2. A second option is to convert to Judaism and therefore take on the responsibility to keep the Mosaic Law.

A Gentile could qualify one way or the other, but a Jew qualified by merely being born as a Jew.

That was the reason for the pharisaic response to both John the Baptist and Jesus: when either of them pointed out the Pharisees were sinners, they responded that they were children of Abraham (Mt. 3:9; Lk. 3:8; Jn. 8:39). This answer reflects their belief that their genealogy was sufficient to inherit the kingdom of God.

And there is a saying in the Pharisaic writings that went like this:

“Abraham sits at the gates of Gehenna to snatch an Israelite consigned thereto.”

If, by some heavenly beaurocratic mistake, a Jew was assigned to go to hell, not to worry. Abraham sits at the gates of Hell and will catch him before he has a chance to fall in, because all Israel has a share in the age to come.

So to repeat, for the Pharisee, merely being born a Jew would confer automatic rights to God’s kingdom.

And the opening statement that Jesus makes is a direct contradiction of that teaching.

Jesus simply says to him that until he experiences the new birth he will not even see the God's kingdom.

How?

Now Nicodemus responds with a question. Read verse 4:

"How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

And his response is often misunderstood.

It is popular among evangelistic speakers to interpret His response to mean that he had never heard the term *born again* before, and that he had no idea what Jesus meant.

But if you look carefully at his question, you will see that that is not really his dilemma.

He is not asking how one is born again.

His question is: how is one born again when he is old?

If his problem was the meaning of new birth, what difference will age make?

In fact, he does know something about the term, because it was a term that was commonly used in Pharisaic writings.

What he does not understand is how one can achieve it once he has reached a certain stage in life, and once he has reached a certain status in Jewish society.

Six ways to be born again

In Pharisaic Judaism there were six different ways of being born again.

All six of these ways are in the realm of the physical.

Of these six ways he did not qualify for two. He did qualify for four.

1. *Gentile conversion*

The first way to be born again is when a Gentile was converted to Judaism.

Conversion to Judaism is a process. And in the process you would be declared born again.

Nicodemus was born a Jew and did not need to undergo that process, and so did not qualify for this kind of new birth.

2. *Crowned king*

The second way to be born again is to be crowned king. And a man being crowned king would undergo a rather lengthy coronation service, at the end of which he would be declared born again.

John nowhere implies that Nicodemus was a member of the house of David apart from Jeconiah, a requirement for Jewish kingship.

Even if he happened to be that, at this point of Jewish history the Jews were under Roman domination and there would be no opportunity to be crowned king anyway.

So, in the second way he did not qualify either.

But there were four other ways he did qualify to be called born again and which he did achieve.

3. *Bar Mitzvah*

The third way is going through a special type of ceremony at the age of thirteen. It is now referred to as the Bar Mitzvah. That was not the term used in the first century, but it subsequently became the term used.

And the term Bar Mitzvah means “a son of the commandment”. It refers to a ceremony that happens when the lad is thirteen years old.

At that age he takes upon himself the obligations of the Mosaic Law.

The common teaching was that until that point his parents were responsible for his sins. Afterwards he is responsible for his own sins.

And by Jewish law he is legally an adult. By Jewish law you cannot have a service of any kind unless you have ten adult males present. And once you have had your Bar Mitzvah you could be counted among the ten adult males necessary for a Jewish service to be conducted.

Now at this point Nicodemus is well past the age of thirteen. He was born again for the first time at that age.

4. *Jewish wedding*

Now the fourth way to be born again is to marry. Jewish men underwent a Jewish wedding underneath a canopy and in various rituals he would be declared born again.

And nowhere in the passage does John come out and say that he was married, and yet we know that he was married by going back to verse 1 where John calls him two things.

John first of all calls him a Pharisee, but that tells us nothing about his marital state. You could be either married or single and be a Pharisee.

But the second thing he calls him is a ruler of the Jews.

This was the title given to the 71 members of the Sanhedrin, and among the prerequisites for membership in the Sanhedrin was to be a married man. Single men of any age or scholarship would never qualify.

So the fact that John calls him a ruler of the Jews means that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, which also means that he was a married man.

And so he qualified to be born again the second way.

And Jewish men married in those days between the ages of 16 and 20.

5. *Rabbi*

The fifth way to be born again is to be ordained a rabbi.

After years of training you would be officially ordained into the rabbinate.

Being a Pharisee Nicodemus was an ordained rabbi.

Rabbis were ordained at the age of thirty.

At that age he was born again for the third time.

6. *Rosh Yeshivah*

The sixth way was to become a Rosh Yeshivah, a title given to those who were the head of a Rabbinic Academy, a Rabbinic Seminary, where they were responsible to train and ordain future rabbis.

And we know that he attained that level in Jewish society because of the way Jesus addresses him in verse 10 where he says:

Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?

(The KJV changes the “*the*” to “*a*” and totally misses the point that is being made here.)

Those who were common rabbis had the title of Rav, which means “a teacher”. But those who were the head of an Academy were given the title of Rabban, which means “the teacher”.

So Gamaliel is always referred to as Rabban Gamaliel because he was the head of a rabbinic academy, and one of his students happened to be the apostle Paul.

The fact that Jesus calls him “the teacher” of Israel, not “a teacher” means that he was the head of a rabbinic academy around Jerusalem, and that he had attained the age of fifty.

At that point he was born again for the fourth and also the last time.

Once he underwent these four ways available to him in Pharisaism there was no other way to be born again.

And that’s why he asked the question the way he did: *How is one born again when he is old?*

What he is saying is, “hey, I’ve used up all my options.” As far as he can see there is no other way to be born again except the way he suggested back in verse 4: to go back into his mother’s womb, be born physically once more, and simply begin the process all over again, and be born again at the ages of 13,20,30, and 50.

Jewish teaching method

Now what Jesus is doing with Nicodemus is a very common method of Jewish teaching where you go from the known to the unknown.

The known fact is the expression “born again”, or “born anew”, or “born from above”.

But the unknown element is the spiritual ramifications of the term, because in Pharisaism it was given a strictly physical connotation, but not a spiritual one.

Unless one is born of water and the Spirit ...

So, having set the stage in this way, Jesus replies in verse 5:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Born of water

Now, being “*born of water*” is a specific expression found in Pharisaic writings. And it refers to physical birth.

To be born of water meant to be born physically.

Qualification for the kingdom

And, according to the Pharisees, to be born physically as a Jew gave you the right to enter the Messiah’s kingdom.

By saying you have to be born of both water and the Spirit, Jesus rejects the Pharisaic fundamental: “all Israel automatically has a share in the age to come”.

Merely being born physically, even as a Jew, does not qualify anyone for the kingdom.

One has to be born both physically and spiritually, both born of water and the Spirit to qualify.

Until Nicodemus has this kind of new birth he does not qualify.

Flesh vs spirit

Then He points out the difference between the two types of birth in verse 6.

⁶*“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

To be born of water is to be born of the flesh. And what is born of flesh is flesh. Flesh gives rise to flesh.

And flesh alone will not qualify you for the kingdom.

But what is born of the Spirit is spirit. To be born of the Spirit means that the Holy Spirit will rejuvenate the dead human spirit. We then become alive to God.

That is the kind of new birth that is essential for God’s kingdom.

Now until Nicodemus has this kind of new birth he will not see, he will not enter into, God’s kingdom.

Wind

Read verses 7 – 8.

⁷“Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

No doubt Nicodemus is amazed by what Jesus is explaining to him.

Why does He compare being born of the Spirit with the wind?

Though you cannot see it, the wind is recognised by its sound and its effects.

So it is with those who are born of the Spirit. They are recognised by the outworking of their newborn spirit.

How can these things be?

The next question to come up in the mind of Nicodemus is (verse 9):

How can these things be?

In other words, “how is one born again spiritually?”

Rebuke

Read how Jesus responds in verses 10 – 13.

¹⁰Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? ¹¹“Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. ¹²“If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³“No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.

Here Jesus begin with a mild rebuke.

Nicodemus is the teacher of the teachers of Israel and yet he does not understand these things!

Jesus is speaking of earthly things. How will he believe if Jesus were to tell him of heavenly things?

Answer

Then Jesus begins to respond to his question.

Read verses 14 – 15.

¹⁴“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; ¹⁵so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

Now Nicodemus would be familiar with the story Jesus refers to here. It is found in Numbers 21: 4 – 9.

Numbers 21:4 – 9 (NASB95)

4 Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey.

5 The people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food."

6 The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

7 So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and you; intercede with the Lord, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people.

8 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live."

9 And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

Those who believed the Lord would look to the bronze serpent and live.

Two steps

Here Jesus points out to Nicodemus that there are two separate steps. He says:

*Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;
so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.*

God does the first step. Man does the second.

1. The first step is the one that God does:

He sent his son to provide the final atonement.

When He died on the cross He did provide salvation for the whole world.

But by itself that will save no one.

2. Then comes the second step:

The individual must believe and receive what God has provided by means of His Son.

The same two steps are repeated in verse 16.

God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.

The first step is a finished step. God has done all that He needs to do to provide salvation for all. But again, by itself that will not save anyone.

Then comes the second step. The individual must receive what God has provided:

whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Now, until Nicodemus accepts Jesus to be the messianic king, he will not see, he will not enter into God's kingdom.

Nicodemus

For Nicodemus this was such a new interpretation of the new birth he could not accept it right away.

Struggle

And those involved in Jewish ministries learn a lesson early. It is very rare for a Jew to accept the gospel when he first hears it.

A Jewish person undergoes a struggle: a spiritual struggle, a theological struggle, a mental struggle, a family struggle, and an ethnic struggle.

He must reprogram his whole way of thinking before he can begin to see the possibility that Jesus could be the Jewish Messiah.

Any Jewish believer you meet has undergone a struggle for a short or a long period of time.

Nicodemus

For Nicodemus the struggle begins here and will continue for three years.

He will appear two more times in John's gospel. The second time will be in John 7, not yet a believer, but as we will see, willing to defend the right of Jesus to be heard before being condemned. And thirdly, at the time of the burial of Jesus, he comes out openly as a believer (John 19:38-40).

Now because Nicodemus was prominent in Jewish society and could not be ignored in Jewish writings, he was not ignored. We learn some other things about Nicodemus outside of John's gospel, from rabbinic writings.

In those days rabbis did not make a living off the Rabbinate. Every rabbi had to have a profession with his hands or a side business by which he would earn his living, so he could teach the Scriptures free of charge.

That is why Paul, who was an ordained Rabbi, was a tentmaker by profession.

And according to these writings, Nicodemus was a well digger, a very wealthy well digger. According to the rabbis he was among the wealthiest men in all Jerusalem, and he was among three of the most righteous men of Jerusalem. But when he became a believer in Jesus he was reduced to poverty, died a pauper. And his daughter had to go around begging for bread to stay alive.

Rabbis record the story only for one reason: to warn other Jews against believing in Jesus. If you believe on him all these bad things could happen to you too. It may be true he died physically poor; we simply don't know the facts of the case. But we also know he died spiritually rich. He will have his place in God's kingdom.

First confrontation with Pharisees and Sanhedrin

Now, for the theme we are developing during this course, here in this conversation, we have the first confrontation between Jesus and a member of the Pharisaic party.

He is also a member of the Sanhedrin.

It becomes obvious early in the ministry of Jesus that he will reject certain fundamentals of Pharisaic Judaism, like the one: all Israel automatically has a share in the age to come.

Belief & Judgement

In verses 17 – 18, Jesus tells Nicodemus that the basis of judgement or condemnation by God is the issue of belief.

¹⁷“For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸“He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Light & Darkness

I mentioned that one of John’s subthemes is the conflict between light and darkness. The first time that was actually found is in section 2 in verses 3-9. Here you have a second example, in section 32 verses 19-21.

We will not be developing this theme, only pointing out references to it.

6. The Witness of John, § 33, John 3:22-36

Location

Now Read John 3:22 – 24.

Notice the location where John was baptising now.

The location of *Aenon near Salim* is not too far from where the Jordan river exits the Sea of Galilee.

From section 21 (Matthew 3:1, 5-6; Luke 3:3) we see that John's ministry is primarily at the southern end of the Jordan River where it runs into the Dead Sea: *the wilderness of Judea, and all the district around the Jordan*.

Why has John moved from there to the northern end of the Jordan river?

John gives us the reason in verse 23:

... because there was much water there.

Why would that be reason to move?

Again, Jews only practice immersion. If he were practicing sprinkling or pouring he wouldn't have to move.

Towards the end of the summer months, before the rainy season begins, the water gets rather shallow at the southern end of the Jordan. It is always possible to sprinkle and to pour, but not always possible to immerse.

So he goes up north near to Salim, which is not too far from where the river exits the Sea of Galilee, and there it is always deep enough to immerse.

This again shows how important immersion was in the Jewish context.

Jealousy

Read verses 25 – 28.

Why did John's disciples come to him with this comment?

They observed the discipleship movement of Jesus and became a bit jealous for John's sake.

How does John respond to them?

He says there is no need to be jealous.

In essence he says this is God's plan, I am not the Christ, but I am the forerunner of the Messiah.

Bridegroom

John continues to speak about his relationship to the Messiah.

Read verses 29 – 31.

Notice the three terms he uses in verse 29: the bride, the bridegroom, and the friend of the bridegroom.

Who do they represent?

As the New Testament teaches,

- i. the bridegroom is the Messiah,
- ii. the bride will be the church, and
- iii. the friends of the bridegroom are the Old Testament saints.

Old Testament saints are not part of the church. The church began only as of Acts chapter 2. But they are the friends of the bridegroom.

Joy

And John also says in verse 29 that his joy has been made full at the coming of the bridegroom. Like the friend of the bridegroom rejoicing at the arrival of the bridegroom, he is rejoicing at the coming of the one who comes from heaven and is above all, and for whom he has been preparing the way.

Messiah

John goes on to say more about this One who is the bridegroom who comes from heaven and is above all.

Read verses 32 – 35.

What does John say about the Messiah here?

- i. He testifies of what He has seen and heard.
- ii. He is sent by God.
- iii. He speaks the words of God.
- iv. God gives Him the Spirit without measure.
- v. The Father loves Him.
- vi. The Father has given all things into His hand.

He points out in verse 34: *He gives the Spirit without measure.*

The Messiah was given the Spirit without measure. This is a fulfilment of Isaiah 11:2.

All believers receive the Spirit in measure, and therefore we have different callings, different gifts, and things of that nature. And God gives us all that we need to fulfil his calling in our lives.

In the case of Jesus, He has no limitations; He has the seven-fold fullness of the Spirit found in Isaiah 11:1-2. See also Matthew 12:18; Luke 4:14; Acts 10:38.

Isaiah 11:1–2 (NASB95)

¹ Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Responses

In verse 36 John describes two responses that people can make to the Messiah.

Read verse 36.

What are the two responses and their consequences?

- i. Believe in the Son, leading to eternal life.
- ii. Disobedience to the Son, leading to wrath.

Notice the contrast between believing and not obeying.

There is an obvious connection between belief in the Son and obedience to Him.

7. The Imprisonment of John, § 34, Mark 1:14; Matthew 4:12, Luke 3:19-20; John 4:1-4

Read the accounts of Mark, Luke and John.

Jesus now leaves Judea to go back to Galilee.

Why did He go back to Galilee?

Notice there are three reasons recorded here:

1. In Matthew's account we read that it was *when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody that He withdrew into Galilee.*

Luke adds that John was arrested because of his statements about the false marriage of Herod to Herodias. That problem we will explain later in a different section, but she married him when her first husband, Philip, was still alive. And Philip and Herod were brothers.

2. In John's account we read: *When the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ... He left Judea and went away again into Galilee.*

But, as John points out, he himself was not doing the work of baptism; that was given to his disciples to perform.

3. Thirdly, John adds in verse 4: *He had to pass through Samaria.*

Now, why did Jesus have to pass through Samaria?

Certainly Samaria was between Judea and Galilee. But He could have gone around it, along the Jordan valley, as Jews often did.

Notice Luke 14:4. *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.*

So it was the divine plan that He go through Samaria at that time, and the reason for that comes out in the next section where Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at the well near Sychar.

Now John is imprisoned, and once again, what happened to the herald will happen to the king.

8. The Acceptance in Samaria, § 35, John 4:5-42

Samaritans

Who were the Samaritans?

The Samaritans were a mixed breed in two ways.

1. *Ethnically*

First of all, ethnically: These were the people the Assyrians brought into the land that was the northern kingdom of Israel, and they intermarried with the Jewish population left in the land.

2. *Religiously*

Secondly, it was also a mixed religion because they brought their own worship styles with them and they simply adopted the God of Israel to be one of their gods, but not the only one.

And, although by the time of the New Testament they were already monotheistic, they still had certain practices that were uncomfortable for the Jews.

When they wanted to participate in the rebuilding of the temple the Jews would not let them do that, and so they built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. You can still see the foundations of that temple on the top of that Mount today.

Therefore, Mount Gerizim became their holy site. Mount Gerizim overlooks the Biblical town of Shechem.

Anti-Jewish

They are very anti-Jewish.

In fact, in reaction to the Jew's refusal to let them participate in the rebuilding of the temple, they went through the Mosaic Law and changed every possible reference to Jerusalem and made it Mount Gerizim. So, if you pick up the Samaritan Pentateuch it doesn't say Abraham brought Isaac to Mount Moriah, but to Mount Gerizim.

Travel through Samaria

Samaritans generally would not allow Jews to travel through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem.

So when Jews wished to travel through Samaria to get to Jerusalem they are often forbidden to travel, or were attacked and often killed.

The Samaritans did not mind seeing Jews travelling away from Jerusalem, that was alright.

Jesus now travels from Jerusalem and that is fine. Later on we will see when He tries to travel again through Samaria in the opposite direction they will not let him pass.

Jewish attitude

A common Jewish saying was: may my eyes never see a Samaritan. And the Jews were just as much anti-Samaritan as the Samaritans were anti-Jewish.

The Samaritan woman

Now, on His journey north through Samaria, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman.

Read verses 5 – 9.

Why is she surprised that He, being a Jew, would even talk to her, being a Samaritan woman?

The rabbis effectively excommunicated the Samaritans and decreed that there was to be only limited contact between Jews and Samaritans. A Jew was not permitted to accept anything free of a Samaritan.

So by not offering to pay the Samaritan woman when He asked her to bring Him water, Jesus contradicted Jewish custom.

And this gave rise to her question.

Jesus' revelation to the Samaritan woman

And there are 5 stages to this conversation.

1. *A new kind of life*

Now read how Jesus answers her in verses 10 – 14.

What did "living water" mean to the woman?

Living water was water that is actively running. This would enable it to be channelled to a more convenient location.

But as we shall soon see, Jesus was using something familiar to her to teach her something new.

The woman's response shows that she is puzzled by this and that her curiosity has been aroused.

Now Jesus begins to move from the physical realm to the spiritual realm by contrasting the water she understands with the water that He would give her.

¹³Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

Unlike the water in front of them, the water He gives will permanently quench thirst, not physical thirst, but spiritual thirst, and result in eternal life.

This is the first stage of the conversation, where Jesus reveals to her a new kind of life.

2. *The woman's life*

But she still does not understand.

Read verses 15.

Her answer reveals that she is still thinking of physical water.

Now read verses 16 – 19.

What is Jesus doing here?

He is pointing out why she needs this new kind of life.

She has apparently been married and divorced 5 times, and now lives with a man to whom she is not married.

And by revealing her sin He has proven to her that He is greater than Jacob.

Then she recognised that He is a prophet. This is significant because in Samaritan theology the next prophet that would come after Moses would be the Messiah. They reject all the Old Testament books except the five books of Moses, and even those were rewritten to replace all references to Jerusalem.

So when she said, *I perceive that you are a prophet*, it meant that she already suspected that He might be the Messiah.

3. *True worship*

The woman then does something that is quite common when we are telling people the gospel.

Read verses 20 – 23.

²⁰*“Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”* ²¹*Jesus *said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.* ²²*“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.* ²³*“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.*

What does she do?

She tries to change the topic to a theological issue: where is the proper place to worship. This is typical of unbelievers when they are confronted with their sin. They become uncomfortable and try to change the topic.

So she points out that the Jews say that Jerusalem is the place to worship, but the Samaritans say that Mount Gerizim is the proper place to worship.

How does Jesus answer her question?

Notice verse 22:

“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

The Jewish people received the message of salvation. They recorded the record of salvation. And therefore they knew where the proper place of worship is. The proper place of worship was wherever the tabernacle or temple stood. So Jerusalem is the proper place to worship, because the Mosaic Law was still in force at this stage.

But He also points out that a time is coming when it will be neither here nor there, but everybody who believes can worship God in spirit and in truth wherever they are.

4. *Who the Father is*

In verse 24 he reveals who the Father is.

²⁴*“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

5. *Who Messiah is*

Read verses 25 – 26.

Now Jesus confirms what she is suspecting and reveals himself to be the Messiah.

Her growing faith

At the end of the encounter the woman believes, and it is interesting to notice the growing of her faith.

1. She first of all calls him a Jew in verse 9, and that is not a compliment coming from her, a Samaritan.
2. She then becomes more respectful and calls him “sir”, as in verse 11 & verse 15.
3. She then calls him a prophet. This is significant because in Samaritan theology the only prophet that would come would be the Messiah.
4. Fourthly, she recognises him to be that Messiah.

Teaching on evangelism

Read verses 27 – 30.

At that point, in verse 27, the disciples returned and they are kind of disturbed that He would be talking to a Samaritan woman.

And while she runs into town to tell people, He has a discussion with His disciples.

Food

Read verses 31 – 34.

What is the point of Jesus' remarks here?

They have brought physical food to Him, and He is speaking, not about physical food, but about spiritual food. He is leading them from the physical realm to the spiritual realm.

While they were away buying physical food, He had been doing the work of the Father as He led the Samaritan woman to believe in Him as the Messiah. And this work was His spiritual food.

The principle of evangelism

Then He teaches them about evangelism.

Read verses 35 – 38.

He begins by pointing out that while the physical field still has four months before it will be ready for harvest, the spiritual harvest is ready even that very same day.

What is the principle of evangelism that He tells them in verses 36 – 37?

Some sow, and others reaps. And sometimes we sow the seed, and someone else does the reaping. Sometimes someone else does the sowing and we do the reaping.

Application

In verse 38 He applies this principle to His disciples.

He points out to them that while they are reaping someone else has sown before them.

Who would that be?

John the Baptist has sown the seed and they are reaping the harvest.

And both those who sow and those who reap will receive wages. They will receive their rewards.

Belief in Samaria

And after Jesus had taught this principle to His disciples and applied it to their own reaping, they had an opportunity to see it in action in Samaria.

Read verses 39 – 42.

Who is doing the sowing and who is doing the reaping here?

There are two cases here.

In verse 39 we see the Samaritan woman was sowing the seed by telling her story. At the same time, she was reaping the harvest of those who believed because of her testimony.

In verses 41 – 42, others went out to see for themselves, and Jesus did the reaping of what she had sown.

It is a very successful tour of Samaria at this stage.

9. The Acceptance in Galilee, § 36, John 4:43-45

Read John 4:43 – 45.

Which Galileans received Him?

The Galileans who accept Him are those who had been to Jerusalem for the Passover and saw his miracles. So they are some of the fruit of His first public ministry in Judah.

B. The Authority of the King, § 37 – 56

In sections 37 – 56 we find the Messiah demonstrating His authority to do various things.

1. Messiah's Authority to Preach, § 37, Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15

And section 37 records His first preaching tour and therefore demonstrates His authority to preach.

As we read the sections that follow, we will see that when He preaches He behaves like a rabbi, like a teacher, and like a prophet. So He performs three roles: rabbi, teacher, and prophet.

Read Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:14 – 15.

Gospel

When we read the word *gospel* we usually think of the gospel which Paul preached and which he defined in terms of His death, burial, and resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:1 – 4.

Now, since Jesus had not yet died, this could not be the gospel that He was proclaiming!

In fact, He has not yet even begun to teach His disciples about His death and resurrection. And when He does they do not understand and they are taken by surprise when He dies.

Message

What, then, is the content of gospel that He is proclaiming?

Mark gives us a good description of the content of the gospel He is proclaiming.

Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

In other words, Jesus is proclaiming that the time has come in God's program for the kingdom of God to be at hand.

Note "*is at hand*" is *eggizo* (eng-id-zo) which means come near, draw near, or approach. He is not saying the kingdom has arrived. He is saying that it is near.

The Hebrew prophets wrote about the kingdom of the Messiah. And this was the kingdom which all Jews were looking forward to.

The gospel He proclaimed was that He is the Messianic King, therefore the Messianic Kingdom is at hand. And, if they would believe in Him then He would establish the Messianic Kingdom.

And the response He told them to make was to *repent and believe in the gospel*.

So there were two aspects to His message:

a. *soteriological*

First of all, His message is soteriological, meaning that it focused on salvation. They needed to *repent and believe in the gospel*.

And the gospel they are proclaiming is that Jesus is the messianic King.

b. *eschatological*

The second aspect of his message is eschatological. He is presenting the kingdom program. *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*.

His ministry

Read Luke 4:14 – 15.

Luke tells us three things about the nature of his ministry.

1. In Luke verse 14, it was Spirit controlled. He went *in the power of the Spirit*.
2. His reputation begins to spread. *News about Him spread through all the surrounding district*.
3. The main place of his proclamation is synagogues. He went from synagogue to synagogue proclaiming his messianic claims.

And what was the response to His ministry?

He was praised by all.

2. Messiah's Authority to Heal, § 38, John 4:46-54

Read verses 46 – 47.

This is the second recorded visit of Jesus to Cana, the first being when He changed the water into wine.

The royal official

By calling the man a *royal official*, John tells us that he was a government official of Herod Antipas.

Now Cana is about 32 kilometres (20 miles) from Capernaum. And while Capernaum is on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and about 183 metres (600 feet) below sea level, Cana is in the hills of lower Galilee about 457 metres (1,500 feet) above sea level. So the man not only walked 32 kilometres, he also climbed 640 metres (2,100 feet).

So this journey shows that the man had faith that Jesus would heal his son.

Jesus' challenge

Now read the rest of this section, verses 48 – 54.

Why did Jesus respond to the man by saying, *"Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe."*?

First of all, notice that Jesus uses the plural second person pronoun. So His statement describes, not this man as an individual, but the group to which he belongs. That may be the man and his travelling companions, or it may refer to Israel as a nation.

In either case, this statement challenges the royal official's motive for coming to Jesus. Did he come in faith, believing in Him? Or, was he looking for a sign to convince him?

The man's answer

The man's response indicated that he already believed that Jesus was the Messiah He claimed to be, and consequently he believed He could heal his son.

Jesus answered: *Go; your son lives* (Jn. 4:50a). John added, *The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he started off* (Jn. 4:50b). The man had true faith, evidenced by the fact that he trusted in Jesus's promise.

The man's faith

When the man's slaves met him on the road, notice how they answered the question about when the boy was healed.

"Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."

The *seventh hour* would be 7 pm if John is using Roman time, and, if he was using Jewish time, it would be 1 pm.

But the key word is *"yesterday."*

It shows that the man stayed overnight in Cana. He did not rush home to see if what Jesus said was true.

Result

And what was the result of this miracle?

he himself believed and his whole household.

Second miracle in Cana

How many signs had Jesus performed at that time?

We don't know the number. He performed signs at the first Passover which are not detailed in the gospels.

But John tells us here that this was the second sign Jesus did in Cana.

3. The Rejection in Nazareth, § 39, Luke 4:16-30

Nazareth

This section records His rejection in Nazareth.

And Nazareth will turn out to be a microcosm of the nation as a whole. What happens in Nazareth will happen later in the nation as a whole!

In section 39 you have the initial rejection in Nazareth. Later in section 69 there will be the final rejection in Nazareth.

What happens locally in Nazareth will also happen nationally.

Jewish motifs

Read Luke 4:16 – 31.

Notice that Luke is the only one who records this first rejection.

Notice also that Luke is very careful to describe the Jewish practices.

In the Jewish practice, the one reads the scroll always stands, and the rabbis always taught from a sitting position.

In the gospels, we often read that Jesus sat down while He was teaching.

Here in this section, we notice in verse 16 that Jesus stood up to read, and, in verse 20, He sat down to teach.

Reading portions

The rabbis had specific rules on how many verses to read each Sabbath.

At a normal Sabbath service, seven men were selected to read the Torah portion. The seventh reader would read a shorter part, but he must read at least three verses and then read from the Prophets.

The rule was that this last reader, when reading from the Prophets, must not read less than twenty-one verses, unless an interpreter was present or there was preaching on the Sabbath. In that case the reader was not required to read all twenty-one verses, and it was acceptable to read only three, five, or seven verses.

And so, as Luke records, the scroll of Isaiah is handed to Jesus to read from the Prophets.

And what he reads is Isaiah 61, but he reads only the first one and a half verses.

Then He sat down to expounding on the text.

This went contrary to Jewish tradition, because He had read only half of the required minimum number of verses.

This is one reason *the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him* (Lk. 4:20b).

Another reason their eyes would be fixed on Him was that He was about to expound upon what He had read and they would be curious to hear what He had to say.

Prophecy fulfilled

Why did he stop where he did?

Turn to Isaiah 61 and read the first three verses.

Isaiah 61:1–3 (NASB95)

¹ *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; ² To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, ³ To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.*

This is an example of the third type of messianic prophecy, a prophecy where aspects of the first and second comings are blended into one picture, with no indication in the text itself that there is a gap of time between the two events, or that the prophecy actually refers to two comings.

Here, in Luke's account, we learn that this is the proper interpretation of this prophecy from Jesus Himself. He read verse 1 and the first clause of verse 2 and then stopped. Then He said, *Today has this scripture been fulfilled in your hearing.*

On that day, Isaiah 61:1-2a was fulfilled, but the rest of verse 2 and all of verse 3 will be fulfilled at His second coming.

The purpose of His first coming was to bring the good news. At His second coming He will *proclaim the day of vengeance of our God.*

Now, Isaiah 61 is recognized as a messianic prophecy even in rabbinic writings. Therefore, when Jesus said, *Today has this scripture been fulfilled in your hearing*, the people clearly understood Him to say that He was fulfilling this part of the prophecy, thereby proclaiming Himself to be the Messiah.

Response

How did the people respond?

They were speaking well of Him, but they were also wondering at His words and saying, *“Is this not Joseph’s son?”*

In other words, they are saying, “Isn’t He the son of Joseph? Didn’t He grow up here? Where does He get such words? He couldn’t be the Messiah!” No doubt they had heard about the miracles He was doing in Capernaum, but they hadn’t seen them.

So they reject Him because of a principle, as Jesus says in verse 24: *no prophet is welcome in his hometown*. And this is his home town.

Gentile examples

So he again brings in Gentile examples, then female examples, which are Luke’s special concerns.

He points out in verse 25 that back in the days of Elijah there were many Jewish widows that Elijah could have been sent to, but God did not send him to a Jewish widow. Rather, He sent him to a Gentile one up in Lebanon.

In the days of Elisha, He points out there were many Jewish lepers that Elisha could heal, but no Jewish leper was healed by him, only a Gentile leper, Naaman the Syrian.

What is the point Jesus is making with these examples?

The point is that that the Jewish people would reject Him, just as Elijah and Elisha were rejected: *No prophet is acceptable in his own country* (Lk. 4:24). They would not accept Him as their Messiah, however, the Gentiles would.

Result

How did they respond to that?

That made them so incensed that they took him outside the town, to the nearby cliff, with the intent to kill Him by throwing Him over the cliff.

The town of Nazareth is on a hill that comes to a cliff, which falls down into the Jezreel Valley.

But verse 30 simply says: *But passing through their midst, He went His way*.

Jesus was able to walk through their midst using his messianic power. They could not harm him.

4. The Headquarters in Capernaum, § 40, Matthew 4:13-16

Read Matthew 4:13 – 16.

Jesus now sets up his ministry in Capernaum.

And Matthew mentions the names of Zebulun and Naphtali that would receive most of the benefits of Messiah’s light.

Zebulun is where Nazareth is located. Naphtali is where Capernaum is located. So he grew up in the territory of Zebulun, and he ministered in the territory of Naphtali.

Capernaum was located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was strategically positioned on a busy highway called the Via Maris, a major trade route that ran from Egypt through the land of Israel to Mesopotamia. The route traversed the coast of Israel, hence the name Via Maris, a Latin term meaning "Way of the Sea." This name comes from the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible.

The fact that Jesus set up His headquarters along such an important trade route meant that news of what He was saying and doing would spread more quickly.

In verses 14-16, Matthew quoted Isaiah 9:1-2, a passage which predicted this choice of location:

Isaiah 9:1-2 (NASB95)

¹ *But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.* ² *The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.*

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, which is in the tribal territory of Zebulun.

And He had His headquarters in Capernaum, which is in the territory of Naphtali. Also in Naphtali were the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida. It was in these three cities that Jesus performed most of His miracles.

5. Messiah's Authority over Demons, § 41, Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37

Teaching with authority

Read Mark 1:21 – 22.

Why were the people *amazed at His teaching*?

They were impressed with the content of His teaching, and they marveled at the authority with which He taught.

Mark contrasts the authority with which Jesus taught and the authority with which the scribes taught.

The rabbis based what they taught on previous rabbinic authorisation. Rabbis received their authority from the academy they attended.

And when the scribes taught they would have to read 2 or 3 pages of rabbinic writings: Rabbi so and so said this ... and rabbi such and such said that ...

But notice Jesus quotes no rabbi, He quotes no Pharisee, He quotes no scribe. He teaches as one who has authority to interpret the text. He is the one who gave it and he has that authority.

The source of His authority

But, since Jesus never studied in a rabbinic academy, what was the source of His authority?

The people recognized that He was teaching something new and that He taught them as having authority in Himself. But they didn't understand where His authority came from.

Unlike the scribes, He did not require previous rabbinic authorization, because His teaching and authority came from the Father (Isa. 50:4-6) as we learned when we read about His visit to the temple at the age of 12.

The demon

While men were slow to recognise His authority, the demons were not.

Read Luke 4:33 – 35.

Why did Jesus tell the demon to be quiet?

Probably because demons don't make good witnesses, since they cannot be relied upon to tell the truth.

Response

Read the response of the people in Luke 4:36.

What is their response?

Amazement! Why?

The authority of His teaching amazed them. Now the authority with which He casts out demons amazed them even more.

They are so surprised because He does not cast out the demon in the normal Jewish manner. We will discuss the normal Jewish method in section 61.

The news about Him spread

Read Luke 4:36 – 37.

Because of what happened here the report about him spread throughout the region. And we will see the result of that report in section 42.

6. Messiah's Authority over Disease, § 42, Mark 1:29-34; Matthew 8:14-17; Luke 4:38-41

In this section we see the Messiah's authority over disease.

Read Mark 1:29 – 31.

It is common practice, even to this day, to have a special meal together after the synagogue service. And on this occasion He is a guest in the home of Peter, and Peter's mother-in-law happens to be ill.

Dr. Luke's observations

Luke was a medical doctor by profession, and he is always a bit more detailed about the diseases and healings he records.

What does Luke add to the description of the fever?

Mark simply says she was sick with a fever. Matthew says she was lying sick in bed with a fever. And Luke says she was suffering from a *high fever*. Furthermore, the Greek tense indicates it was chronic; she had been ill for some time.

Description of the healing

Jesus proceeds to heal her. Notice that the three accounts describe the healing differently.

And the way they are reported is based upon the theme of each author.

Mark says in verse 31, He took her by the hand and raised her up. That is the act of a servant. And Mark's theme was the Messiah's perfect servanthood – Jesus the Messiah, the servant of Jehovah.

Matthew says in verse 15, He touched her hand and the fever left her: the touch of a king is sufficient. Matthew's theme is kingship: Jesus the Messiah, the king of the Jews.

Luke says in verse 39, he stood over her and rebuked the fever: the act of an ideal man. His theme was: Jesus the Messiah, the Son of Man.

Result of the healing

In Luke verse 39 notice there is an immediate infusion of strength: *and she immediately got up and waited on them*. The others simply said she rose up, but Luke knows it was immediate, and she was able to serve the dinner to them.

Evening

Now read Mark 1:32 – 34.

All three gospel accounts make the point that what occurs here happened when evening came.

Surely these people were keen to be healed or set free from their demons after seeing what had happened at the synagogue that day.

Why did they wait until evening?

It was the teaching of the rabbis that no healing could occur on the Sabbath unless a life was endangered.

Therefore, they waited until sunset, when three stars could be seen in the sky, which marked the beginning of the new day.

Sickness and demon possession

Notice also that there is a difference between physical sickness and demon possession. There are two different groups: *all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed*.

Jesus cast out demons with a word

Read Matthew 8:16.

Notice how Jesus cast out the demons.

He cast out the spirits with a word.

Matthew is writing to the Jews, and this fact is very significant for them.

The point is that Jesus was not resorting to the rituals practiced in Judaism.

Prophecy

Now read Matthew 8:17.

Misunderstanding

This has led some to teach that physical healing is in the atonement, that Jesus's death on the cross provided physical and spiritual healing, and if a believer has enough faith, they can be physically healed, that all who are saved can claim healing today.

This teaching has caused undue agony, disappointment, and insecurity among many believers.

Healing not based on atonement

However, notice that the healings recorded here happened nearly three years before Jesus made atonement on the cross.

Therefore, the healing was not based on the atonement, and this passage cannot mean that all believers will automatically be healed because of the atonement.

Literal plus application

What did Isaiah mean?

In the context of Isaiah 53, the prophet was not describing physical healing. Rather he was describing the fact of spiritual healing from sin through atonement. In other words, he explained what the result of the Messiah's death would be.

Because of one point of similarity, Matthew applies the passage to the situation he has just described. The point of similarity is that healing took place. In Isaiah the healing was spiritual. In Matthew the healing was physical.

Therefore, this quotation falls into the category of *literal plus application*.

Moreover, it does not mean that the atonement guarantees physical healing in this life.

That will only come with the resurrection and the glorified body.

7. Messiah's Authority to Preach, § 43, Mark 1:35-39; Matthew 4:23-25; Luke 4:42-44

Now we come to His second major preaching tour.

Read Matthew 4:23-25.

Notice:

1. As to place: he taught them in the synagogues.
2. As to content: he proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom; the good news of the kingdom.

The gospel He was proclaiming was not that He died for their sins, was buried, and rose again, because those events had not yet taken place. As mentioned before, the content of the good news was not always the same, but must be determined by the context, and the gospel in this context was the good news *of the kingdom* and the fact that He was the Messianic King. If they would accept Him as the Messiah, they could see the kingdom established in their day.

3. As to authentication: he healed sicknesses and cast out demons.
4. The results:

In Matthew Verse 24, the news about him spread throughout all Syria. The term *Syria* refers to the larger Roman district of that name, which included the land of Israel.

And in verse 25: *Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.*

At the end of his second preaching tour, His reputation has spread throughout the land and even to areas outside the land. We shall see an example of it later.

8. Messiah's Authority over Nature, § 44, Mark 1:16-20; Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 5:1-11

We now have the recall of the disciples Peter, Andrew, and John the addition of the sixth disciple, James the brother of John.

Luke provides the historical background to the call.

Read Luke 5:1 – 11.

Here again notice his position of a Rabbi. Luke's account, at the end of verse 3: *He sat down and began teaching the people.* The Rabbis always taught in a sitting position. And many times we will see that when he taught he sat down.

After teaching them, he tells the disciples to

Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.

But Peter is the fisherman and he says:

Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing ...

Why does Peter respond that way?

The implication is that he says to Jesus: you are not the fisherman, you are the carpenter; I'm the fisherman, and my experience tells me that if you didn't catch them during the night hours

you won't catch them during the day hours because when the sun hits the water the fish go deeper into the lake. If you couldn't catch them at night you won't catch them in the day time.

Peter continues,

... but I will do as You say and let down the nets.

Why did he let down the nets in spite of his experience?

He recognised that the authority of the Messiah supersedes the authority of his experience. Therefore, he lets down the nets.

Then, to his surprise they catch a multitude of fish, and they filled their boats with so many fish their boats began sinking. When Peter recognised His authority over nature, Luke records in verse 8:

... he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

If we compare ourselves with other people, we can always come out looking good. There is always somebody out there worse than we are. But, the proper comparison is not between us and other people, but between us and the Lord. And when we see ourselves against the Lord we have to respond the same way Peter does. "We are sinners, O Lord."

However, at this time Jesus calls him into full time discipleship:

From now on you will be catching men.

And to the four men He says:

Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. (Matthew 4:19)

Therefore, now they are called to full time discipleship.

The result is that they leave their fishing business. Keep in mind that for them this is a total commitment. This is their source of income. Now they have to trust him to provide the income as they travel with Him and He disciples them.

9. Messiah's Authority over Defilement, § 45, Mark 1:40-45; Matthew 8:2-4; Luke 5:12-16

Now we come to the section on His Authority over Defilement.

This is the account of the healing of the Jewish leper. Although he has done quite a few miracles since He began His public ministry at the first Passover, with the healing of leprosy we have something that is really unique.

But before we read this section we need to look at some Jewish background information to help us see what is happening.

No Jew healed of leprosy

Now to understand why this is such a significant miracle, keep this in mind that, from the time the Mosaic Law was completed until Jesus healed this man, there was no record of any Jew ever being healed of leprosy.

Miriam was healed of leprosy, but that was before the completion of the Law. And, in the case of Naaman, he was Syrian and not Jewish. Jesus even said in Luke 4:27,

“And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”

Provisions of the Law

Moses described in detail what the priesthood would have to do in the event that a Jew was healed of leprosy. In fact, Moses devotes two lengthy chapters of his Law to the subject: Leviticus 13 & 14. In them he spends 116 verses dealing with two questions:

1. What the priests needed to do when confronted with someone who had leprosy; and
2. What they had to do when someone was healed of leprosy.

Leper

In the Mosaic Law, only the priest had the authority to declare someone a leper.

Once he declared someone a leper, on that day the declared leper would have to tear his clothing; from then on he must walk around in torn clothing. He was ostracised from Jewish society. He had to live in a special area of town reserved for lepers only. He had to keep his face covered from the nose down. And he was not allowed to enter the tabernacle or temple compound, and he could not receive the spiritual benefits of the tabernacle or temple services.

If he happened to be walking down the road and saw someone approaching he would have to warn the person, not with the words “leper, leper”, but with the words “unclean, unclean”.

He was morally unclean from the day he was declared a leper. From that day on no one could touch him. Anyone touching him would also himself become unclean.

Leper healed

Then Moses also specified the details of what to do if a Jew was healed of leprosy.

He had to go before the priesthood and say, “I was a leper and now I am healed of my leprosy”.

And on that day the priest would have to offer up two separate birds. One bird was killed by shedding of blood. The second bird was dipped in the blood of the first one and then set free.

Then came a seven-day period of investigation to answer three questions:

1. Was the man a declared leper?

Since only the priests had the authority to declare a man a leper, there would be a record of it there somewhere.

2. If the answer was yes, then the second question was: was he really healed of his leprosy?

Every day for seven days his whole body was carefully investigated. His whole body was shaved of all hairs, including his eyebrows to ensure that no part of his skin was missed.

3. Again if the answer was yes, the third question was: What were the circumstances of the healing?

If all three questions were answered satisfactorily, the eighth day was a day of ritual with four different types of offerings:

1. A Trespass Offering
2. A Sin Offering
3. A Burnt Offering
4. A Meal Offering.

During the ceremony they would take the blood of the Trespass Offering and apply it to three parts of the man's body: his right ear, right thumb, and right big toe.

They did the same thing with the Sin Offering.

The blood was applied to the three parts of the body. And then the ritual ended with the anointing of oil applied on the same three parts of the body.

Only then was the person allowed to return to live among the normal part of Jewish society. Only then could he visit the tabernacle or temple compound and receive the benefits of the spiritual services.

Divine judgement

While Moses gave them all these details of what to do if a Jew was healed of leprosy, they never had a single opportunity to put any of this into effect, because at that time there was no record of any Jew healed of leprosy since the time the Law was completed.

And while rabbinic writings have cures for many different diseases and we will be looking at one of those a bit later in our study, there was simply no rabbinic cure to heal a Jewish leper.

In the history of Israel three Jews were stricken with leprosy as a divine judgment:

1. Miriam, when she and Aaron spoke against Moses (Num. 12:9-15);
2. when king Uzziah tried to burn incense God struck him with leprosy (2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chronicles 26:16-21); and
3. when Gehazi, the servant of Elisha lied, God struck him with leprosy. (2 Kings 5:27)

Consequently, leprosy was viewed as a divine judgement, and therefore no Jewish leper would ever be healed until the Messiah comes.

Messianic miracles

Jesus is not the only one to perform miracles. Miracles are also recorded in the Old Testament. Elijah and Elisha both healed people and raised someone from the dead. No one responded to their miracles with the question, "could this be the Messiah?" Yet this was the response to some of the miracles of Jesus.

As we read through the gospels, we find certain key miracles that stand out because they were different from anything that had ever been performed in the Hebrew Scriptures. In addition, these miracles caused unique reactions among the people, causing them to consider whether this was the Messiah.

The miracles Jesus performed fall into two categories:

1. First, there were those miracles that anyone would be able to perform if he was empowered by God to do so.
2. The second category of miracles we will call Messianic Miracles.

These are the miracles that only the Messiah will be able to perform.

There is no record of anyone else ever performing them, and when Jesus performs them the Jewish reaction is very different from when he performs miracles of the first category.

And the two primary criteria for determining that a miracle is messianic are the unique reactions of the people, and the fact that these particular signs had never been performed before.

There are three main miracles in this second category, the messianic miracles.

And the first of these three special miracles is the healing of a Jewish leper.

The miracle

Now read Luke 5:12 – 16.

Full of leprosy

Mark and Matthew simply mention that the man was a leper, but Luke being a doctor is always a bit more detailed.

How does he describe the man's condition?

He says he was a man full of leprosy. The point he makes is this: At this point of time the leprosy was fully developed, and it would not be that much longer before it would take the man's life.

The request

Notice how the leper makes his request.

Why does he ask to be made clean, instead of to be healed?

Because he has been unclean, and untouchable since the day he was declared a leper. And for him quite a bit of time passed by since he was declared a leper, because by now the leprosy was fully developed.

Does he believe Jesus can heal him?

Yes, he declares that Jesus is able to heal him if He is willing.

It is the will of the Messiah to heal him, and in verse 13 of Luke's account *He stretched out His hand and touched him.*

He touched him

Why does He touch him?

Now as we have seen previously already, he does not need to touch someone to heal him. In the case of the healing of the nobleman's son, he was in Cana and the son was sick in Capernaum, 20 mile away, and yet he was able to heal long distance.

So again, he does not need to touch the leper to heal him, but in the context of leprosy that touch is significant. This would be the first time the man was touched by human hands since he was a declared leper.

And it was a touch that causes instantaneous healing.

Go to the priest

And notice what Jesus tells him to do in Luke's account in verse 14:

And He ordered him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, ..."

And why? Why did Jesus send the man to the priests?

"as a testimony to them."

Jesus deliberately sent this cleansed leper to the priesthood in order to provoke the leaders to start investigating His ministry and the message He was proclaiming. He wanted them to make a decision regarding His person (that He was the Messiah) and His message (that He was offering to Israel the kingdom predicted by the Jewish prophets).

And so when this man came before the priesthood and said "I was a declared leper and now I am healed of my leprosy", on that day they offered up the two birds.

Then came seven days of investigation, when they answered the three questions:

1. Yes, he was a declared leper.
2. Yes, he is healed of his leprosy, but
3. It is a man named Jesus of Nazareth that did the healing.

And, from a Jewish context, the fact that He healed a Jewish leper meant that he was claiming to be the Messiah.

They could not ignore the fact that a Jewish leper had been healed.

A unique miracle had indeed occurred.

Response

Read the last verse of Mark's account, verse 45.

In the middle of verse 45 of Mark's account notice what it says. *He could no longer publicly enter a city.*

He performed miracles that created a stir earlier, but it was not as big a stir, he was still able to come to the city. But now, because he performed this unique miracle, he arouses a lot more attention.

Also, notice the crucial point in Luke verse 16: He withdrew Himself into the desert and prayed. And, from the context, He was praying regarding what was about to happen next.

10. Messiah's Authority to Forgive Sin, § 46, Mark 2:1-12, Matthew 9:1-8, Luke 5:17-26

Where this occurs

Now the first thing to note is where the next event occurs. This is the advantage of the thematic approach where we see the correlation of one event to the other. Mark's account, verse 1, specifies that the event occurred up in Capernaum. And that is a three day walk away from Jerusalem. Keep that in mind.

The First Stage of Investigation: Observation

Now look at Luke's account in verse 17. *There were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem.* Note what we do not have here. We don't merely have a few local Pharisees observing what he is doing. Luke is far more specific. He tells us all of the spiritual leaders from all over the country have come up to Capernaum. He specifies they came from every village of the Galilee, and every village of Judea, as well as Jerusalem. All of the spiritual leaders have come up to Capernaum. And the question is: why are they all up there? There was no Baptist convention being held in that city that year, so why are they all up there?

This is their response to what was happening in the previous section, the healing of the Jewish leper. This is the first stage (that we mentioned earlier) of the Sanhedrin's investigation, the stage of observation. Normally they wouldn't all have to go. A small delegation such as the one they sent to John would have been sufficient. But this time they are not responding to someone who merely claims to be the Messiah. Now they are responding to someone who performed a miracle that has never happened before. So they all choose to go up there for this occasion.

Now remember that in the stage of observation they could ask no questions and they could raise no objections. All they can do is observe. And while they are observing and hearing what he is teaching, four friends of a paralytic try to get him over to Jesus to have him healed, but could not do so because all the leaders were there blocking the doorway. So they go to the opposite side of the house. Every house back then had an outdoor stairwell that will lead to a flat roof. And with some effort they got the man up there, and they had to take some effort because the man himself was paralytic and could not help them get him on top of the roof. And then Mark verse 4 points out they went ahead and broke the roof apart, which must have made the owner of the house rather ecstatic! But the gospels do not tell us how the owner of the house responded to the demolition of his roof. And when the hole was finally big enough they lowered the man down on his litter, down to where he was teaching.

Now on similar occasions he would simply proceed to heal, but not this time. Instead, in Luke verse 20, he makes a declaration: *Friend, your sins are forgiven you*, knowing very well that claiming the authority to forgive sins in the salvation sense would raise some serious questions among these leaders.

Also notice that sins are forgiven in the passive voice, which is significant because in the Hebrew text the only time you find the passive voice used is in the book of Leviticus chapters 4-6 which are dealing with sacrifices in reference to the atonement. So saying, *Friend, your sins are forgiven you*, using the passive voice he uses, means he was speaking as if he was God.

Now while this raises serious questions and concerns in the minds of the leaders, remember they cannot verbalise these issues. And notice how two of the gospels make that point. See Mark's account at the end of verse 6: *reasoning in their hearts.* And Matthew verse 3: *And some of the scribes said to themselves.* Once you understand the Jewish background then these small

phrases begin to make sense. They were not allowed to verbalise anything in the observation stage. All they could do was observe. And their unspoken objection is found in Mark verse 7: *“Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?”* And their theology here is correct. No-one can forgive sins in a salvation sense except God alone. So if he claims to have the authority to forgive sins it means one of two things. Either he is a blasphemer, or he is who he claims to be: the messianic God-man.

And he responds to them with his own question. I mentioned earlier that a common way of Jewish teaching is to go from the known to the unknown. A second common way of Jewish teaching is responding to questions by asking questions. If you go to a rabbinic class in some rabbinic school for example, you will observe this happens all the time. And the purpose is to get the student to reason through his own question to see if he can come up with the right answer without being told what the right answer is.

There is even a rabbinic story that goes with this. There was a place where a priest and a rabbi would get together and the priest would like to ask all these different questions and the rabbi never gave him a straight answer. To every question the priest raised the rabbi responded with a question. And one day the priest got a bit frustrated and said: Why do you Jews always answer questions by asking questions? The rabbi answered: why not?

And Jesus frequently uses the same method: questions for questions. And the question he raises is in verse 9 of Mark: *“Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’?”* And the issue now is: what is the easier thing to merely say. Is it easier to say to this man: “your sins are forgiven you?” Or is it easier to say: “stand up and walk because I am healing you?” What is the easier thing to only say? Now the easier thing to merely say is, “your sins are forgiven you”, because that requires no outward obvious evidence. The harder thing to say is, “I am healing you”, because it will require obvious visible evidence.

I could make the same claim here and now by saying: “From now on no matter what you believe or don’t believe, no matter what you do or don’t do your sins are forever forgiven so don’t worry about your spiritual future.” Having said this you cannot prove me right or wrong because what I just said does not require any visible evidence. On the other hand if all of you here had two broken legs and I was to say: “within five minutes you will all be healed and can jog home”, that is a bit harder for me to say because within those five minutes I would have to visibly prove that.

Now using a bit of rabbinic logic called *kal va-chomer*, which means light and heavy, and the system is that you prove the easier by doing the harder. He says to them I will prove to you I can do the easier, your sins are forgiven you, by doing the harder, healing the paralytic.

Only then does he proceed to heal and there is instantaneous evidence. Mark verse 12: *he got up and immediately picked up the pallet.* Luke says in verse 25: *Immediately he got up before them.* There is instantaneous evidence that he could do the harder.

That in turn becomes evidence that He can say the easier: your sins are forgiven you. And if He can say the easier, He is who he claims to be: the messianic King, the messianic Person.

Now it is obvious that when they went back to Jerusalem they said: “men, the movement of Jesus is significant.” And now from section 47 to section 60 He will undergo the second stage, the stage of interrogation. From now on, everywhere he goes a Pharisee is sure to follow. But now they are asking questions and raising objections, looking for a basis to either accept or reject His claim.

When we get to section 61 we will see the major turning point of His public ministry. But this is the point at which they begin to look for reasons to accept or reject Him.

11. Messiah's Authority over Men, § 47 Mark 2:13-17; Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32

Read Mark's account.

Interrogation

Here we begin to see the second stage of the investigation: the stage of interrogation.

It comes in connection with the calling of the seventh disciple, who goes by the name of Matthew, also called Levi the son of Alphaeus. By profession he was a publican.

Publican

The job of publican was actually forbidden to Jews by Jewish law. But some publicans chose to bid for the office, not because Rome paid well, but because of what Rome allowed them to get away with. If the Roman government determined that Mr Cohen here owed the government 5 shekels in taxes, the publican could go to him and say, "you owe 10 shekels", collect 10, give 5 to Rome which she demanded, and keep 5 for himself.

And so publicans were hated for two reasons. First of all they were working on behalf of the Romans, they were working on behalf of the Gentile subjugating authorities. And secondly, they became wealthy by extorting from their own people. So once a man decided to become a publican he was ostracised from Jewish society and the rabbis issued many rules and regulations against the publicans.

Among these rules was that there are only two classes of society that were allowed to associate with publicans. And these were other publicans, and prostitutes. The term sinner in some of these passages is a euphemism for prostitute.

Customs official

There are two types of publicans. Both were bad, but one was worse than the other. The lesser of the two evils was the income tax collector. The worst kind of publican was the customs official. They charge you for stuff you buy outside the country.

The *tax booth* was a booth located on the edge of a city or town to collect taxes for trade. There was a tax booth in Capernaum, which was on the trade route from Damascus to Galilee and the Mediterranean. The "taxes" were collected on produce and goods brought into the area for sale.⁴

This means that Matthew was a customs official. So he was the worst kind of publican you could possibly be.

Rabbinic writings emphasise the issue of honesty, but when dealing with a customs official publican they said it was permitted to smuggle goods behind his back, because, just as a man might hide his things to keep them from being stolen by a thief, so it was the same principle to get around a publican: simply protecting your goods from being stolen by a thief.

⁴ Biblical Studies Press. (2005). *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible*. Biblical Studies Press.

Follow Me!

And to this man he says: *"Follow Me."*

And normally when you have this kind of position you didn't simply get up and leave it. You would have to make other arrangements and find replacements.

But Matthew recognises that the authority of the Messiah supersedes the authority of Rome. So, in Luke verse 28, *he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him.*

Party

And this marks the point of Matthew's new birth. So what he decides to do is give himself a new birth birthday party.

But what kind of people attend Matthew's new birth birthday party? Only other publicans and sinners, who are prostitutes. Both classes are there, but contrary to Jewish practice, Jesus and His six disciples are also there. This simply contradicts the rabbinic practice of that day.

And so, in Mark at the end of verse 16, they raise the objection: *"Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?"*

And the point of the objection is that if he really were the Messiah he would not associate with this class of society.

Jesus responds by saying three things in Matthew verses 12 & 13.

1. First of all, it is not the people who are well that need a physician, but those who are sick.

The Pharisees saw themselves as being spiritually healthy and declared the publicans to be spiritually sick.

So should he not go to them as a spiritual physician to bring about some healing?

2. Secondly, he points out the Pharisees are characterised by much sacrifice, but lack mercy.

Now being characterised by sacrifice shows they are very careful to keep the external demands of the Mosaic Law.

But, they were not as zealous to keep the internal demands of the Mosaic Law, such as showing mercy.

And their lack of mercy is seen in their many rules and regulations against the publicans.

3. And thirdly, he didn't come to call the righteous to repentance, but the sinners.

The Pharisees saw themselves as being among the righteous ones. The publicans were declared to be unique sinners, especially customs official publicans.

So should not He go to them to bring them to repentance?

And this event sets the stage for what happens from this time until section 60. Everywhere He goes Pharisees are following and objecting, either to thing He says, or to things He does.

12. Messiah's Authority over Tradition, § 48, Mark 2:18-22, Matthew 9:14-17; Luke 5:33-39

At this point Jesus enters into a unique period of conflict over a specific issue, because by this point of time in the history of Judaism a whole body of traditions developed that by first century Israel became sacrosanct, equal with Scripture, and sometimes more important than Scripture. And the Pharisees expect Jesus to be in submission to all these new rules and regulations, but He consistently refuses to do so.

You often hear people say that the reason the Jews rejected Jesus is that He would not overthrow Rome, but that is never given as a reason in Scripture. And the actual reason given for rejecting him is not his failure to overthrow Rome. Had they accepted Him he would have overthrown Rome. The issues are elsewhere.

As we will see, they reject Him because He rejected the teaching of Pharisaism.

But to fully understand what the issues are we will have to do some background work in Jewish history.

The Sopherim (Sopher) BC 450- BC 30

When the Jews returned from the Babylonian Captivity, the Jewish leaders realized the reason for the captivity was disobedience to the Mosaic Law. Ezra of the book of Ezra began a School called the School of the Sopherim. Sopherim is a Hebrew word meaning scribes. Sopherim is plural and Sopher is singular.

The original intent of Ezra and the scribes was to give the people a clear knowledge of the Mosaic Law. Hosea the prophet declared, "The people perish for lack of knowledge". Therefore, the School of the Sopherim was established in order to overcome the lack of knowledge and give the people a clear understanding of what the law required, and how to keep the law and therefore avoid another divine judgement like that of the Babylonian captivity.

While Christians often think of the Law as having ten commandments, it actually contains a total of 613 commandments. God actually gave Moses 613 specific commandments.

A fence

After Ezra's time, the Sopherim made their goal to build a fence around the Torah, to build a fence around the Law.

Now what did this fence consist of?

It consisted of new rules and new regulations that could largely be derived from the original 613.

Their thinking was that the Jews might break the laws of the fence, they might break the rabbinic law, but that would keep them from breaking through the fence and breaking the Mosaic Law and bringing on divine judgement.

So Ezra's goals were correct: merely to expound the Scripture as any Bible teacher would do today, expounding the text from the original context and language, and so on.

But now they became more serious and wanted to build this fence around the Law.

The principle

And the principle they used was this: A Sopher may disagree with a Sopher, but cannot disagree with the Torah. The Torah, the Mosaic Law was given by God. It was sacrosanct. There was no basis for debating these issues. They could disagree among themselves until a decision was made by majority vote.

Once the majority of rabbis voted on a specific new law, it became mandatory for every Jew in the world to follow it.

Pilpul

And the kind of logic they used was called pilpul. That is a Hebrew word meaning peppery or sharp, but it refers to a form of rabbinic logic that could be summarised in the question: given an original statement, how many new ones can you logically derive from that one?

Example

I'll give you an example of how that works. Among the 613 commandments given to Moses was the one which says you must not seethe a kid in the milk of its mother. You don't boil a baby goat in the milk of its mother.

The purpose of the law originally was to avoid a common Canaanite practice. When a mother goat gave birth to its first born kid, the kid was taken away from the mother and the meat of the kid was boiled in the milk of the mother as a first fruits offering to the god of Baal.

Jews could not practice that type of idolatry, and therefore the Law was that you do not seethe a kid in the milk of its mother. God gave the law to Moses in about 1400 BC, now it's about 400 BC. The original intent of that rule had been forgotten.

And so the Sophrim raised the question: how do we make sure we never, never, never, ever, ever, ever seethe a kid in its mother's milk?

That is how Pilpul logic began to work.

Now, suppose you eat a piece of meat and with that piece of meat you drink a glass of milk. It is always possible that the milk may have come from the mother of the meat that you are eating. And they go down into your stomach and they seethe in your stomach and therefore you break the Mosaic Law.

So they added one new rule: Jews could not partake of meat products and dairy products at the same meal. They must be separated by about 24 hours.

If you go to a Jewish neighbourhood in a place like New York or LA which has many orthodox Jews, and you go into their Jewish restaurants. If it says "Kosher" on it, they will either be serving dairy or they will be serving meat, but they will not serve both at the same time.

Although it is happening less and less today, in most places in Israel, in Hotels for example, they follow these Kosher laws and there is no mixing of the meat and milk products. There was one restaurant in Jerusalem that served dairy and meat at the same time, but it is a two story restaurant. The ground floor was for meat; the upper floor was for dairy. Either you eat upstairs or downstairs. What you could not do is go up and down to eat in both places because they had people watching to make sure you did not do that.

To this day orthodox Jews separate dairy from meat. They will often have different parts of the refrigerator, or two refrigerators, and so on.

But there's more

But Pilpul logic goes even further.

Suppose at lunch time you decide to have a dairy meal. You take a plate, and from this plate you eat a slab of cheese. Of course, after lunch you want to wash it. But no matter how well you wash it and scrub it, you might not notice a small spec of cheese on that plate. And then in the evening you decide to have a meat meal, and you take the same plate and you put your hamburger on it. If this is Kosher law it wouldn't be a ham-burger, it would be a beef-burger. You put the beef-burger on the plate and it picks up the small spec of cheese you did not see. No matter how remote the chance, the cheese may have come from the milk of the mother of the meat that you are eating. You swallow them both together and they seethe in your stomach and you break the Law of Moses.

So rule number two is: Jews must have two sets of dishes. And to this day all orthodox Jews have at least two sets of dishes: one used for dairy; and one used for meat. If by mistake you happen to use one for the other, you must either destroy the dish or give it away to a Gentile, but no Jew could eat from that plate ever again.

It went on and on and on, and to each of the 613 commandments God gave to Moses they issued hundreds, and sometimes thousands of new regulations.

The period of time for this is from about 450 BC until 30 BC, when the School of the Sophrim came to an end.

The Tannaim BC 30 – AD 220

But then came the second school of rabbis called the Tannaim, plural for Tanna, a Hebrew word meaning teacher.

And they looked upon the work of the Sopherim and guess what they said: There are still too many holes in the fence.

And they continued the process of trying to plug up the holes in the fence. Their period of time was from 30 BC until AD 220. And so Jesus was coming on the scene in the Tannaim period.

Principle

The principle of the Sopherim was, "A Sopher may disagree with a Sopher, but he cannot disagree with the Torah."

The principle of the Tannaim was, "A Tanna may disagree with a Tanna, but he cannot disagree with a Sopher."

That meant that from 30 B.C., shortly before Jesus arrived, all the thousands of rules and regulations passed down by the Sopherim became sacrosanct and of equal validity with Scripture.

Oral Law

Now from 450 BC until AD 220 none of these rules was written down, and so they are referred to as the Oral Law.

But they had to justify their teaching that the laws of the Sopherim are equal to the laws of Moses. And so they came up with a teaching that all orthodox Jews still hold to today: On Mount Sinai God gave Moses two separate laws; not one, but two.

The first law is called the written law, and these are the commandments he wrote down in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And so the written law is the 613 commandments.

But, they say, He also gave to Moses the Oral Law, oral because he did not write these thousands of other commandments down. He memorised them all. And by memory it was passed down to Joshua, who passed it down to the Judges, who passed it down to the Prophets, who passed it down to the Sopherim.

So they said that the Sopherim did not innovate these new laws. They got them from the Prophets, who got them from the Judges, who got them from Joshua, who got them from Moses, who got them from God. And therefore they must be observed equally with Scripture.

And in another section we will see that sometimes they went beyond that, and the rules of the Sopherim take priority over the laws of Moses.

Scribes

From 450 BC until AD 220 none of these laws were written down. Certain rabbis had them memorised. In the gospels you read of Pharisees and scribes. What is the difference? All scribes were Pharisees.

But the scribes were those Pharisees who had these laws memorised. If you wished to know what the tradition was regarding this or that, you would go and approach a scribe and he would pull it out from his memory. They were a living encyclopaedia.

However, by the time of third century Israel, the Jewish population was decreasing, and there were fewer and fewer men around to memorise all these things.

And so, in AD 220, at the order of one rabbi called Judah HaNasi, Judah the Prince, all these rules were written down for the first time: a collection of more than six and a half centuries of material.

The Amoraim (Amora) AD 220 – AD 500

Then came a third school of rabbis called the Amoraim, plural for Amora, an old Aramaic word meaning teacher.

And they looked upon the work of the Tannaim, and guess what they said?

There are still too many holes in the fence! They repeated the process of trying to plug up the fence. And continued to do so until about 500 AD.

Principle

And, once again, they changed their principle of operation. And you guessed it ...

Their principle was, "An Amora may disagree with an Amora, but he cannot disagree with a Tanna." Thus, all the rules and regulations of the Tannaim also became sacrosanct, having equal validity with Scripture.

Mishnah, Gemara, & Talmud

The work of the Sopherim and Tannaim together is now called the Mishnah, and the Mishnah in Hebrew is roughly about 1500 pages.

The work of Amoraim is called the Gemara, and that is about the size of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, a massive body of work.

When you put the two together, that makes up the Talmud. (The Talmud is the Mishnah plus the Gemara.)

In this study we are not concerned about what the Gemara says, because that is from a later period.

From now on in our study, we will be using certain words synonymously, or interchangeably: The Oral Law, Mishnaic Law, Pharisaic Law, and Rabbinic Law. These are all various phrases for what we now call the Mishnah.

In the New Testament, it is known as *the tradition of the elders* or *the tradition of the fathers*.

The bone of contention

Now, for a Pharisee, what was the Messiah supposed to be like?

The Messiah would be a fellow Pharisee, and he would not only subject himself to both the Mosaic Law and the Oral Law, he would also help them in plugging up the holes of the fence!

But, Jesus consistently rejects the authority of the Oral Law, only affirming the authority of the Mosaic Law.

And His rejection of this the Oral Law will become the key area of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees.

Messiah's Authority over Tradition, § 48

And it begins here in section 48.

Read the first verse of Luke's account, Luke 5:33.

Who is speaking?

"*They*" refers to the Pharisees and their scribes mentioned in verse 30. Mark also says that John's disciples were also curious.

Luke points out that the Pharisees followed the practice of fasting frequently, and the disciples of John followed the Pharisaic tradition.

And by the way, the Pharisees fasted twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays. Every Monday and every Thursday were the two Pharisaic fast days. There will be another section later on where a Pharisee and a Publican go to the temple compound to pray. And the Pharisee boasts that he fasts twice a week, meaning Mondays and Thursdays.

But Jesus' disciples did not follow this tradition and they wanted to know why, and He responds by saying four things.

1. Read Luke 5:34 – 35.

First of all, in verses 34 & 35 (of Luke's account): He said to them: You don't come to a wedding feast to fast, you come to feast.

And what is the point He is making?

He is the bridegroom, and as long as the bridegroom was present there will be no room for fasting. There will be fasting only once He leaves.

Indeed, from the time He began His public ministry at that first Passover, there is no record of Jesus ever fasting.

2. Read Luke 5:36.

Why is it not a good idea to patch an old garment with new cloth?

An old garment has been washed many times and it has shrunk as much as it will shrink. If an old garment develops a hole in its old age and you use a new patch of cloth to cover the hole in the old garment, the next time you wash it the new patch shrinks and pulls the garment out of shape.

His point here is that He hasn't come to help them patch up Pharisaic Judaism. He didn't come to close up these holes in the fence.

He is presenting something that is quite different.

3. Now read Luke 5:37 – 38.

Why don't you fill an old wineskin with new wine?

An old wineskin has stretched as much as it will ever stretch. New wine is wine that has only just begun its fermentation process. If you fill up an old wineskin with new wine, as

the fermentation process continues the wine will expand. It will cause a rip in the skin and you will lose both the wineskin and the wine.

And the point is that He did not come to put his teachings into the mould or the skin of Pharisaic Judaism.

He is presenting something that is different. He is presenting something that is new.

4. Now read Luke 5:39.

His fourth point can be taken in two ways.

In the first interpretation, the old wine represents their Pharisaic traditions, and the new wine represents His teachings. And He is prophesying that, in the end, they will reject the new and stay with the old.

In the second interpretation, the old wine is Mosaic Judaism, and the new wine is Pharisaic Judaism. And of course, Mosaic Judaism is better.

This section is the first of several examples of His conflict with the Pharisees over the authority of the Mishnah.

13. Messiah's Authority over the Sabbath, § 49 – 51

(See also MBS036, & MBS176)

In the next three sections, 49 to 51, we find three consecutive conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees over the correct way to observe the Sabbath.

Personification

The Sabbath had been highly personified in the Judaism of the first century, and the personification continues to this day.

It was personified both as a queen and as a bride: Jehovah's queen, Israel's bride. In the synagogue service on Friday night, as the sun begins to set and the Sabbath begins, the synagogue doors are opened, and they sing a song welcoming queen Sabbath into the service.

Over 1500 Sabbath rules

Now, to the one commandment that God gave to Moses, to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, the Pharisees added over 1,500 new Sabbath rules and regulations.

Israel's purpose

In addition to that, in the School of the Sopherim when they raised the question: why did God make Israel? The answer was that God Made Israel to honour the Sabbath.

a. *Through the Healing of the Paralytic, § 49, John 5:1-47*

Now, the occasion for the first of these three Sabbath conflicts is the healing of a paralytic.

This is the third of John's seven signs. In addition, what follows is the second of John's seven discourses: the discourse on the works of God.

The Second Passover, v 1

Now read verse 1.

It says:

After these things there was a feast of the Jews, ...

In Jewish writings, whenever a feast is mentioned without naming it, it is a reference to the Passover.

Therefore, in keeping with the Jewish practice, this would be a Passover and so at this point in time, His ministry is exactly one year old.

From the time He began His public ministry at the first Passover, one year has passed.

Miracle – public, not requiring faith, v 2-9

Read verses 2 – 9.

Notice two things here.

1. Number one, Jesus sought the man out. He didn't come to Jesus. Jesus took the initiative and went to him.
2. Secondly, faith was not a prerequisite for the healing.

The purpose of his miracles at that point in His ministry was to authenticate His claims, and to enable Israel to make a decision about His claim to be the Messiah.

This will change when we come to section 61.

Sabbath Controversy, v 10-15

Read verses 10 – 15.

Notice that when they asked the man who healed him, he doesn't know who it was. He had to go back and find out who it was. So Jesus had not revealed to the man who He is.

Why were the Jews saying to the man who was cured,

“It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.”?

According to the pharisaic law, you could not carry anything on the Sabbath day from a public place to a private place, or from a private place to a public place. Furthermore, inside the Pool of Bethesda is regarded as a private area, while the streets outside are a public area.

Therefore, when *Jesus said to him, “Get up, pick up your pallet and walk”*, He asked the man to carry his pallet from a private area to a public area in violation of the pharisaic law.

However, this is not a violation of the Mosaic Law.

Accusations, v 16-18

Read verses 16 – 18.

Notice that both verse 16 and verse 18 begin with the words, *for this reason the Jews were doing something*.

There are two different things that the Jews were doing and a different reason is given for each.

What were they doing?

They were *persecuting Jesus*, and they were *seeking all the more to kill Him*.

Sabbath

Why were the Jews persecuting Jesus?

When He healed the man on the Sabbath, He violated the law of the Pharisees, but not the Law of Moses. The Pharisees forbade healing on the Sabbath unless life was in danger.

So they persecuted Him because He violated their law.

Jesus equal with God

What provoked them to seek all the more to kill Him?

He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

When the Jews heard Him claiming God as His Father, they understood him to be claiming equality with God.

Therefore, they sought to kill Him.

Son equals Father

Cultic groups deny the deity of the Messiah. One of their arguments is that He is the son of God and the son is not equal to the Father.

While that might be true in Gentile reckoning, it is not true in Jewish reckoning, where the first-born son is equal to the father.

The response of His own Jewish audience brings this out here.

When the Jews heard Him claiming God as his Father, they were not hearing Him say He was something less than God; they understood him to be claiming equality with God.

Two charges

So now, they have two charges against him:

1. Number one: He breaks the Sabbath.
2. Number two: He claims equality with God.

Jesus Defence of His Claim to Deity, v 19-29

John begins verse 19 with,

Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them ...

What follows is His answer to their charges against Him.

Jesus defends himself in four points.

1. *Works*

Read verses 19 – 21.

What is His first line of defence?

The works that He does are the works of the Father, works that only the Father could do.

Therefore, because He can do what the Father does, the implication is that He must be equal to the Father.

And, in talking about His works, Jesus makes three points about His equality with the Father.

a. *Relationship*

In verse 19, He is able to do the works that He does because of His relationship with the Father.

There is an equality of relationship, so that what one does, the other does also.

b. *Love*

In verse 20, He is able to do the works of the Father because, out of His love for the son, the Father *shows Him all things that He Himself is doing*.

There is an equality of love between the Father and the Son.

Therefore again, the works that He does are the works that the Father showed Him and gave Him to do.

c. *Power*

Finally, in verse 21, there is an equality of power.

He shares the Father's power to raise the dead and give them life. (For an example of the Father's power, see II Kgs. 4:32-35; 13:20, 21.)

2. *Honour and judgement*

Read His second line of defence in verses 22 – 23.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, in Psalm 9:7 – 8, God Himself is the One who will judge the world.

Psalm 9:7–8 (NASB95)

⁷ But the Lord abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, ⁸ And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity.

Therefore, if Jesus has been given all judgement, then He must be God.

As a result, there is an equality of honour between the Father and the Son.

3. *Power to give eternal life*

Read His third line of defence in verse 24.

Jesus has the power to provide eternal life to those who believe in Him.

Those who were listening to Him would know from their Scriptures that only God has the power to provide eternal life. See for example Daniel 12:1 – 3.

Daniel 12:1–3 (NASB95)

¹ “Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. ² “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. ³ “Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Therefore, if He claims to provide eternal life then He must be God as well.

4. *Power to raise the dead*

Read His fourth line of defence in verses 25 – 29.

He will bring about the resurrection of the dead.

Here again, in the Old Testament only God had the power to provide the resurrection of the dead. (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; Hos. 13:14)

Isaiah 26:19 (NASB95)

¹⁹ Your dead will live; Their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, For your dew is as the dew of the dawn, And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.

Therefore, if He is the One who is going to provide eternal life, He must be God.

Two Resurrections

Furthermore, there will be two types of resurrections (verse 29).

- a) There will be a *resurrection of life* for those who believe.
- b) And there will be a *resurrection of judgement* for those who don't believe.

These are very clear claims of His deity!

Two Titles

Also, notice the two different titles He gives Himself.

- a) *Son of God*

At the end of verse 25 He calls himself the Son of God, focussing on His deity, which He has just established in four points.

- b) *Son of Man*

In verse 27, He calls Himself the Son of Man, focussing on His humanity.

He is the unique God-Man.

Witnesses

Read verses 30 – 32.

It is not sufficient that He testify about Himself.

Therefore, having made His defence in four points culminating in His declaration that He is the unique God-Man, Jesus now calls forth four witnesses to testify about Him.

For the Jews, in the Law of Moses, two or three witnesses were sufficient to establish a case. Two witnesses were sufficient; Three were better.

Here Jesus provided four, thereby going beyond the requirement of the law.

1. *John the Baptist*

Read verses 33 – 35.

The first witness happens to be John the Baptist:

John was the one who declared Him to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Light & Darkness

One more thing to notice here in passing: In verse 35 there is another example of John's sub-theme of the conflict between light and darkness.

2. *His works*

Read verse 36.

His miracles authenticate His claims.

Moreover, by now He had already performed one Messianic miracle: the healing of a Jewish leper.

3. *The Father*

Read verses 37 – 38.

God the Father publicly spoke at His baptism: *this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*

The voice of God, a Bat Kol, was considered authoritative by the Jews of that day.

4. *Scripture*

Read verses 39 – 47.

The Scriptures are the fourth witness testifying about Him. Moses wrote about Him, and the prophets wrote about Him, and He is fulfilling what they wrote.

The Pharisees Problem

Now He has made His defence against their charges, and He has brought four witnesses to support His case.

Yet He says to them, *you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have eternal life.*

Their problem is not that there are insufficient witnesses to His claims that He is the Messiah and that He is divine.

What is the root of their problem?

We see it in what He tells them in verse 46:

For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?

Who believed in Moses more than the Pharisees!

So, in what sense did they *not believe his writings*?

They believed Moses the way Moses was reinterpreted through Pharisaic tradition and Mishnaic law.

They did not believe what Moses himself wrote, because all they could see was their own traditions and rules, which they had added to Moses!

Consequently, they failed to recognise their Messiah when He came to them.

Why?

Because they were testing Him through the prism of the Pharisaic traditions.

b. *Through the Controversy over Grain, § 50, Mark 2:23-28; Matthew 12:1-8; Luke 6:1-5*

Read Luke 6:1 – 5. Luke’s account, verse 1 says:

Now it happened that He was passing through some grain fields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grain.

The Pharisees came attacking because by so doing they had just broken four of their 1500 Sabbath rules and regulations.

The disciples broke four separate rules.

1. When they picked the wheat off the stalk, they were guilty of reaping on the Sabbath day.
2. When they rubbed the wheat in their hands to separate the wheat from the chaff, they were guilty of threshing the wheat on the Sabbath day.
3. When they blew on their hands to blow the chaff away, they were guilty of winnowing on the Sabbath day.
4. When they swallowed the wheat, they were guilty of storing the wheat on the Sabbath day.

That is how extreme the situation had become.

Walking of grass

In the Pharisaic schools there was a debate about walking on grass. Many rabbis issued a ruling that you should not walk on the grass on the Sabbath day.

If you ask the rabbi, “What’s wrong with walking on the grass on the Sabbath day” his first answer will be “nothing, it is permissible to walk on the grass on the Sabbath day.

However, here is the problem (here we have the fence around the law again) – you may see only a grassy field, and what you might not see is one stalk of wild wheat growing among the grass. Moreover, as you walk on the grass you might step on the wheat and separate the wheat from the stalk. So you become guilty of reaping on the Sabbath day.

Then your foot comes down and squeezes the wheat just enough to separate the wheat from the chaff, and now you are guilty of threshing the wheat on the Sabbath day.

As you keep on walking, the hem of your outer garment might cause enough of a breeze to blow the chaff away, and now you are guilty of winnowing on the Sabbath day.

Fourthly, once you are gone, a bird or a rodent might see this piece of wheat and swallow it, and now you are guilty of storing the wheat on the Sabbath day.

That is why we do not walk on the grass on the Sabbath day. See! ”

That is how extreme some of these things had become.

Jesus' response

Now Jesus responds by pointing out six specific things:

1. *David ate showbread*

Read verses 3 & 4 of Matthew's account.

What is the point Jesus makes here?

David also broke the Pharisaic law by eating the showbread (1 Samuel 21:1 – 6).

The Mosaic Law never said that a Levite could not give the showbread to a non-Levite, but the Pharisaic law did say that.

They could not claim that David lived before the Mishnah came into being, because they were teaching that the oral law also came from Moses.

So if David could break the oral law without being condemned by the Pharisees, so can David's even greater son.

Law of Moses

Notice how He begins, "*Have you not read ...?*"

This directs their attention to what Moses wrote, as opposed to their oral traditions. Then, as we have seen, He points out the difference between the requirements of the Mosaic Law and their Pharisaic law.

2. *Sabbath rest not universal*

Read verse 5 of Matthew's account.

What is His point here?

The law of Sabbath rest did not apply in every situation.

While everybody outside the Temple compound has to treat the Sabbath as a day of rest (staying at home to rest), that was not the case for those within the temple compound. For them it was not a day of rest but a day of labour.

In fact, they had to work harder on the Sabbath day than on any other day.

There were daily sacrifices and rituals, but on the Sabbath all sacrifices had to be doubled, and on the Sabbath there were certain rituals done that were not done on any other day.

Yet the people working in the temple compound were not viewed as breaking the Sabbath because they were not resting but working on the Sabbath day.

So to repeat, the Sabbath commandment did not apply to every situation, and it did not apply to merely walking through a field and picking some wheat for the purpose of eating.

That was not a case of reaping it for the future.

3. *Messiah is greater than the temple*

Read verse 6 of Matthew.

What is the significance of that?

The Messiah happens to be greater than the temple.

Therefore, if the temple can allow work to be done on the Sabbath without violating Mosaic Law, so can He allow certain works to be done on the Sabbath without violating the Mosaic Law.

It might break Mishnaic Law, but it did not break Mosaic Law.

4. *Mercy*

Read verse 7 of Matthew.

Here Matthew quotes from Hosea 6:6.

Certain works were always allowed on the Sabbath day, such as works of necessity and works of mercy. Now eating is a work of necessity. Healing is work of mercy.

Such works should always be allowed on the Sabbath day.

5. *Lord of the Sabbath*

Read Matthew verse 8, as the Messiah He happens to be the Lord of the Sabbath.

Being Lord of the Sabbath He can allow what they disallow and disallow what they allow.

6. *Purpose of the Sabbath*

Read Mark 2:27.

They have misconstrued the purpose of the Sabbath.

The Pharisees were teaching that the very reason God made Israel was for honouring the Sabbath.

They were teaching that God made Israel for the Sabbath, but the opposite is true: God made the Sabbath for Israel, to give Israel a time of refreshment and rest, not to enslave Israel.

Instead of freeing the Jew to enjoy the Sabbath, the practical outworking of their 1,500 additional Sabbath regulations was the enslavement of the Jew to the Sabbath.

Therefore, they misconstrued the purpose of the Sabbath.

Now this is rather hard on the Pharisees, but let me point out that the same kind of legalism and building of fences around the law did not escape the Christian church either.

In different segments of the Christian church there are different types of legalism. At least in Judaism all of their rules and regulations are uniform; no matter where you travel in the Jewish world they follow virtually the same rules and regulations with very small differences.

However, in the Christian church there are different rules in different denominations and in different areas. Even the same denomination in different parts of the country can have different rules and regulations.

For example, some churches say you must never drink alcohol, you must never go to see a movie, you cannot dance any kind of dance, men and women cannot swim in the same ocean at the same time, and so on.

Arnold gives an example from his own experience:

My early years in a Christian College were at a rather legalistic school. As freshmen we had to sit in a lecture by the Dean of students to learn the rules we had to live by.

If they simply said these are the rules you have to go by while you are in school, I could live with that. Every organisation has the right to have standards they want members to observe. That is fine.

But that is not the way they presented the case. What they were saying is: if you are a Christian you don't do certain things. They made it a spiritual issue, not an issue of the standards for that school.

One of the rules threw me a bit because the Dean says: if you are a Christian you never play with dice. And I remembered that in the Bible they cast lots for things and that sounded a bit like dice.

So I raised my question and asked him: You said that Christians cannot play with dice, but where in the Bible does it say that. I don't recall reading it.

And the Dean said, "Well it is not exactly in the Bible that way. What the Bible says is that you must avoid any appearance of evil. And because gamblers use dice, that is why we should not use dice: to avoid the appearance of evil."

So, in my naivety I raised my hand a second time and said, "Let me just understand this. You say we should not use dice because gamblers use them." "That's right," he said, "We must avoid any appearance of evil."

So I said, "In that case, shouldn't we be forbidden to drive cars because bank robbers use cars to get away with the stolen money? So shouldn't we avoid using cars for that reason?"

The next day I was called into his office for a private lecture, one of several that I got throughout the year.

The first week of school ended and I went to the student activity building where I noticed a monopoly game. And it had the stamp of approval of the school and that threw me because in the monopoly game at home you threw two dice and went around the board. So I took the lid off to see what they were doing, and they did remove the dice and in place of the dice they had a spinner. And you had to spin twice in place of throwing the dice.

They are simply building the fence around the law. The church has no more authority than the Pharisees have to pass new rules and regulations about the Scriptures.

We are to judge other people's spirituality by the word of God and not by human traditions.

So keep in mind that the church did not escape the same tendency to build a fence around the law.

c. *Through the Healing of the Man with a Withered Hand, § 51, Mark 3:1-6; Matthew 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11*

In section 51 is a third Sabbath controversy, the controversy over the man with a withered hand.

Read Luke 6:6 – 7 and Matthew 12:9 – 10.

Where was Jesus and what was He doing?

He was teaching in the synagogue on a Sabbath.

Notice how Luke’s description of the man with the withered hand is different from that of the other authors. Being a doctor, he gives more detail, specifying that it was his right hand that was withered.

Entrapment

Notice the situation here.

Pharisaic law forbids healing on the Sabbath unless a life was in danger.

The man here is in need of healing, but his life is not in danger.

Therefore, according to the law of the Pharisees, healing him on the Sabbath would be a violation of their law.

What are the Pharisees doing?

Luke tells us that they “*were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him.*”

Matthew records that they asked Him their question *so that they might accuse Him.*

Remember that they have begun the second stage of their investigation of Jesus, the stage of interrogation. Already they are looking for a basis to accuse Him and reject Him.

In view of all these things, it certainly looks like the Pharisees have brought the man into the synagogue for the purpose of entrapping Jesus.

Jesus’ response

Did Jesus know what they were up to?

Read Luke 6:8.

He knew what they were thinking ...

Read His response to them in Matthew 12:11 – 12.

He reminds them of their own practice. Even they will do good on a Sabbath.

Notice how He finishes in verse 12:

¹² *“How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”*

This is a *kal va-chomer* argument, which we have seen Him use before. It is an argument from the lesser to the greater; if the lesser is true, then how much more is the greater true.

Therefore, if it was permissible to do good for an animal on the Sabbath (the lesser), how much more would it be permissible to do good for a man on the Sabbath (the greater)?

As He taught them in the previous section, works of necessity and acts of mercy are always permitted on the Sabbath day.

Healing

Having retaught that lesson, He now proceeds to heal the man.

Read Mark 3:5.

Notice some important details of the healing.

Jesus simply gave an order, and the healing was immediate. He did not ask the man if he believed, so the man’s faith was not a prerequisite for the healing.

At this point in His public ministry, the purpose of His miracles was to authenticate His messianic claims. We will see this change after section 61.

Responses of the Pharisees

Now there are three specific results from these Sabbath controversies.

1. *Rage*

Read Luke’s account, in verse 11: they *were filled with rage*.

To be filled means to be controlled.

They were controlled by their emotions and madness and anger.

2. *Conspiracy*

Read Matthew verse 14.

They *conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him*.

3. *Conspiracy with Herodians*

Read Mark verse 6.

They even carried out this conspiracy with the Herodians.

The Pharisees and the Herodians were at the opposite ends of the political spectrum and were bitter enemies. The Pharisees objected to Roman rule of any form. But the Herodians were willing to accept Roman rule if it was rule through the house of Herod.

These two groups are at the opposite ends of the political spectrum, but now they come together against what they see as a common enemy, and that is Jesus.

The Sabbath controversy, more than any other controversy, is what motivated them to find a way to deal with him.

14. Messiah's Authority to Heal, § 52, Mark 3:7-12; Matthew 12: 15-21

Read Mark 3:7 – 12.

It is now the earlier part of the second year of His public ministry, and He continues to receive a lot of interest. There are three things to notice here.

- a. His reputation had spread, not only throughout the land of Israel, but also beyond that to Gentile territory such as Idumea, which is south of Judah, and to Tyre and Sidon (present day Lebanon) to the north of Galilee.

Because this spreading reputation, we will see, in a later section, a Syro-Phonician woman came to Him.

- b. Masses of people pressed against Him seeking healing, and He healed many.
- c. Furthermore, in verse 11, He is continually being recognised by the demons that He confronts. But, as always, He refuses to allow them to tell who He is, and He continues to refuse any testimony from demons.

Prophecy fulfilled

The Matthew passage quotes Isaiah 42:1-4, which contains a prophecy of the nature of Messiah's ministry during His first coming.

Therefore, Matthew 12:18-21 falls under the category of literal prophecy plus literal fulfilment.

15. The Choosing of the Twelve, § 53, Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16

Read Luke 6:12 – 13.

Jesus had a great number of disciples who were following Him. Out of these He chose twelve men to be apostles.

The word *disciple* simply means “learner”, “one who learns”. It was used of a follower of a Rabbi, and it does not carry any principle of authority.

But the word *apostle* means “one who is sent”, and the one who is sent carries the authority of the one who sent him.

So these twelve men have the authority of Jesus when they are sent out.

Purpose

There are three reasons why they were called into a smaller apostolic group found in Mark’s account in verses 14 & 15.

1. *To be with Him*

They were appointed so that they might be with him all of the time.

Disciples would be coming and going. Some disciples are called when necessary, as we will see in a later section.

While disciples were to be on call, coming and going as required, this group of twelve men were to be with him all of the time.

2. *To be sent out to preach*

They were appointed so that he might send them forth to preach.

They would go out from city to city and from synagogue to synagogue to give the same message He was giving: that they must accept Him to be the Messianic King.

3. *To be sent out with authority to cast out demons*

They were appointed so they have the authority to cast out demons. And they will be active in casting out demons as evidence of their claims.

While this authority was only given to the apostles at this time, it will be given to others later.

The Apostles

1. Simon (Hebrew) or Peter (Greek), Cephas (Aramaic).
2. Andrew. Simon & Andrew are brothers, sons of John.
3. John (a different John). He was the son of Salome and Zebedee.
4. James, actually Jacov or Jacob. As the language moved from Hebrew to Greek to Latin and English Jacov became James. In the Greek New Testament you will see it as Jakobos.

And these two (John and James) are sons of Zebedee and Salome which is the Hellenised form of Shulamit.

5. Philip means “a lover of horses”.
6. Nathaniel (“gift of God”) also goes by the name of Bartholomew.

Bartholomew is not a name but a title. It is the Hellenised form of the two words Bar Talmai, meaning the son of Talmai.

So his full name was Nathaniel the son of Talmai.

7. Thomas (Hebrew), or Didimus (Greek). Both words mean twin. He obviously had a twin brother.
8. Matthew, also called Levi the son of Alpheus. Alpheus is the Greek form for the Hebrew Chalphi.
9. James, the son of Alpheus, not the same Alpheus.
10. Judas, also called Thaddeus or Taddai. He is the brother of James the son of Alpheus. Judas is the Greek form for Judah.
11. Simon the Zealot. He was a member of the zealot party.
12. Judas Iscariot. Iscariot is from the Hebrew of two words, “Ish Kiriote” meaning “man of the village Kiriote.” Kiriote was located in southern Judah.

Brothers

There are three sets of brothers: Simon & Andrew, sons of John (1 & 2); John and James, sons of Salome (3 & 4); and James and Judas, sons of Alpheus (9 & 10).

Salome was the sister of Miriam, the mother of Jesus, making her His aunt and James and John His cousins.

Extremes

There are also two extremes represented in this group.

Notice Matthew and Simon the Zealot.

The Zealots were very energetic in opposing Roman rule, and while the mainline Pharisaism believed in passive resistance, the Zealots were those Pharisees that believed in active resistance. And often they would go around carrying a small dagger, and in a crowd they would often kill fellow Jews who were working for the Romans. Publicans were among their targets.

Therefore, Matthew and Simon the Zealot would normally be enemies.

Three subgroups

Now, turn to Appendix 5 in your harmony.

There are four different records of the twelve apostles. Notice that

1. The first name is always the same: Peter; followed by James, John and Andrew in various orders.
2. The fifth name is always the same: Philip; followed by the same three names in various orders.
3. The ninth name is always the same, with the names below mixed. Judas always last because of his actions.

Now what this may indicate is that within the apostolic group of twelve there were three different groups, each group containing four men, and each group had a leader.

So Simon was the leader of the first group, Philip was the leader of the second group, and James the son of Alphaeus was the leader of the third group. And the names that were below Simon, Philip, and James are those that were under their authority.

16. Messiah's Authority to Interpret the Law, § 54, Matthew 5-7; Luke 6:17-49

Now we come to section 54, which is usually called the Sermon on the Mount because, as Matthew records, *he went up on the mountain*. That title is appropriate enough because it describes where this event took place. But the shortcoming of that title is that it says nothing about the content of the message.

Therefore, in order to focus attention on the content of the sermon, in the outline we have given it the title: *Messiah's Authority to Interpret the Law*.

Now just as the gospels are not merely collections of isolated events and teachings but are the record of a story unfolding with a theme, a purpose, a turning point and a climax, so also the Sermon on the Mount is a well-structured message with a theme, a purpose, contrasts, a conclusion, and a climax.

a. *The Occasion, Matthew 5:1-2; Luke 6:17-19*

Read Matthew 5:1 – 2 and Luke 6:17 – 19.

Notice that Matthew says He sat down – this is a rabbinic position, they always teach the Word of God from a sitting position. Now once again we see Him sitting as he teaches.

Now before we survey the sermon as a whole, it is helpful to consider two questions:

1. What is the historical background leading up to this sermon?
2. In view of that background, exactly what is the sermon as a whole? Or, what is its purpose?

(1) Historical Background

So firstly, what is the historical background leading up to this sermon?

Notice who Luke reports was there at the bottom of the mountain when He came down.

- A large crowd of His disciples, and
- A great throng of people from
 - All Judea and
 - Jerusalem and
 - The coastal region of Tyre and Sidon.

Therefore, this is not a local crowd. They have come from all over the country and beyond its borders. Moreover, many of them have travelled for 3 or 4 days to be there.

Why did they come?

Messianic hope

At that time in Jewish history, the Jewish people were looking for the messianic redemption. They were looking for the coming of the Messiah to establish His Messianic Kingdom as foretold by their prophets.

Jesus has been preaching the good news that the Kingdom is at hand and claiming that He is the Messiah.

Righteousness the key

In addition, the people knew from the prophets that when the Messiah comes, righteousness will be the way of entering the kingdom.

And during the four preceding centuries, Pharisaism had developed, offering people a form of righteousness, but it was a wide way of righteousness, a wide road, because, as we mentioned before, the Pharisees taught that all Israel has a share in the age to come. In other words, anyone born a Jew would make it into the kingdom.

Challenge

From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus has challenged that fundamental teaching, by saying, as He told Nicodemus, that a person must experience a new birth to qualify for the kingdom. And that meant to believe in Him, to believe that He is the Messiah He claims to be.

Therefore, in contrast to the very broad road to the kingdom proclaimed by the Pharisees, He proclaimed a very narrow road.

Conflict

Also, as we have seen, He has been challenging the authority of the oral traditions of the Pharisees, culminating in the controversy over the Sabbath.

Intense interest

Therefore, the question arising in the minds of the crowd was, who is right, Jesus or the Pharisees?

Moreover, **what kind of righteousness is necessary for entry into the kingdom?**

The theme of the Sermon

This is the question addressed by the Sermon on the Mount. **Its theme is True Righteousness.**

The key verse, which expresses the whole purpose of the sermon is found in Matthew 5:20:

For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

With this one statement He rejects Pharisaism on two counts:

1. The righteousness proclaimed by Pharisaic teaching will not qualify them for entry into the Kingdom.
2. Pharisaic teaching has misinterpreted the true righteousness of the Mosaic Law.

(2) What is the sermon as a unit?

In view of that background, exactly what is the sermon as a whole? Or, what is its purpose?

i. First of all, what the Sermon on the Mount is not:

1. It was not intended to be the constitution of the future Messianic Kingdom.

This has been a popular interpretation in pre-millennial and dispensational circles.

If that was the intent it would mean the re-institution of all 613 commandments of the Mosaic Law, and that will not happen again because the Messiah died, bringing the operation of the Law to an end.

2. It is not a way of salvation.

If it were, then salvation would be by works and not faith.

This interpretation is more frequent in liberal Christian circles where they want to avoid the narrow thinking, as they would say it, of believing Jesus to be the only way of salvation. They say that if you keep the principles of the Sermon on the Mount such as the golden rule, you can still go to heaven even if you never come to believe in Jesus.

The problem with that view is that it would make a salvation by works, and salvation is always by grace through faith apart from works.

The sermon provides a rule of life for somebody who is already saved, but not a means of earning salvation.

3. It is not intended to be Church ethics or Christian ethics for this age.

What would it mean if we took this to be ethics for the church?

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:19 that it is not permissible to annul one of the least of these commandments, meaning the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Law.

Therefore, if this applies to the church, then all 613 commandments apply to the church. We cannot choose some and ignore others.

The dietary laws would exclude the eating of bacon or ham. The clothing laws would prohibit the wearing of mixed threads. Moreover, if a man was shaven, or had a rounded beard he would be breaking the law.

Those who consider the sermon to be teaching church ethics have ignored these requirements.

Ethics for the church

Some of the things He mentions in this sermon do become ethics for the church, but those things are not ethics for the church because they are mentioned here.

How can we know which things these are?

Those things which apply to the church are either repeated later in the gospel accounts in a context which applies them to believers, or they are repeated in the writings of the apostles.

To summarise: these three things are what the sermon is not: It is not the constitution of the kingdom; It is not a way of salvation; and it is not church ethics for this age.

ii. What the Sermon on the Mount is:

Now we come to our question: exactly what is the sermon as a whole? Or, what is its purpose?

A contrast

In His sermon Jesus does two things:

He gives His interpretation of the standard of righteousness demanded by the Law of Moses.

And He contrasts that with the Pharisaic interpretation of the righteousness which the Law demanded.

Basis for contrast

What is the key element of the contrast?

The foundation of the contrast, the primary difference between the two interpretations, is that the Mosaic Law requires both external and internal conformity, whereas the Pharisees believed it only required external conformity.

The Mosaic Law required both internal and external conformity.

Therefore, in His sermon Jesus contrasts the external appearance of righteousness with the internal reality of righteousness required by the Law of Moses.

His method

How does He bring out the contrast?

For each of the written Laws of Moses, the Pharisees have derived many laws in their oral tradition. These oral laws reveal their interpretation of the righteousness required by the underlying written law.

As you will soon see, Jesus will take one of these oral laws at a time and use it to contrast their interpretation of the righteousness required by the underlying Mosaic law with His interpretation of the righteousness required by that underlying command.

b. The Characteristics of True Righteousness

From the prophets we know that the Messianic Kingdom was to be an age of righteousness. One of the purposes of the seventy sevens announced to Daniel (9:24b) is to bring in an age of everlasting righteousness. This age of righteousness is the Messianic Kingdom.

The same point is made by Isaiah 1:26-27; 11:4-5; 32:17; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-16. And in Isaiah 60:21 we also see that the people themselves will be righteous.

Isaiah 1:26–27 (NASB95)

²⁶ *“Then I will restore your judges as at the first,
And your counselors as at the beginning;
After that you will be called the city of righteousness,
A faithful city.”*

²⁷ *Zion will be redeemed with justice
And her repentant ones with righteousness.*

Isaiah 11:4–5 (NASB95)

⁴ *But with righteousness He will judge the poor,
And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth;
And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.*

⁵ *Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins,
And faithfulness the belt about His waist.*

Isaiah 32:17 (NASB95)

¹⁷ *And the work of righteousness will be peace,
And the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever.*

Jeremiah 23:5–6 (NASB95)

⁵ *“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord,
“When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch;
And He will reign as king and act wisely
And do justice and righteousness in the land.*

⁶ *"In His days Judah will be saved,
And Israel will dwell securely;
And this is His name by which He will be called,
'The Lord our righteousness.'*

Jeremiah 33:15–16 (NASB95)

¹⁵ *'In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth.*

¹⁶ *'In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: the Lord is our righteousness.'*

Isaiah 60:21 (NASB95)

²¹ *"Then all your people will be righteous;
They will possess the land forever,
The branch of My planting,
The work of My hands,
That I may be glorified.*

Here, in Isaiah 60:21, the Lord is addressing Jerusalem and declaring that all her people will be righteous.

In these passages we find that the Messianic Kingdom is an age of righteousness and the people themselves will be righteous.

We also see in these passages some of the characteristics of righteousness. Righteousness will bring about peace, quietness and confidence in God.

(1) The Characteristics of Those Who Attain True Righteousness

Now we come to the beatitudes in which Jesus describes the characteristics of the true righteousness that is required by the Law of Moses and that is required for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Jews who are listening to him understand that righteousness is essential in the Kingdom. It will be the requirement for entry into the Kingdom. But they define righteousness by the Oral Traditions of the Pharisees.

In the beatitudes Jesus is going to describe the characteristics of true righteousness, that righteousness which is required by the written Law, and which is essential for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven.

As we look at the beatitudes we will see that each one has two parts. The first part describes a characteristic of those who have true righteousness. And the second part gives the blessing or the reward for those described in the first part.

Furthermore we will see that just as the first part describes a characteristic of those who have true righteousness, so the second part describes a related aspect of entry into the Kingdom that will be enjoyed by those who are righteous.

i. In Relationship to God: The Beatitudes Part 1: Matthew 5:3-6

The first four beatitudes deal with a right relationship with God.

1. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* (v3)

To be *poor in spirit* is to have a right and proper evaluation of oneself before God. It is the opposite of pride. Those who are poor in spirit have a right evaluation of themselves before God, recognising they have no righteousness of their own and the righteousness that they have is because of faith in God, and it is the righteousness of God in them. This is the first characteristic of true righteousness.

And the result will be entry into the Kingdom of Heaven; *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. Although they are poor in spirit now they shall possess the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.* (v4)

To *mourn* means to develop a sensitivity to sin that leads to the confession of sins to God.

Jeremiah describes in chapter 31 the regathering of Israel. In verse 9 he says *with weeping they will come*. They will be mourning their sin, particularly their national sin of rejecting their Messiah.

Then Jeremiah 31:13 describes how their mourning will be turned into joy and they will be comforted:

*Then the virgin will rejoice in the dance,
And the young men and the old, together,
For I will turn their mourning into joy
And will comfort them and give them joy for their sorrow.*

So the second characteristic of true righteousness is mourning that will be turned into joy and comfort in the Messianic Kingdom.

3. *Blessed are the gentle [meek], for they shall inherit the earth.* (v5)

Meekness means to have a quiet confidence in God, and submission to God's authority. It is confidence that God can bring us through any situation.

We can see in Isaiah 32:17b that *the service of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.*

Jesus says that those who have this quality and live a life of confidence in God and submission to Him *shall inherit the earth.*

What does that mean?

It means they will someday exercise authority over the earth when they inherit the earth in the Messianic Kingdom.

4. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.* (v6)

Another characteristic of those who attain true righteousness is an internal desire for righteousness. They *hunger and thirst for righteousness.*

What is righteousness?

Righteousness is living according to an absolute standard, and in this context the absolute standard is the Mosaic Law.

Therefore, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are those who long to live according to the Law of Moses.

When will they be satisfied?

The prophets wrote of the Israelites being satisfied in the Messianic Kingdom. For example Jeremiah 31:14 says: *My people will be satisfied with My goodness.* And Jeremiah 31:25 says: *For I satisfy the weary ones and refresh everyone who languishes.*

ii. *In Relationship to Man: The Beatitudes Part 2: Matthew 5:7-12*

Then we have the characteristics of those who attain true righteousness in relationship to man.

1. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.* (v7)

To be merciful means to show compassion and to respond to the need of others – to meet the needs of others as we are able.

Ezekiel writes in 39:25: *Therefore thus says the Lord God, "Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name.*

Jeremiah 33:26 says the same thing.

Those who have a righteousness characterised by mercy will be found in the Kingdom where they will receive mercy.

2. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (v8)*

To be *pure in heart* is to have a heart that is undivided, has no darkness, and has nothing to hide. It means to be honest and to operate and do good things out of a proper motivation, a love of God.

So their acts of mercy described in the previous beatitude will come from a pure motive.

The pure in heart will also be in the Kingdom of Heaven where they will see the Messiah who is God.

3. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (v9)*

In Isaiah 32:17a we read, *the work of righteousness will be peace.*

In addition, James writes in 3:18: *the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

In His context, Jesus is talking about peace and unity between believers, not a political peace or a peace between nations.

Such peacemaking is a characteristic of true righteousness and those who possess this quality *shall be called sons of God*, and therefore they too will be found in the Kingdom of Heaven.

4. *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. (v10)*

Those who live consistently with the absolute standard required by the true righteousness of the Law will raise a sense of guilt among those observing them who are not believers. This in turn could bring on (and often does bring on) persecution.

The apostle John gives the example of Cain who killed his brother because his own deeds were evil while his brother's deeds were righteous in 1 John 3:10 – 13.

¹⁰ *By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.* ¹¹ *For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;* ¹² *not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.* ¹³ *Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.*

Those who live according to true righteousness can expect to be persecuted, but they are assured of entry into the Messianic Kingdom, *for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

5. In light of His coming on the scene and claiming to be the Messiah, Jesus makes one more point. (v11-12)

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me”.

Now those who will accept His Messiahship will be rejected by the Jewish community.

Before He came they would be persecuted only because of their consistent living in accordance with the Mosaic Law. Now those who believe in the Messiahship of Jesus are also going to attract persecution.

But those who are willing to suffer the persecution will reach a level of spiritual happiness that others cannot attain. And, Jesus adds in verse 12: their *reward in heaven is great*.

These are the characteristics of those who attain the true righteousness required by the Law, both in relationship to God and in relationship to man. They will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

(2) The Characteristics of Those Who Fail: Luke 6:24-26

Read Luke’s account in verses 24-26.

Here Jesus gives the contrasting characteristics of those who fail to attain the true righteousness of the Law. In place of blessings, they will have woes.

He points out that they are characterised by four things: wealth, for materialism is their focus; self-satisfaction; mirth or laughter; and a reputation.

Here He uses four descriptions of their physical state to point out four characteristics of their spiritual state.

1. *Wealth*

Woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. (v24)

Instead of being poor in spirit they consider themselves to be rich in righteousness.

In Revelation 3:17 – 18 Jesus says a similar thing to the church in Laodicea:

‘Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see’.

Although the Laodiceans considered themselves to be rich they lacked righteousness as represented by the white garments which they were advised to buy.

In their pride the Pharisees also consider themselves to be rich in righteousness and in need of nothing spiritually. They also seek and obtain material wealth and they become rich materially, but fail to lay up for themselves treasure in heaven.

Jesus says they are receiving their comfort in full, in other words they are receiving their reward in this age and will not receive comfort in the Kingdom of Heaven. They will be excluded.

2. *Self-satisfaction*

Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. (v25a)

In contrast with the righteous who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the Pharisees consider themselves to be righteous and therefore do not hunger and thirst for righteousness.

In contrast with those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who will be satisfied in the Kingdom of Heaven, those who are well fed now will be hungry.

In other words, they will not find themselves in the Kingdom of Heaven.

3. *Laughter*

Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. (v25b)

In contrast with those who mourn their sinfulness now and find comfort in the Kingdom of Heaven, those who do not have true righteousness laugh now but will weep and mourn when they find themselves excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven.

We see this illustrated later in the parable of the wedding feast, in Matthew 22:11 – 13, where there was a man who was not dressed in wedding clothes. The wedding clothes represent true righteousness. In that parable, the unrighteous man is thrown into the outer darkness where *there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*.

While they are characterised by laughter in this age, they will find themselves weeping in the age to come.

4. *Reputation*

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way. (v 26)

Here is a direct contrast with the righteous who are persecuted for righteousness sake (Matthew 6:11 – 12).

The righteous are persecuted in the same way as the prophets who were before them.

The unrighteous on the other hand have a good reputation with all men. Their fathers, while persecuting the true prophets, used to speak well of the false prophets.

Instead of having the blessing of the Kingdom of Heaven these ones have woe because they will not see the Kingdom.

Here in Luke's account, Jesus provides four characteristics of those who fail to attain the righteousness of the Law, and He indicates that they will not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

(3) The Characteristics of True Righteousness in Relationship to the World
The Beatitudes Part 3: Matthew 5:13-16

In Matthew's account, Jesus goes on to describe the characteristics of true righteousness in relationship to the world, and he points out two things.

1. *Salt*

First of all in verse 13 he says:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men."

Who is He addressing here when He says, "you"?

As Luke described them, "there was a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon."

These are Jews who have come from all over the land of Israel and beyond its borders because of their intense interest in His teaching and His works.

Here Jesus describes the Jews as the salt of the earth and he refers to salt that has become tasteless.

How can salt become tasteless?

Salt as we know it is pure sodium chloride and cannot lose its saltiness. But in the Middle East of Jesus' day salt was obtained from mineral deposits that were a mixture of several minerals, and, if it was exposed to rain or moisture from the earth, the sodium chloride would be leached out of it and it would become tasteless.

Now just as their salt contained within it a salty flavoured component, so Israel contained within it a believing Remnant, who were intended by God to be the flavour of righteousness in the world. They were to possess the characteristics of true righteousness for all the earth to savour. In this way the Jews were the salt of the earth.

But, they had lost their flavour of righteousness because so many of them were following the Pharisaic tradition of righteousness instead of the true righteousness required by the Law. They had become tasteless.

Such salt, Jesus says,

is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

This indeed is what has happened to the Jews. They were removed from their land, and both they and their land have been trampled underfoot by Gentiles.

In passing, it is worth noting that this is not the final state of the Jews, but following that train of thought would take us away from our present study.

2. *Light*

Secondly, in verses 14-16 He says:

- 14 *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;*
15 *nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.*
16 *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Here Jesus describes those who attain the true righteousness required by the Law as *the light of the world*.

And the prophet Isaiah describes the righteousness of Jerusalem in the Messianic Kingdom as a bright light for all the nations to see.

Isaiah 61:11-62:2

- 11 *For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
And as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up,
So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
To spring up before all the nations.*
- 1 *For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent,
And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not keep quiet,
Until her righteousness goes forth like brightness,
And her salvation like a torch that is burning.*
- 2 *The nations will see your righteousness,
And all kings your glory;
And you will be called by a new name
Which the mouth of the Lord will designate.*

And so Jesus says,

Just as a city on a hill cannot be hidden at night, but its light can be seen from a long way off, and

Just as in a house we light a lamp and put it where its light will be useful,

So those who attain true righteousness should allow their good works to be seen, so that others will glorify their Father who is in heaven.

He has already pointed out that the righteous will suffer persecution. Now He encourages them to persevere in their righteousness in spite of persecution.

When they do, unbelievers will see their light (their good works) and become believers themselves, thereby glorifying God who is in heaven.

c. *The Code of True Righteousness, Matthew 5:17-48*

In the beatitudes, we saw Jesus describing the characteristics of true righteousness and contrasting them with the characteristics of false righteousness. Then He showed how true righteousness relates to the world.

Next He addresses the question of the code of true righteousness: What is the standard that defines true righteousness?

When He has answered that question, He will go on to discuss the correct interpretation of that code, then after that He will discuss the correct practice of that code.

Therefore, we are about to see the answers to three questions in turn:

What is the code or standard which defines true righteousness?

How should that standard be interpreted?

How is it to be practised?

(1) Introduction: Matthew 5:17-20

He will fulfil the Law

Read verse 17.

¹⁷*“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.*

The Greek word translated *abolish* here is the word *katalyo*, and it means to divide, demolish, destroy, or throw down as a building or its materials. The ASV aptly translates it as *destroy*.

In these few verses Jesus spelled out His own relationship to the Law. He pointed out that He came for the purpose of fulfilling the Law; He did not come to destroy it.

Indeed, He proved to be the only Jew who ever kept the Mosaic Law perfectly.

Because He kept the Law perfectly, He was able to be a substitute for those who failed to keep it. As a substitute, He took upon Himself the penalty of the Law and shed His blood for that penalty.

Then, by His death and resurrection, He rendered the Law inoperative, bringing it to an end so that it is no longer in effect. (See Ephesians 2:11 – 16).

Therefore, He says He came, not to abolish the Law, but to fulfil it.

Have a look at Ephesians 2:11-16 (NASB).

¹¹ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” *which is performed in the flesh by human hands*— ¹² *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you, who formerly were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

In verses 11 & 12 Paul addresses his Gentile readers and declares that they were *separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

In verse 13 he says the blood of Christ has brought them near.

In verse 14 the word *for* at the beginning of the verse introduces the explanation of how it is that the Gentiles *have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

In verse 14, He did it by breaking down the barrier or dividing wall.

And how did He do that?

The answer is in verse 15: *by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances.* Notice that the *dividing wall, or the enmity, is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances.*

Then notice in verse 16 that the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile into one body was achieved, Paul says, *through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.*

The enmity was put to death by the cross. And what is the enmity? In verse 15 he tells us the enmity is the law.

So we see that the Law was abolished or put to death by the cross.

And here the word translated *abolish* is a different Greek word from the one used in Matthew's gospel. It is *katargeo* which means to render inactive, idle, useless, ineffective, to destroy, cause to cease, do away with, put an end to. Whereas the word Jesus used in Matthew's gospel conveys the idea of destroying as we might demolish a building, in Ephesians Paul uses a word that means to render inactive, cause to cease, do away with or put an end to.

Therefore the Law has been rendered inactive or inoperative by His death on the cross.

Now, back in Matthew's gospel we read that Jesus said that He didn't come to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it.

Notice in passing that Jesus not only fulfilled the righteousness required by the Law, He also fulfilled the penalty required by the Law for those who do not have that righteousness.

He came to fulfil the Law and then, as we read in Ephesians, to bring it to an end so that it is no longer active.

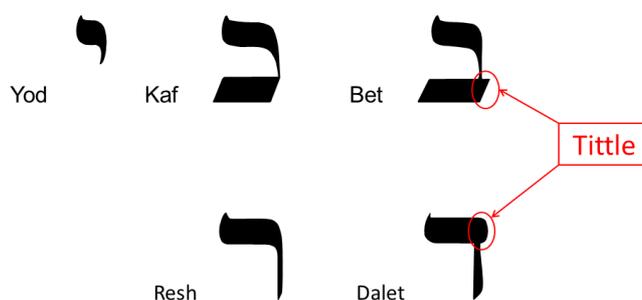
In addition to stating His purpose, this statement makes a direct contrast with Pharisaism, because Pharisaism was in fact destroying the Law by its many additions, reinterpretations and changes.

Even the smallest letter or stroke

Read verse 18.

¹⁸*“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

He will be the one who will fulfil every jot and tittle. What does that refer to?



The word jot actually refers to the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the letter yod. Yod is the smallest letter of the alphabet. It is about a quarter of the size of the other letters.

The point of saying not one yod is that He will fulfil the Law down to the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Now what is the tittle?

Some Hebrew letters look very much the same, like the letter bet and the letter kaf. The only difference is a small thing protruding at one corner. That is the tittle. Another example is dalet and resh.

Tittle is the smallest part of a single Hebrew letter.

The point is: not only will he fulfil the Law down to the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, He will also fulfil the Law down to the smallest part of a single Hebrew letter.

By using the letters in this way He points out that the Law He intends to fulfil is the written Law, the one Moses gave.

He does not intend to fulfil the Mishnaic Law.

Moreover, He will fulfil the Law of Moses perfectly down to every yod and tittle.

All of it

Read verse 19.

¹⁹*“Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

What is His point here?

Not only will He fulfil the smallest letter and stroke of a letter of the Law, He also points out that, until He has fulfilled it, not even the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will be removed from it.

Here He points out that all 613 commandments of the Law must be kept. The Law of Moses is one unit. Either it is all in or it is all out.

His point is that, until He fulfils the Law at His death and resurrection, they have to keep all 613 commandments, even the least of them.

Pharisaism repudiated

Read verse 20.

²⁰*“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Having stated His own purpose for keeping the Law He went on to repudiate the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law because Pharisaism was destroying the Law by means of its many added traditions.

Often these traditions circumvented the keeping of the Law.

In verse 20, He repudiated Pharisaism on two counts:

- i. First as the proper interpretation of the kind of righteousness demanded by the Law; and
- ii. secondly, as the kind of righteousness required for entering the Messianic Kingdom.

The kind of righteousness they were offering is too wide a righteousness. His righteousness is a narrow type of righteousness. The kind of righteousness that will qualify someone for God’s kingdom is the kind of righteousness that will be given only to those accept Him as Messiah.

(2) Examples of the Code of True Righteousness: Matthew 5:21-4

Following this introduction to the code of true righteousness, He then gave specific examples showing the difference between His interpretation of the kind of righteousness demanded by the Law and the Pharisaic interpretation of that righteousness.

What Jesus did is this: He picked out six specific commandments of the Mosaic Law and then differentiated His interpretation from that of the Pharisees.

The contrast was between mere external conformity and internal conformity.

The Pharisaic interpretation was to declare that one was not guilty of violating the righteousness of the Law until He committed the act forbidden by the Law. However, Jesus taught that this was wrong. While one was not guilty of breaking the letter of the Law until he committed the act, he had violated the righteousness of the Law before that.

In the examples that follow we see Him using a pattern: “you have heard that it was said”, followed by a quotation from the oral Law, then followed by “but I say to you ...”, followed by His interpretation of the written Law.

When Jesus says, as He does in other contexts, “It is written....” He is speaking about the Mosaic Law, the written Law.

When Jesus says here, “You have heard it said...” He is speaking about the Mishnah. The Mishnah is the Oral Law and it is said out loud. It was not written until AD 220.

Jesus picks a Mosaic Law and compares their interpretation of it to His interpretation.

Here in these six examples the focus is on interpretation.

i. The Law regarding murder: Matthew 5:21-26

His first example is the law against pre-meditated murder found in Exodus 20:13.

In the Pharisaic interpretation you were not guilty of breaking the righteousness of this command until you commit the act. The Messiah says this is a wrong interpretation. You do not break the letter of the command until you commit the act, and you cannot be punished by the law until the act is committed, but the righteousness of the command is broken before that.

He points out that before anyone commits murder he first of all develops inside of him an animosity towards the victim. Once the animosity is inside him the righteousness of this command has been broken.

“raca” is an Aramaic term meaning “you empty head”. Once you start calling people names, not in friendly jest, but in animosity, the righteousness of this command has already been broken.

The Mosaic Law did not merely require external conformity; it required both external and internal conformity.

ii. *The Law regarding adultery: Matthew 5:27-30*

The second example comes from Exodus 20:14, which is the law concerning adultery.

Pharisees say you are not guilty of adultery until you commit the act.

Jesus says that is wrong: true righteousness requires a pure mind. Once the lust is there internally, righteousness has been broken.

Again, you do not violate the letter of the command until the act is committed, and you cannot be stoned to death until the act is committed.

But the righteousness of the command is broken before the act is performed. Before a married man commits adultery he begins to lust after someone he is not married to. Once the lust is there inside him the righteousness of this command has already been broken.

It is the internal violation that could lead to the act of adultery. Whether it does or does not lead to adultery the righteousness of this command has been broken.

iii. *The Law regarding divorce: Matthew 5:31-32*

This will be discussed further in §122.

In Deuteronomy 24:1 there is a commandment concerning the issue of divorce.

The Pharisees interpreted it to mean that one may divorce his wife for any and every reason. Even the mere burning of supper became grounds for divorce in the Pharisaic interpretation.

Again Jesus said that was wrong because the kind of righteousness which this law of divorce was trying to perpetuate was to show that God hated divorce, and therefore the grounds for divorce were to be extremely limited.

There was only one acceptable ground for divorce: fornication.

To allow divorce for any and every cause went beyond what the Law allowed, so the righteousness of the Law was again violated.

iv. *The Law regarding taking of an oath: Mathew 5:33-37*

According to Numbers 30:2,²

“If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

The rabbis developed many ways of saying oaths such that, if they say it one way they have to keep it, and if they say it another way they don't have to keep it. But the person hearing them would not know that subtle difference.

Jesus points out in this section that a believer should be recognised to be true to his word. If a believer says “yea” or “nay” it should be understood to be “yea” or “nay” and so a believer should not have to take an oath to be believed.

v. *The Law regarding Punishment or An Eye for an Eye : Matthew 5:38-42*

His fifth example concerns the Pharisees' interpretation of Exodus 21:22 – 24.

Exodus 21:22–24 (NASB95)

²² *"If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide. ²³ "But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,*

The context of this commandment is dealing with the legal punishment to be determined by a court of law. The principle is that the punishment must fit the crime.

But the Pharisees used this law as the basis for personal vengeance, ignoring the fact that the righteousness of the Law is characterised by love of neighbour, and ignoring the fact that God says in the Old Testament "Vengeance is mine", He will repay. So they totally misconstrued the purpose of this commandment and violated the righteousness of the Law.

Jesus tells them not to resist the evil person, it would be more consistent with the righteousness of the Law to let the matter go without demanding one's rights.

vi. *The Law of Love : Matthew 5:43-48*

The last example concerns the command to love your neighbour found in Leviticus 19:18.

Leviticus 19:18 (NASB95)

¹⁸ *'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.*

As Jesus quoted it, the teaching of the Pharisees changed this command to: *love your neighbour and hate your enemy*. They based this on the example of David in Psalm 139:21.

Psalm 139:21 (NASB95)

²¹ *Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?*

In the context of Leviticus 19:18, their neighbour is their fellow countryman. However, the Pharisees defined neighbour, not merely as being a fellow Jew, but a fellow Pharisee. They divided the Jewish world between a group called the *haverim*, those who are fellow Pharisees, and the *'am ha-arets*, people of the land outside the Pharisaic circle.

And by making that unnecessary division they limited the loving of neighbour only to fellow Pharisees.

The principle of the Law is that a man's neighbour is anyone who has a need that he can meet. The love required by the law will do things for others, and especially for those without the means to repay.

d. *The Conduct of True Righteousness*

In this section there is a repudiation of Pharisaic action. Whereas in the previous section He repudiated the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law, here He repudiated the Pharisaic practices concerning the Law.

Again, He first stated the principle, and then gave three specific examples.

(1) Introduction – The Principle: Matthew 6:1

Earlier in his sermon (5:16) He said: *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Now He says (6:1): *Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.*

Here He points out that the practice of righteousness should not be done for the sake of merely being seen by men and to be approved by men, but rather it should be done for the sake of the Lord. Therefore these actions often need to be done in secret.

If anyone does good things to be honoured by men, then that itself is the ultimate reward they will receive.

Our purpose in doing good things is to meet the needs of others or for the good of others. Our motivation should be to do this for love of God and not for the honour we may receive from it.

This is the principle: The motivation for works of righteousness which are seen by others should be to please God and not to be commended by men. The reward will be according to the motivation. Those who seek commendation from men will receive it and that is all they will receive. But those who seek to please the heavenly Father will receive a reward from Him.

(2) Examples of Conduct of True Righteousness: Matthew 6:2-18

Having stated the principle, Jesus gives three examples of what the conduct of true righteousness looks like: Alms giving, prayer, and fasting.

i. In Alms Giving, Matthew 6:2 – 4

A common practice of the wealthy when they were about to make a donation was to announce it by sounding a trumpet. Their motivation was obvious, and their only reward will be the sought after praise of men.

The application of the principle for the conduct of true righteousness is to give in secret.

ii. In Prayer – Four Lessons: Matthew 6:5-15

1) Pray in Secret, Matthew 6:5-6

Do not use public prayer as an opportunity to show off oratory skills. One should pray in secret. In areas of Pharisaic Judaism prayer tended to be public with Pharisees congregating together in public to pray three times a day. Frequently the purpose of meeting three times a day was only to show how holy they were. Those who pray publicly to show off their spirituality and their

oratory skills have already received their reward. However, the purpose of prayer is to communicate with God.

2) *Do not use Vain Repetition, Matthew 6:7-8*

We should not use prescribed prayers.

None of the Gentile religions had extemporaneous prayer; all prayer was memorized or recited from prayer books. By this point in time the same was true of Judaism, because all prayers were prescribed through a prayer book – daily prayer books, Sabbath prayer books, prayer books for special occasions. To this day, the synagogue uses prayer books.

The problem with prayer books is that you are merely mouthing words that somebody else wrote.

However, prayer should come from the heart, in our own words speaking to our God.

3) *Use the Pattern of Prayer, Matthew 6:9-15*

Having told them what not to do when they pray, He now tells them what they are to do.

Notice how He begins. He says, "*Pray, then, in this way.*"

Is this an instruction to recite these words in prayer?

Surely not, in view of what He as just said about vain repetition! Moreover, He does not say to pray or recite this prayer. Rather, He says to *pray in this way* or in this manner. In other words, what follows is a pattern or outline for prayer.

He gives us a six-part outline of how to organise our prayer life. This does not rule out other prayers during the day, but in our routine prayer time, this is a good outline to follow.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Our Father who is in heaven | Address God the Father, not the Son or the Holy Spirit. We don't have any examples in Scripture of prayers addressed to the Son or to the Holy Spirit. All prayers which are truly prayers are addressed to God the Father. |
| 2. Hallowed be Your Name | Set God apart in such a way that we are focused on Him. Reflect upon the various attributes of God, how each attribute shows the uniqueness of God, and what practical ramifications it has for believers living today. Focus on who and what God is. |
| 3. Your Kingdom Come, Your Will be done, On earth as it is in Heaven | Pray for the Kingdom Program with all its facets including His return, evangelism, salvation of family members or other unbelievers, work of pastors, missionaries, maturing believers ... All these things are part of God's Kingdom Program. This is also the time to pray for the Lord's soon return; this is the time to pray, Maranatha (I Cor. 16:22), even so come Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:20), "come quickly, Lord Jesus." This is the time to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6) and for the salvation of the Jewish people. |
| 4. Give us this day our daily bread | Pray for your own daily needs: finances, personal crisis, etc. Pray for both personal needs and the needs of the ministry with which you are associated. |

5. Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us

Pray for forgiveness of our sins and forgive others. This is the time to confess our sins. The tendency is to think that confession of sins should come first so the slate can be wiped clean before one makes any requests known unto God. However, that is not the order given in this outline. After having addressed prayer to God the Father, after God has been sanctified, after praying for the Kingdom Program, and after praying for our own daily needs, it is time to wipe the slate clean. It is at this point that one can see that in order to have these requests answered, one needs to confess every sin of which one is aware since the previous confession. This is the time to ask the Lord's forgiveness even for unknown sins and for the sin-nature with which believers have to contend. This is the time to apply I John 1:9: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

6. Lead us not into
temptation but
deliver us from evil

Spiritual warfare concerning spiritual conflicts of the world, the flesh and the devil. The prayer ends with spiritual warfare because when the prayer is concluded the spiritual warfare begins in earnest.

4) *Re Forgiveness, Matthew 6:14-15*

At the end of this section about prayer Jesus pointed out something else. In order for the one praying to be heard by God, he should have a forgiving spirit toward fellow saints. If he is not willing to forgive those who have offended him then he should not expect to receive family forgiveness from the Lord.

In this context the issue is not salvation but fellowship; not salvation forgiveness but family forgiveness. Salvation forgiveness is the means by which one enters into God's family, and the only way of receiving salvation forgiveness is by grace through faith apart from works. But once one is in the family, sin in the believer's life can cause a breakup in the relationship within the family of God. And it can break one's fellowship with God the Father. The way a believer receives family forgiveness of sins is by means of confession according to 1 John 1:9.

The point Jesus is making here is that asking for forgiveness will not restore fellowship with God unless we are also forgiving towards others.

5) *Re praying in His Name*

At this point, He did not say to pray in His name. Remember, in this context He was teaching the standard of righteousness which the Law demanded and the kind of prayer, which the Law demanded. Therefore, He is dealing with the standard of righteousness within the scope of the Law of Moses, and praying in His name is something that only came with the new Law, the Law of the Messiah. Since, in this context, Jesus is concerned only with the Law of Moses, He did not state that one should ask in His name. At this point, He was only explaining the righteousness, which the Law demanded.

iii. In Fasting: Matthew 6:16-18

In the Pharisaic practice of fasting, whenever one went through a period of fasting, he made sure everyone knew it. He would continually refer to his extreme hunger. If someone offered him food, he would say, "Oh no, I can't eat now; I am separated to the Lord by means of fasting." It became evident that the fasting was not to receive honour from the Lord; the fasting was to receive honour from men. Again, this illustrates the principle difference between doing it for the public and doing it in secret for the Lord.

Believers are never commanded to fast. Fasting is purely an option, but if a believer chooses to fast, he must do so to honour the Lord and not to receive honour from men. Therefore, if a believer chooses to go through a period of fasting, he should not go around bragging about it. As soon as his fasting becomes obvious, it is time to eat again.

e. *The Practice of True Righteousness*

In this section, Jesus gives five more lessons in the practice of true righteousness.

(1) Regarding Treasure and Money, Matthew 6:19-24

Read Matthew 6:19 – 21.

What is the point Jesus is making here?

His point is that a man's heart will determine what he treasures and where his treasure is.

For a closer look at the nature of the heart, have a look at Jeremiah 17:5 – 10, where Jeremiah describes the heart.

Jeremiah 17:5–10 (NASB95)

⁵ Thus says the Lord, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the Lord. ⁶ "For he will be like a bush in the desert And will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, A land of salt without inhabitant.

⁷ "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord And whose trust is the Lord. ⁸ "For he will be like a tree planted by the water, That extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit.

⁹ "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? ¹⁰ "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.

In verses 5 and 6 Jeremiah describes *the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord.*

In verses 7 and 8 he contrasts this with *the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD.*

Then in verse 9 he says *the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?*

Therefore a man may be deceived by his own heart and he may be unable to understand it.

How can a man know where his heart is? By looking to see what it treasures.

The point Jesus is making here is that a man's heart will determine what his treasure is.

Read verses 22 – 23.

Here He points out the importance of what we are looking at or what we focus on. In the context, if we focus on wealth and material things then we will have darkness. If we are looking to God we will have light.

Read verse 24.

In verse 24 the principle is: we cannot serve two masters; and the question is: in which master do we trust for our security?

The word mammon is a common rabbinic term for what the world offers materially, including money, wealth, and possessions. If we give ourselves to serving money, we will fail to serve God. If we serve God and do what we have to do then our needs will be provided, and we will know how to use the mammon when it comes to us.

And why does this work? Because we cannot serve two masters, and the one we serve will influence our heart, which in turn will determine where our treasure is.

Key ideas

What are the key ideas in this paragraph?

- i. There are two masters: God and Mammon. In addition, it is only possible to serve one of them.
- ii. If a man is serving God, his eye will be clear and he will be full of light. On the other hand, if he is serving mammon, his eye will be dark and he will be full of darkness.
- iii. Which master a man is serving will be evident in where his treasure is, either on earth or in heaven.

(2) Regarding Anxiety, Matthew 6:25-34

Verse 25 begins *for this reason*.

For what reason?

Because there are only two masters and we can only serve one of them, and obviously we should be serving and trusting God.

We should not be anxious for our basic needs, because, as he points out (in verses 25-31), God takes care of the birds of the heavens, and he takes care of the flowers of the field. No matter how worried we get we cannot change the situation.

Notice also the argument from the lesser to the greater (*kal v'chomer*). If God cares so well for the animal and plant kingdoms, how much more will God care for us?

There are three basic things we can trust God to provide in normal times (periods of persecution are an exception): A roof over our heads; Clothing for our body; & Food on the table.

In verse 32 Jesus gives two reasons why they should not worry.

1. First, *the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things*. They should not be like the Gentiles who don't know God.
2. Secondly, *your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things*. They can trust God who knows their needs.

Then in verse 33 He comes to the very point of his sermon. The conduct of true righteousness teaches: seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, be concerned about doing the righteousness of God, and all these things—food, clothing, and shelter—will be added to you. They will be provided.

The focus of the believer's life is to be God's kingdom and His righteousness. In other words the motivation in his life should be the advancement of God's kingdom and righteous living. And righteous living in this context means to live consistently with the Law of Moses as interpreted by Jesus.

Again, the contrast here is between His kingdom and His righteousness and that of the Pharisees. He emphasises the contrast between God's righteousness and that of the Pharisees.

(3) Regarding Judging, Matthew 7:1-6, Luke 6:37 – 42

Read Matthew 7:1 – 6.

How is this verse often used?

People often use it, out of context, to say that believers should not judge other believers. That is not the issue here. In fact, the Bible tells us to confront people living in sin, and the practice of church discipline described in Matt 18 requires a measure of judgement.

The standard of measure

What is the key issue, which is revealed in verse 2?

The emphasis is upon *your standard of measure*.

What was the standard of measure used by the Pharisees?

The Pharisees judged the Judaism of other Jews according to how they conformed to the oral law and rabbinic traditions.

The point is that they are not to use manmade standards, such as the Mishnah, to judge other Jews.

What is the proper standard?

The proper standard, in the context of the time, is the righteousness required by the Law of Moses.

The spec and the log

Now look at verses 3 and 4.

What do a spec of sawdust and a log have in common?

Both are made of the same thing, differing only in size. While the spec will irritate the eye, the log will make the eye blind. The eye will not be able to see past it.

Those who judge others based on added rules and regulations are like those who try to take a mere piece of sawdust from a person's eye, not realising that they have a plank of wood in their own eye.

What do the spec and the log represent?

They represent transgressions against the man-made standards of the oral law.

The point is we cannot use manmade criteria to judge others. If we do, God will ultimately show us that we ourselves do not meet up with these manmade standards.

In verse 5, Jesus exhorts them first to take the log out of their own eyes. How can they do that?

They can remove the log from their own eyes by looking at themselves in the light of the righteousness required by the Law of Moses.

When they have done that, they will see clearly by the same light to help their fellow Jews to remove the spec from their eyes.

Casting pearls

Who are the dogs and swine of verse 6?

They are those already committed to rejecting the truth. Their purpose in coming together is to ridicule and reject the truth.

To give such people the truth is like giving pearls to swine or giving something holy to dogs to tear apart.

Instead, the gems of the Word of God must be given to those willing to learn and willing to accept it.

(4) Regarding persistence in prayer, Matthew 7:7-11

Jesus has already taught four lessons on prayer in this sermon.

- i. The motivation for prayer should not be to be seen by men.
- ii. It should not be vain repetition of prescribed words.
- iii. It should be organized as in the pattern of prayer He gave.
- iv. There must be a spirit of forgiveness in the one who prays.

Now He teaches one more lesson here: that prayer should be persistent.

Read Matthew 7:7 – 11.

The verbs ask, seek and knock are in the Greek present tense, emphasising continuous action – keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking until the problem is resolved or until the burden is lifted.

Since it is coming from the heart, this is not vain repetition such as praying through a prayer book. Jesus encourages them to continue to present a request to God until it is resolved.

Notice the *kal v'chomer* argument here, the argument from the lesser to the greater:

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

Later Jesus will teach to pray in His name, but at this time, the Jews were still under the Law of Moses.

(5) The Golden Rule: The Core of the Practice of True Righteousness, Matthew 7:12

Read Matthew 7:12.

Notice the structure of this statement: In everything, therefore, do something, for this reason.

In everything... He is summing up everything that He has been saying.

Therefore... Why is the therefore there? What follows is linked to what He has just finished saying. Because of the characteristics of true righteousness, because of the code of true righteousness and its interpretation, because of the outworking of true righteousness in practice, indeed because of true righteousness itself, *treat people the way you want them to treat you*. And why?

For this is the Law and the prophets. In other words, in the area of actions, this summarises the Law and the Prophets. The Law contained commandments in relationship to God and in relationship to man. As long as we keep the commandments in relationship to God we will keep the commandments in relationship to men. If we fail to keep the commandments in relationship to men we are also failing to keep our commandments in relationship to God. This is the core of the Law and the Prophets.

f. *The Warnings Concerning True Righteousness*

Now He finishes by giving special instructions for those seeking the kind of righteousness they will need to enter into the Kingdom. There are four warnings, each of which talks about a contrasting pair.

(1) Two Ways: Matthew 7:13-14

The first pair contrasts the two ways. There are two ways by which one could try to enter into the Kingdom.

1. The Wide Way is the Pharisaic Way. It is a wide road because they taught that all Israel has a share in the age to come. However, the wide road of Pharisaism will not lead to righteousness, it will lead to destruction.
2. The correct way is the narrow way, which is the standard of righteousness demanded by the Mosaic Law, which now included accepting Jesus to be the Messianic King.

The only way to qualify to enter the kingdom is a narrow way, because one must believe that Jesus is the Messianic King in order to have God's righteousness given to them.

(2) Two Trees: Matthew 7:15-20, Luke 6:43-49

The second pair contrasts the two trees. The difference between true prophets and false prophets is seen in the difference between fruitfulness and fruitlessness. Each interpretation of the Law will produce its own kind of fruit.

1. Bad fruit or fruitlessness. To follow the Pharisaic interpretation of the righteousness of the Law, which was only external conformity, will produce bad fruit or fruitlessness. False prophets may say many things, but there is no good fruit involved.
2. Good fruit or fruitfulness. If they follow the Messiah's interpretation of the Law, which had to do with internal conformity that will in turn lead to external conformity and they will produce good fruit.

(3) Two Professions "Lord, Lord": Matthew 7:21-23

There are two professions and both may use the name of the Messiah. When the Judgment Day comes, many will make a profession: *Did we not prophesy by your name, and by your name cast out demons, and by your name do many mighty works?*

Here he points out that not everybody who says to Him "Lord, Lord" is actually a believer. Often these people use the name of Jesus, but it is a counterfeit Jesus. Notice what they are able to accomplish in the name of a counterfeit Jesus:

1. Able to prophesy events which came to pass
2. They cast out demons
3. They did many mighty works such as miracles and healings

Yet he will say to them in that day "I never knew you" which proves that they were never believers to begin with.

What this principle shows for them, and also for us today is that the existence of the miraculous does not prove it is the work of God, because Satan can duplicate many of these things.

For example some of the miracles of Moses were duplicated by the Egyptian magicians. Where did they get their power? Not from God, but from Satan. Therefore, when Moses changed water into blood, they did the same thing. When Moses brought frogs up from the dust of the ground, they did the same thing. At that point, Egypt did not need any more frogs. However, the principle is that while Satan can duplicate a divine miracle, he cannot remove a divine miracle. If the magician wanted to show his superiority, he should have removed the frogs that Moses brought up. Instead, they simply created more frogs which the Egyptians had to suffer from. At that point, I suspect the Egyptians were ready to croak themselves.

Satan can duplicate many of these miracles.

The test is not the existence of miracles. Merely proving things by the supernatural is not sufficient. The true test is this: Is what is being done, taught and said consistent with the written Word of God? Does it conform to the written word of God?

People who go after experience and not after the text of the Word of God are open to deception.

Therefore, there will be two professions:

1. Those with the mere external ability to do great things.
2. Those who really have internal regeneration, who stress consistency with the Word of God, and are doing the will of God the Father.

Also notice that He says, *depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness*. The Pharisees, by means of all their oral laws, were in fact practicing lawlessness! Furthermore, some of their laws, as we shall see in a later section, actually enabled them to circumvent the Law of Moses.

(4) Two Builders: Matthew 7:24-27

The fourth pair is the account of the two builders in Matthew 7:24-27. In this final pair, Jesus presented the Jewish people with a choice:

1. They could continue building on the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law, but that would be building on a foundation of sand. The structure built on that foundation would collapse, and they would fail to enter the Kingdom. Or, on the other hand
2. They could build upon the Messiah's interpretation of the standard of righteousness that the Law demanded, and that would be building on the solid foundation of rock. These are the ones who will attain the righteousness that the Law demanded, and they are the ones who will enter into the Messianic Kingdom.

During the sermon he has spelled out his interpretation of the Law in contrast to the Pharisaic interpretation. Now the people must make a choice.

g. The Conclusion, Matthew 7:28-29; 8:1

The crowds recognised the obvious contrast between his teaching and that of the Pharisees. They recognised two things.

1. First, He taught in a different manner from the Pharisees. When the Pharisees taught they always quoted previous rabbinic authorities. Jesus, however, quoted no rabbi. He taught as one having the authority to interpret the Law and did not base His teaching on previous rabbinic teaching. As the Messiah who gave that law He would certainly have that authority.
2. Secondly, the crowds also recognised that there was a difference in content. They were amazed at His teaching. They clearly understood exactly what He said and where He differed from the scribes and Pharisees.

When this Sermon was concluded, the crowds then had to make a decision: Whom would they follow? Would they follow this new Shepherd, or would they follow the old ones?

A minority would choose to accept His Messiahship and follow Him. The majority would decide to follow the Pharisees thus setting the stage for the national rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus.

As a unit, the Sermon on the Mount is:

The Messiah's interpretation of the true righteousness of the Law
contrasted with
the Pharisaic interpretation of the righteousness of the Law.

It is also Jesus' public rejection of the authority of the oral law in Pharisaism.

He will fulfil the Mosaic Law down to every jot and tittle but He has no intention of fulfilling the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law.

And this rejection of their Pharisaic Judaism will lead to the Pharisees' official rejection of Jesus' messianic claims.

17. Recognition of Authority in Capernaum, § 55, Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10

Here we see Jesus' authority recognised by a Gentile. Luke records this event because of his interest in Gentiles, while Matthew records it because of what it teaches about the messianic kingdom.

Read Luke 7:1 – 5.

A Roman Centurion sent the Jewish leaders to Jesus to ask him to heal his servant.

A Centurion was an officer of the Roman army with authority over 100 men.

Matthew says the centurion came to Him, but Luke records that the centurion sent a delegation to Him. This is not the contradiction it may appear to be, because, as the Talmud states, "... a man's agent is equivalent to himself." Therefore, in the Jewish context, when the centurion sent the elders to Jesus, it was viewed as though he had gone himself.

Now normally Jews and Gentiles did not get along. Why are these elders willing to make a request on behalf of the centurion?

Notice in verse 4 of Luke's account, they say he is worthy for Jesus to grant him his request. Why is he considered worthy?

Two reasons:

- 1) We read in verse 5 that he loves the Jewish nation. This centurion is different from other centurions because he loves the Jewish nation.
- 2) And secondly, he financed the building of their synagogue with his own money.

Therefore he will fall under the blessing facet of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12:3, I will bless those who bless you.

Later, in the book of Acts (chapter 10) we read of another centurion, Cornelius, who also loves the Jewish people, therefore he becomes the first Gentile to enter the church, the body of the Messiah, also experiencing the blessing facet of the Abrahamic covenant.

Read Luke 7:6 – 8.

Why does the centurion send the elders of the Jews to Jesus instead of going himself?

He says he is unworthy to approach Jesus himself or to have Jesus come under his roof. He recognised that as a Gentile he was unworthy for this to happen. Therefore, he sent the elders of the Jews.

This was in sharp contrast to what the Jewish elders had said about him.

In English, the religious leaders and the centurion use the same word, *worthy*, but in Greek, two different words are used. The Jewish leaders called the centurion *axios*, meaning "of weight," "of worth," "worthy." The centurion said that he was not *hikanos*, not "sufficient," meaning, "I am not deserving that you should even enter under my roof."

Then he adds in verse 8: *For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me*. He has officers over him, and he has soldiers under him. He simply has to give a command to any one of his soldiers and they will obey his command immediately.

Notice the word, *also*.

As a man with authority, he recognised that Jesus had authority and did not have to come to the house, He simply had to give the command and his servant would be healed.

This showed that the centurion understood who Jesus is, and it shows the extent of his faith.

This event is a pre-view of what will happen on a national scale.

Read Luke 7:9.

When Jesus heard this he said to the crowd (Lk 7:9), *I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.*

This Gentile Roman soldier, part of the subjugating army, has shown more faith than any Jewish person has shown so far.

And because of Matthew's concern for the kingdom, notice the extra detail he adds.

Read Matthew 8:10 – 12.

I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

He points out that when the kingdom is established, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be there enjoying the benefits of the kingdom. And people will come from all over the world to recline at table with the patriarchs. *To recline at the table* means they will be feasting.

Therefore, many Gentiles will be in the kingdom, but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out. The sons of the kingdom, of course, are the Jewish people. But merely being sons of the kingdom will not bring them into the kingdom; they must be believers to enter the kingdom. Many Gentiles will end up inside the kingdom and many Jews will end up outside the kingdom.

This is contrary to the teaching of the Pharisees, who considered themselves to be the *sons of the kingdom* and believed they would be reclining at the Messiah's table in the kingdom.

Read Matthew 8:13.

Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that very moment.

Because of his faith, the centurion's servant was healed from a distance at that very moment.

18. Recognition of Authority throughout the Land, § 56, Luke 7:11-17

Read Luke 7:11 – 17.

Jesus now comes to the town of Nain, which is in Galilee, almost directly south from Nazareth, across the valley. It sits on the northern slopes of the Hill of Moreh. On the southern slopes of this same hill was the town of Shunem, where, long ago, Elisha raised a woman's son back to life. This is, therefore, the second time this hill has witnessed God's power of resurrection.

As He comes, He comes to a funeral procession where a mother had lost her only son. Therefore, in the economy of first century Israel she has lost her only means of support. Her husband has

gone, and she has no other sons. The son is responsible for supporting his mother, but now he has passed away.

As He approaches the procession, He touches the bier, which would have been forbidden to someone who was a Levite. However, He is not a Levite and therefore He could touch the casket. (Leviticus 21:1)

He then orders the son to be raised from the dead. Therefore, a resurrection occurs with three specific results:

1. In verse 16, fear gripped them all and they glorified God.
2. The second result is the recognition that *“A great prophet has arisen among us!”* and *“God has visited His people!”* They recognise a divine result here. They recognise him to be a prophet, but that is not enough. He is more than a prophet. What they are failing to conclude is that he is the Messiah.
3. Thirdly, *this report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.* His reputation simply continues to spread. While the Pharisees are rejecting him, he still has a rather large following among the people. The conclusion of verse 16 is the conclusion of the people and not the leaders.

III The Controversy over the King, § 57 – 71

Now we come to the third major division in his life, which is the Controversy over the King, comprising sections 57-71. It begins with the rejection of the herald, and ends with the death of the herald.

A. The Rejection of the Herald, § 57, Matthew 11:2-19; Luke 7:18-35

1. John's Question

Read Luke 7: 18 – 23.

Why did John ask this question?

Now John has been in prison for some time and his disciples reported to him what was happening (Lk 7:18). He could tell that the leaders of Israel were not responding to Jesus, and even many of the people were not responding, failing to acknowledge his Messiahship although they were willing to call him a prophet.

This is what he sees. What happens to John when he sees this?

As often happens with believers, even mature ones, a measure of doubt sets in, and the issue is that he may have missed the Messiah and pointed out the wrong man as the Messiah.

So he sends his disciples to raise the question found in Matthew in verse 3: *“Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?”*

What was going on when John's disciples arrive where Jesus is?

The messengers arrived in the context where Jesus was curing many of diseases and plagues. Many miracles were being performed, including the healing of lepers, and the giving of sight to the blind.

How does Jesus respond to them?

Jesus says to John's disciples to go back and tell him about two things:

1. *What you hear*, and what they hear is that He claims to be the Messiah.
2. And what you *see* – the works that they observe being done. The works that they see will be both messianic and non-messianic miracles, and these miracles authenticate his messianic claims.

Jesus points John to the evidence that He is the Messiah: His claims, and His works.

John, like the disciples of Jesus, did not understand that the Messiah would come twice. He had expected the Messiah to establish His kingdom when He came, and therefore he expected the leaders and the people of Israel to accept Him as their Messiah. However, this was not happening, so he began to question whether Jesus was really the Messiah after all.

Therefore, Jesus directed his attention to the correct evidence for His messiahship: not the response of the leaders and the people, but His claims and His works which authenticated His claims.

2. Jesus' Tribute to John

Now when the disciples of John leave to report back to John, we find Jesus evaluating his forerunner.

Read Matthew 11:7 – 15 and notice the five points he makes.

1. Matt v7, Lk v24. He was not a read shaken by the wind. He was not wishy-washy. Everyone always knew where he stood on certain issues and did not mince words. For example he called the Pharisees a *brood of vipers*. (Matthew 3:7)
2. V8, Lk v25. He was not accustomed to luxurious living. He dressed like Elijah and lived in the wilderness eating locusts and wild honey.
3. V9, Lk v26. He was a prophet, and this is confirmed by the fact that he received direct revelation from God.
4. V9-10, Lk v26-27. He was more than just a prophet; he was the forerunner of the Messiah in fulfilment of Malachi 3:1, which Jesus quotes.
5. V11, Lk v28. John is the greatest of the Old Testament saints.

Who would you think of as the great saints of the Old Testament?

Moses, Abraham, David, ... Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, ...

What is it that defines greatness?

Matthew 18:1–4 (NASB95), § 90

¹ *At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"* ² *And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,* ³ *and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."* ⁴ *"Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

Mark 9:33–35 (NASB95) , § 90

³³ *They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?"* ³⁴ *But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.* ³⁵ *Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."*

Matthew 23:11 (NASB95), § 142

¹¹ *"But the greatest among you shall be your servant."*

Luke 22:24–30 (NASB95), § 157

²⁴ *And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest.* ²⁵ *And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.'* ²⁶ *"But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.* ²⁷ *"For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the*

*table? But I am among you as the one who serves.*²⁸ *“You are those who have stood by Me in My trials;”*²⁹ *and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you*³⁰ *that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

It is hard for us to really appreciate what He says here because the gospel writers rightly spend most of their time on Jesus and only mention John in the early stages of his ministry.

But John had a rather effective ministry throughout the land. While he stayed mostly in one place, people from all over the land came to him. In addition, many made a commitment in their baptism by John to believe in whomever John points out the Messiah to be.

In fact, much later, as in Acts 19:1-8, Paul runs into believers who were baptised by John the Baptist, yet had not heard that the Messiah whom John was announcing had been identified. They came into the land, were baptised, and left the land before John said, “Behold the Lamb of God”. And therefore, even a couple of decades later, there were still people following the baptism of John and who had yet to be told about Jesus.

Jesus went on to say in v11 of Matthew’s account (verse 28 of Luke’s), that although there is no one greater than John the Baptist, *Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*. He now makes the contrast that although John was the greatest of the Old Testament saints, superseding people like Abraham, Moses, David, and others, yet the least member of this new body is greater than John. The church is not equivalent to the kingdom of God, but the church is part of God’s Kingdom program, and that is the focus here. And those who are members of the body of the Messiah have a higher position in the kingdom than the greatest of the Old Testament saints. And this already indicates that John will die before the church comes into being.

Then in Matthew’s concern for the Jewish details he says in verse 12, *From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force*. From the time that John began preaching about Jesus, the kingdom of heaven has been suffering violence – violence primarily from Pharisees, but also from others like Sadducees and Herodians. They tried to block individual Jews from entering the kingdom by believing in Jesus.

Consider the following.

violent men: those who use force

suffers violence: the use of force

take it: To seize upon, spoil, snatch away, an open act of violence in contrast to cunning and secret stealing.

They openly and with violent force prevent their fellow Jews from believing in Jesus and entering the Kingdom.

Then in verse 13 of Matthew, *for all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.*

John is the last of the Old Testament style prophets. After this will come NT prophets, which are of a different category.

The prophets who preceded John by centuries announced the coming of the Messiah. John was the last of those prophets of the Old Testament and he had the privilege of identifying who that Messiah was.

And in verse 14, *and if you are willing to accept it [the kingdom of heaven], John himself is Elijah who was to come.* [see Footsteps p 130-134.]

Here is another correlation between John and Elijah.

Now previously we learned that John came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk 1:17); that he dressed like Elijah; and thirdly, he denied being Elijah (John 1:19-23). When we discuss the transfiguration we will add a fourth point.

But for now the main point of what Jesus said is this: if they were willing to receive the message that John proclaimed then John would have fulfilled Elijah's function.

In particular, if the Jewish people had accepted Jesus as Messiah, and therefore accepted the messianic kingdom, then John would have fulfilled Elijah's function. But they did not accept the kingdom, they did not accept the Messiah, and therefore John did not fulfil Elijah's function, and so Elijah is yet to come.

So again, if the kingdom offer had been accepted, John would have fulfilled Elijah's function, and because it was rejected John did not fulfil Elijah's function.

This does not mean that John's ministry was a failure, because, as we saw initially, his calling was to have a people prepared to accept the Messiahship of Jesus. And again, those who were baptized by John were making a commitment to believe on him whom John points out the Messiah to be.

3. Responses

Now read Luke 7:29 – 30.

In verse 29:

When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John.

Notice that those who had been baptized by John had no trouble identifying Jesus to be the Messiah. Indeed John did have a body of people ready to accept the Messiah once he became public.

But in verse 30:

But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

The Pharisees who had rejected the testimony of John also ended up rejecting the testimony of Jesus.

4. Reasons for Rejection

Now in verses 16 & 17 of Matthew's account, Jesus compares that generation of Jews with children in a market place who play a tune and expect the onlooker to dance to their tune.

But John would not uphold Pharisaism. And so while they played, John refused to dance. The real reason that John was rejected was that he would not support Pharisaism.

But the given reason, the reason given by the leaders (verse 18), is that he was demon possessed: *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!* John was characterised by fasting and total abstention from alcoholic beverages and they used that to teach that he was demonised.

On the other hand, in verse 19 of Matthew, Jesus came neither fasting nor abstaining from alcohol, and they rejected him for the same reason, so regardless of how you live your life, if you reject Pharisaism they will reject you on the basis of demonism.

Now again, note this carefully. The real reason why John was rejected is that he would not support Pharisaism, but the given reason was that he was demon possessed.

And so we see once more: what happens to the herald will happen to the king.

B. Curses on the Cities of Galilee, § 58, Matthew 11:20-30

1. The Condemnation of Unbelief

In verses 20-24 He condemns three cities because most of His miracles were performed in these cities. He performed miracles elsewhere, but the majority of His miracles were performed within these three cities, and in spite of all these miracles, both messianic and non-messianic, they chose to reject him. The three cities are Chorazin and Bethsaida in verse 21, and Capernaum in verse 23. Now we have records of what he did in Bethsaida and what he did in Capernaum, but we have no record of any miracle performed in Chorazin. There is not even a record of him going there or leaving there. And yet, based upon this verse He must have been there many times and performed many miracles there. This again verifies what John writes at the end of his gospel, that it would have been impossible for anybody to write about everything that He said and did, and the gospel writers had to be selective in what they would choose to report and write about.

Also this passage shows that there are going to be degrees of punishment in the Lake of Fire. While all unbelievers will end up in the Lake of Fire, they will not all suffer to the same degree. So in verse 22 He says, *it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.* And in verse 24, *it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.* Therefore,, the fact is that there will be degrees of punishment. And those who had the most exposure to the light and rejected the light will suffer greater degrees of punishment. In some cases the judgement is due to the degree of sinfulness, but in other places, like here, the amount of light they had and chose to reject.

2. The Explanation of Unbelief

In verses 25-27 he gives the explanation of their unbelief, in that those who saw themselves as wise and full of understanding (pride!) are the ones who ended up failing to see the truth. And those who were more ignorant were the ones who recognised the truth. And the simple responded.

3. The Invitation to Belief and Discipleship

Finally, in verses 28-30 you have an invitation to belief and discipleship. He begins with the words, *Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.* That involves believing on Him, which will result in salvation. (Isaiah 55)

And in verse 29 he says *take My yoke*. As Robertson notes in his footnote, “Take my yoke” was a rabbinic figure of speech meaning to come and learn, come to a school. And so rabbis would often pick certain people and say, “take my yoke”, “come to my rabbinic school and learn my teachings”. Jesus uses that same rabbinic expression, “take my yoke”. Now, after becoming believers we have to learn of him. We have to learn what he expects of us. And so, following salvation which is simply an act of faith, discipleship requires a level of study and commitment.

Verse 30: For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. By way of contrast with the heavy burden of Pharisaic Judaism, the teaching of Jesus is easy or light.

C. The Reception of a Sinner, § 59, Luke 7:36-50

Here a woman plays a role, and notice that Luke is the only one to give us an account of this event.

And now a Pharisee invites Jesus over for dinner, and how nice it is for a Pharisee to invite Jesus over for dinner. But the context shows he had ulterior motives: to find other reasons for rejecting him. And that’s when a sinner (again a euphemism for prostitute) comes in, and she begins to shed tears on his feet and wiping them with her hair. And the Pharisee says to himself in verse 39: *If this man were a prophet* (not even the Messiah, but just a prophet) *He would know who and what sort of person this woman is* and he would not allow her to touch him.

That is why Jesus gives him a parable to show why the woman was so lavish in her love - because those who are forgiven little love little; and those who are forgiven much love that much more. He reminds the Pharisee that, while he was invited into his home, the Pharisee failed to give him even the minimum requirements of hospitality in that day.

1. He failed to give him water to wash his feet, but this woman has been washing his feet with her tears.
2. He gave him no kiss, but she kisses his feet.
3. He did not anoint his head with oil, but she anointed his feet with perfume.

So he tells this woman in verse 38: *Your sins have been forgiven.* Once again, he is claiming to have the authority to forgive sin in a salvation sense. Once again, this results in a negative attitude on the part of the Pharisees in verse 49. They *began to say to themselves, “Who is this man who even forgives sins?”*

And he says to the woman: *Your faith has saved you; go in peace.* The things she was doing were the outworking of her faith.

Notice that it is Luke alone who provides some of these details about the role of women in his ministry and life, because Luke has the concern for Jerusalem, Gentiles, and women.

D. The Witness to the King - Ministering Women § 60, Luke 8:1-3

Here we have the third preaching tour around the country – the last one before Israel’s rejection that will come up in section 61.

Again he goes about from city to city, from synagogue to synagogue, proclaiming his Messianic claims, and offering to Israel the establishment of the kingdom, but the prerequisite is to accept him as the Jewish Messiah. This time, notice that he travels with the twelve apostles who are with him all of the time.

But now we read of certain women, and again this is Luke's account and Luke always brings in the female role. Luke mentions that certain women who have been healed by him or had demons cast out of them also follow him. Among these is Mary Magdalene and Susanna, which would be Shoshanah in Hebrew.

Then he mentions how Jesus ministry was financed. It was financed by several wealth women.

Now at this point we come to a major turning point in his public ministry, which we'll look at next time.

E. The Rejection of the King by the Leaders, § 61-62

Last time we began the third major division of Jesus' life: The Controversy over the King, which begins with the rejection of the herald and will end with the death of the herald. And now between these two events we come to a group of sections, § 61-64, where we have the major turning point in his public ministry. And if we don't clearly understand what happens in these four sections then the second half of His ministry doesn't quite seem to make a lot of sense.

1. The Unpardonable Sin, § 61, Mark 3:20-30; Matthew 12:22-37

There are two parallel passages for this account, one in Mark and one in Matthew. Matthew gives the most detail because he is writing to a Jewish audience where it has the most significance. So we will stay mostly with Matthew's account because of his details, but a couple of points have to be made from Mark's account. Two things in particular.

- i. First of all read Mark 3:21.

When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."

Notice those who are his friends and those who have been hearing Him and listening to Him are recognising that something different is taking place. They misinterpret the situation. They think He needs to be saved from Himself because His zeal seems to border on insanity and they are afraid He is beside himself. They do recognise something different is happening here, but they misinterpret the situation.

- ii. The second thing to notice in Mark is verse 22:

The scribes who came down from Jerusalem ...

What this shows is that while the event takes place up in the Galilee, it was instigated by priests who travelled to the Galilee from Jerusalem, which again is a three days journey.

What it shows is that the period of interrogation is now complete, they have reached their decision, and they are looking for a public opportunity to make that decision itself public. And the opportunity comes with the event of the casting out of the dumb or mute demon.

So with these two details from Mark, we will stay with Matthew because Matthew contains everything else that Mark has, but then adds some more details.

a. The Rejection, Mark 3:22; Matthew 12: 22-24

Now read verses 22 – 23 of Matthew's account.

The crowd's response

First of all, notice the response of the crowd to this miracle.

All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can He?"

Turn back to section 41, and notice how the crowds responded there when Jesus cast out a demon.

²⁷*They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."*

In section 41, the question raised was: by what authority does He cast out demons?

Here in section 61, when He cast out the demon, the question raised was: can He be the Son of David? Son of David is a messianic title, a title of the Messiah. So now they are asking: could He be the Messiah?

Why the question?

Why did this miracle raise a different question for the crowd? What is it about this miracle that caused the crowd to ask a different question?

This demon caused the person to be both blind and mute, so the man could not speak.

How was that significant?

Jewish procedure

Now the act of casting out demons was itself not all that unusual in that day and age. Even the Pharisees, and the Rabbis, and their disciples were practicing the casting out of demons.

But the Pharisees carried out a ritual that had three basic steps:

1. First of all he would have to establish communication with the demon. When the demon speaks he uses the vocal chords of the person he controls.
2. Secondly, after establishing communication with the demon he would have to find out the demon's name.
3. Thirdly, once he knew what the demon's name was he could use the name to command the demon to go out.

These were the three steps of the ancient Jewish procedure.

On another occasion, in Mark 5, Jesus used the standard Jewish approach. He asked the demon, "What is your name?" and the answer was, "My name is Legion".

Because of this three step procedure there was one kind of demon they could do nothing about: the kind of demon that caused the person controlled to be a mute so he could not speak. And because the person could not speak, there was no way of establishing communication with this kind of a demon, no way of finding out the demon's name, and so in the framework of Judaism it was reckoned impossible to cast this kind of a demon out.

Messianic miracle

However, the common teaching in that day was that whenever the Messiah comes He will cast out dumb demons.

Jesus will perform three such messianic miracles in all. We have already mentioned the first one, the healing of a Jewish leper. Here is the second one, the casting out of a mute or dumb demon.

These miracles are unique in that only the Messiah would perform them.

In response, as we have already noted, the crowd is raising the question: could this be the Messiah? And that is the correct response.

Leadership complex

However, while they are willing to raise that question. What they are not willing to do is answer the question for themselves. They are looking to the leaders to make that decision for them.

Throughout Jewish history the people have laboured under a complex Arnold calls "the leadership complex". Whichever way the leaders go, the people are sure to follow.

We see this frequently in the pages of the Old Testament. When the king did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, the people followed. But when he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, they also followed.

Even in our day, when we witness to our Jewish contacts, eventually they always raise the same objection: if Jesus was the Messiah, how come our rabbis don't believe in him. That is the leadership complex.

In New Testament times, because of the stranglehold Pharisaism has upon the masses, because of the application of Mishnaic Law, this leadership complex was very strong.

So again, while they are willing to raise the question, could this be the son of David, they are not willing to answer it for themselves. They are still looking to the leaders to make that decision for them.

The answer of the Pharisees

Now, when the Pharisees were considering this question, what alternatives did they have for their response?

In view of what is happening the Pharisees have only two options.

- 1) The first option would be to proclaim Him to be the Jewish Messiah.

Why don't they want to do that?

As we have already seen, this option is unacceptable to them because He rejects their Pharisaic traditionalism.

2) The second option would be to simply reject His messianic claims.

However, that leads to another dilemma. What is it?

If they choose this option they will have to explain how it is possible for him to do these special miracles never done before.

Now read their response in verse 24.

They choose to reject His claims to be the Messiah.

And how do they explain His unique abilities?

They claim that he himself is possessed, not by a common demon, but by the prince of demons, Beelzebul.

This became the official Pharisaic reason for rejecting his Messiahship: he is not the Messiah on the basis of demon possession.

Extra-biblical testimony

Now this is found not only in the gospels, but also in the rabbinic writings of the Talmud. There are two passages in the Talmud that reflect the events of verse 24.

- 1) One passage says this: The reason they had to execute Jesus on the Passover, though it contradicted Jewish law to have executions on Passover, had to do with the nature of his crime, and that was this: he seduces Israel by practicing sorcery. There is a close connection between sorcery and demonism.
- 2) Now a second passage in the Talmud says that when he was still living in Egypt he made these cuts inside the skin of his flesh and inscribed into his skin the four letters of God's name. In Hebrew God's name comprises four letters that would correspond to our Latin letters YHVH.

Thus they explain how it was that He could perform His miracles.

However, Neither here in the gospels, nor in the rabbinic writings do they deny the fact of His miracles. There are too many witnesses to those miracles. But in both places they ascribe it to a supernatural or demonic source.

Now it is important to keep this response of the Pharisees in mind in order to understand the nature of the unpardonable or unforgivable sin: the reason they gave for rejecting Him was that He was demon possessed.

b. *The Defence, Mark 3:23-27; Matthew 12:25-29*

Now Jesus defends himself against this charge by making four specific points.

Read verses 25 – 29.

1. V 25 – 26. This accusation cannot be true because it would mean a division in Satan's kingdom.
2. V 27. They themselves were teaching that the gift of exorcism was a gift of God. Therefore, to accuse him of this would be inconsistent with their own theology.
3. V 28. This miracle actually authenticates the message, and authenticates the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah.
4. V 29. It shows that he is stronger than Satan and not subservient to Satan.

c. *The Judgement, Mark 3: 28-30; Matthew 12:30-37*

Now Jesus goes on to pronounce a judgement against Israel in Matthew 12:30 – 45. In the middle of His pronouncement He is interrupted by the scribes and the Pharisees who ask Him for a sign. He responds briefly to them and then He continues His judgement.

In order to have His whole judgement in mind, read Matthew 12:30-45. And as you read take note of the questions that come to mind.

Let's hear some of the questions that came to you as we read this passage.

The key to understanding

This passage raises many questions and is often not well understood, but it is actually the key to understanding the rest of the gospel story, and the story of the book of Acts, and indeed the letters of the apostles.

Context limits apparently universal statements

Perhaps the first issue we need to look at is found in Jesus' statement (in verse 32) that

whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven Him.

Now when we read a statement like that it appears to be a universal statement, one that applies to all individuals in all times. But is it?

An example

Imagine a scene near here in our own time. At the Mountain Trails campsite a busload of children have just arrived to enjoy several days or a week of outdoor activities, and as part of the orientation talk one of the leaders shows the campers the campsite boundaries and says to them, "Whoever wants to go across that boundary must first come and ask a leader for permission."

Taking only those very words, you would conclude that anyone, of any age, at any time, whether camper, or leader, or anyone else, would need to come and ask permission before crossing that boundary. But we don't understand it that way because of the context in which the statement was made. We understand that the statement applies only to the campers at the time of the camp.

Context

And so, when we see Jesus making similar statements that may sound like generalisations with a universal application, it is very important to look closely at the context in order to understand just what He was intending His listeners to understand.

This issue actually highlights a very important principle of interpretation found in the Golden Rule of Interpretation, which you can find in Appendix 1 of your harmony.

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning, unless the facts of the immediate context,

studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths,

indicate clearly otherwise.

This rule reminds us to consider the immediate context of each statement, and also to take into account other related passages.

In the example of the statement made to the campers we found that the facts of the immediate context influenced our understanding of the statement. And so it will be, as we consider what Jesus is saying here, that the facts of the immediate context will influence our understanding of what He is saying.

Now with that principle in mind, let us consider some of the questions that arise in this passage and gather the facts of the immediate context. As we gather these facts, they will be like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that we arrange on a board and fit together to make the picture come into view. Then we will understand what Jesus is saying here.

(1) A Scattering

The first question arises from verse 30:

³⁰*“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.*

The first part of this statement is fairly plain. They cannot be both for Him and against Him at the same time. If they are not for Him they are against Him.

The questions arise from the second half of this verse:

What is the gathering?

Furthermore, what is the scattering that He talks about?

The implication of His statement is that those who are with Him will gather with Him, but those who are against Him will scatter.

Now what is the gathering, and what is the scattering?

God’s covenant with them

Turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 28:63–64.

In chapter 28 of Deuteronomy, Moses first sets before Israel the blessings they will receive if they diligently obey the Lord their God.

Then he sets out the curses they will have if they disobey the Lord their God. In the midst of the consequences of disobedience, he says this:

⁶³ *“It shall come about that as the Lord delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the Lord will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you; and you will be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it.”* ⁶⁴
“Moreover, the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known.

Here, right in the very covenant He gave them, God warns them that one of the consequences of their disobedience will be a scattering. They would be scattered among all nations over all the earth.

Their history

In all their history this had not yet happened. In the Babylonian captivity, they were taken captive into one nation.

But in AD 70, about 40 years after Jesus spoke these words, the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple. At that time:

- i. Those who accepted His Messiahship and heeded His warnings were gathered together in safety outside of the war zone and not one of them perished.
- ii. But, those who rejected His Messiahship were either killed or scattered all over the world by the Romans!

Application of this context

These words of the covenant would be familiar to His audience.

Therefore, we can see that Jesus is referring to this statement from the covenant. Moreover, the implication is that the time for that promised scattering is at hand.

Because of what the Jewish leaders have just said, the scattering of the Jews all over the world is about to take place.

In other words, He is pronouncing a judgement against them:

They have rejected Him on the basis of demon possession, and

Now, in accordance with the covenant, they will be scattered as a consequence.

(2) Blasphemy

Now, the second question arises from verses 31 and 32 of Matthew’s account, and it is this:

Why does He talk about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, or speaking against the Holy Spirit here?

Or, what is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that He is talking about?

Jesus and the Holy Spirit

As we have already noticed in earlier sections, Jesus was lead by the Spirit and filled with the Spirit, which means that He was controlled by the Holy Spirit.

In verse 28 He says that He *cast out demons by the Spirit of God*, which means He cast them out in the power of the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit was the agent who brought it about.

The blasphemy

Therefore, when they declared that *He casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of demons*, they were attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to the devil.

Thus, they were speaking against and blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.

And in doing this they rejected the Holy Spirit's testimony that Jesus is the Messiah.

Ultimately, their sin is the wilful rejection of the person of the Messiah, while He was present with them offering Himself to Israel as their Messiah, on the grounds that He was demon-possessed.

(3) Unforgivable

Why does He say:

whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven Him?

In the process of investigating His messianic claims there were two stages, First, the observation stage, and then the interrogation stage. The purpose of the investigation was to determine if His claims are true; whether or not He is the Messiah. During the course of this interrogation stage they would be questioning Him and challenging Him, and even speaking against Him. This was acceptable and would be forgiven them.

Why does He add:

but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come?

Now they have reached their conclusion. The investigation is complete. Their decision has been made:

He is not the Messiah, and the power enabling Him to perform His miracles is that of the prince of demons.

So Jesus makes the contrast. While they were speaking against Him, whatever they said would be forgiven them. But now they have reached their decision they will be judged on the basis of that decision, and the consequent destruction of the city and the temple and the scattering of the Jews is now inevitable.

Thus, their decision is unforgivable.

(4) Unique to that generation of Israel

This also means that Jesus is dealing with a specific national sin. He is not dealing with a sin committed by an individual, but a sin committed by the nation.

Furthermore, it was committed by a particular generation of Jews, and in the next section we see the emphasis in His judgement is on *this generation*, the generation of Jesus day.

It was to this generation that he came, offering himself as the Messiah, offering to set up the Messianic kingdom. And it was this generation that rejected him. So from now on in the gospels we are going to see two words coming up frequently: this generation.

(5) Individually forgivable

In verse 31 Jesus said,

³¹ *“Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.*

Here the word *people* is the word that means a man or woman, an individual of the human race, a person.

So, before He points out that their decision, as a nation, is unforgivable, He is careful to point out that individuals can be forgiven.

Also, regarding individuals, one thing the Bible makes clear is that any sin is forgivable to an individual who will come to God through the blood of the Messiah, and the nature of the sin is irrelevant. On the cross He did not die for some types of sin and not for others. He died for every type of sin, which renders every type of sin forgivable to any individual that will come to God through the blood of the Messiah. (John 3:14-16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 7:38; 11:25-26; 20:31)

(6) A Point of no return

But for the nation of Israel as a nation, and for that generation, it is now unpardonable. Let us look at that more closely.

In God's dealings with his covenant people, once a particular generation has gone beyond a point of no return, no amount of repenting can change the fact of coming physical judgement. The judgement is irrevocable because they have gone beyond the point of no return.

The events of section 61 are actually the third time this has taken place.

- i. The first time we see this happening is in Numbers 13 & 14, the sin of Kadesh-barnea.

Kadesh-barnea is an oasis right on the border of the Promised Land. And from that oasis Moses sent out 12 spies into the land, who came back 40 days later, all agreeing on one point: the land is all that God called it, a land that flows with milk and honey.

Then came the key point of disagreement: Only two of the men said, "God is with us, we can take it". But ten men said no, because of the numerical strength of the Canaanites and their military forces there is no way we can take the land.

As people often do today, they make the faulty assumption the majority must always be right, and there was a massive rebellion against Aaron and Moses. The two men were almost killed, but God intervened.

At that point God entered into judgement with the Exodus generation. And the decree was that they would have to continue wandering in the desert until 40 years passed. In that 40-year period, all who came out of Egypt will die out except for the two good spies and those below the age of twenty.

Therefore, 40 years later there was a new nation, a nation that was born as free men in the wilderness, and not as slaves in Egypt, that could enter the land under Joshua.

What happened is that God withdrew the offer of the Promised Land from the Exodus generation, just as here in § 61 he will withdraw the offer of the kingdom from this generation.

The land was re-offered to the wilderness generation that did accept it and therefore entered the land under Joshua. And in the future the Tribulation generation will accept the Messiah and they will enter into the messianic kingdom.

Now to repeat: once the point of no return has been reached, no amount of repenting can change the fact of coming physical judgement.

And Numbers 14 does say the people repented. Verse 20 even says God did forgive their sin. The judgement did not affect anyone's salvation, but they had to pay the physical consequences of going beyond the point of no return, which was physical death outside the land.

And keep in mind that even Moses had to die outside the land because of a sin he committed. But it did not affect his own individual salvation.

Here we are dealing with the physical consequences of going beyond the point of no return.

- ii. The second time this happened was in the days of Manasseh. The details are in 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33.

Manasseh was the cruellest king Jerusalem ever had and a great quantity of the blood of the remnant was shed in his day. The temple that was built by Solomon for the glory of God was turned into a centre of idolatry. He resorted to human sacrifice.

And finally, a point of no return was reached, and God decreed the Babylonian destruction of the city and the temple and 70 years of Babylonian captivity.

Now here again, once a point of no return is reached no amount of repenting can change the fact of coming physical judgement. And the Bible tells us that towards the end of his life Manasseh did repent. He became a saved man.

He was followed in his reign by the righteous king Josiah who brought revival throughout the land, but God simply said he would not bring on the calamity in Josiah's day, but the calamity itself was inevitable.

The point of no return had been reached.

Not long after Josiah's death, the Babylonians came and Jerusalem was destroyed, and the 70 years of captivity occurred.

- iii. And now for the third time, here in section 61, a particular generation goes beyond the point of no return.

What it means is: no matter how many Jews will believe, and, as we will see, myriads will come to believe, it cannot change the fact of coming physical judgement. The AD 70 judgement is now inevitable, and it will strike the nation.

There was now a physical judgement hanging over that generation that could not be revoked and would come in AD 70.

(7) Either in this age or in the age to come

Why did He say, ... *it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.*

And why does Mark record Him saying, ... *never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.*

Both are referring to the same thing. First notice that Mathew's terminology is particularly Jewish. The Jewish people of the first century saw two ages: the present age, the one in which we now live; and the age to come, which was always the messianic age – the messianic kingdom period. That is the way Jewish people use this terminology.

So Jesus is telling them that the consequence of this sin will be experienced by this generation both in this age, the age in which we now live, and in the age to come, the messianic kingdom.

And what is the consequence of this sin? This generation has rejected Jesus as their Messiah on the basis that He is demon-possessed. The consequence is that His offer to establish the messianic kingdom has been withdrawn from this generation to be offered to a future generation. And so, this generation will not see the kingdom established in their own time, and they will not see it when it is finally established in the future, either in this age or in the age to come.

As individuals, those who refuse to change their mind about His Messiahship will either perish in the Roman destruction of AD 70 or be scattered throughout the world in this age. And when the kingdom comes they will not see it because they died in unbelief.

Those who do change their minds about His Messiahship, of course, will escape the coming judgement of AD 70, and will also be in the kingdom when it comes.

(8) The Unpardonable Sin Defined

Now in the light of the foregoing discussion of the facts of the context let us define the unpardonable sin.

**The unpardonable sin is the national rejection
by Israel
of the Messiahship of Yeshua,
while he was present on earth,
on the basis of His being demon possessed.**

(9) Results of the unpardonable sin

There were two results of the unpardonable sin.

- i. First, the offer of the Messianic Kingdom was withdrawn from that generation. It would not be established in their day, but it will be offered to a future Jewish generation that will accept it, the Jewish generation living in the days of the Tribulation, something we will see when we talk about Matthew 24 & 25.

- ii. Secondly, the judgement of AD 70 was certain, and nothing could alter it.

If we see the unpardonable sin clearly, we will also see its effects in the rest of His ministry on earth, in the story that unfolds in the book of Acts, in the letters of the apostles, and in the continuing history of the Jewish nation.

(10) The importance of words

In verses 33-37 Jesus points out that just as *the tree is known by its fruit, so the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart*. Therefore *in the day of judgement* the very words that they are speaking will be used as evidence of the nature of their hearts. And they will be justified or condemned on the basis of that evidence. Their justification or condemnation is actually determined by the condition of their hearts, but the condition of their hearts is revealed by the words they have spoken.

So Jesus is warning them as individuals that the words they have just spoken are an indication of the condition of their hearts and will have eternal consequences in the day of judgement!

2. The New Policy Concerning Signs, § 62, Matthew 12:38-45

Now the scribes and the Pharisees have been listening to his words of rebuke and they interrupt Him to ask him for another sign, as if he had not done anything so far to authenticate his messianic claims.

a. *The Sign for that Generation*

Read Matthew 12:38 – 40.

From the time of His first public miracle at the first Passover, until this point of time in which a year and a half has passed, He performed numerous miracles including those same miracles, which they themselves called messianic. In spite of this, they rejected him.

Therefore, He now announces a new policy concerning the purpose of His signs.

Until this time the purpose of his miracles was to serve as signs for Israel to get them to make a decision, and now they have made their decision and made it irrevocably. The unpardonable sin is just that, unpardonable, they have gone beyond the point of no return.

Therefore, He announces a new policy in regard to His miracles. He says in verse 39 of this *evil and adulterous generation* that *no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet*. In other words, for that generation there will be no more miracles to serve as signs that He is the Messiah, except for the sign of Jonah.

From now on, while He will continue to perform many miracles, the purpose of his miracles will be to train the twelve disciples for the new kind of work they will have to conduct because of this rejection, the kind of work we will find them conducting in the book of Acts.

But, for the nation, no more signs will be given except one sign: the sign of Jonah, the sign of resurrection.

He will give them one miracle publicly: the sign of Jonah, the sign of resurrection, and, as we learn both from the history recorded in the gospels and from prophecies regarding events still future, that will come to Israel three different times.

1. First will be the resurrection of Lazarus.
2. Secondly will be the resurrection of Jesus.
3. Thirdly will be the resurrection of the two witnesses during the tribulation.

What is common in all of these resurrection accounts is a three day period of time.

b. *The Judgement of that Generation*

Their judgement

Now notice that, having dealt with the interruption by announcing His new policy concerning the purpose of his signs, he returns to the theme that was interrupted: the theme of judgement.

And notice also the emphasis here on this specific generation.

Read verses 41-42.

⁴¹*“The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*

⁴²*“The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.*

He now brings in two Gentile examples from the Old Testament: the men of Nineveh, and the Queen of Sheba.

What is the significant point about both of these Gentile examples?

These were Gentiles who had much less light to respond to, but they did respond to it.

Therefore, at the Great White Throne Judgement these Gentiles will be able to stand and witness against that Jewish generation for being guilty of rejecting the greater light, and being guilty of the unpardonable sin.

Their final state

The theme of judgement finally comes to a close in verses 43 to 45 with a story involving a demon.

Read verses 43 – 45.

What does this mean?

First we need to understand the story itself.

What details does Jesus give us about this man’s life, and what is the climax of his experience?

He talks about a demon that was indwelling a person but then chose to leave. He was not cast out. He left of his own free will looking for a better apartment in which to live. He searches for a while, but when he can find no vacancies he decides to go back to the person he was indwelling earlier.

When he returns to the man, what does he find?

When he finds him again we are told in verse 44, he finds him swept, he finds him garnished. The Greek word is Kosmeo, meaning to order, to set in order, to adorn, to decorate, to garnish.

But also notice that he finds him still empty, because in this interval, when the man was freed of demonic indwelling, he was not indwelt by some other spirit, be it the Holy Spirit or a demonic spirit.

Therefore, because he remained empty this demon is able to go back in. However, he doesn't want to live by himself anymore, so he invites seven of his buddies to join him.

While at first he only had one demon in him, now because he remained empty he has eight demons in him.

Therefore, Jesus says in verse 45:

The last state of that man becomes worse than the first.

That is the conclusion of the story.

Application

What is its application?

Jesus gives us the answer in the last part of verse 45:

That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.

Once again, the emphasis and focus is on this specific generation.

What are the points of similarity between the man and this evil generation?

When this generation began, it began with the preaching of John the Baptist. The purpose of John was to speak to them to get them to accept the Messiahship of Yeshua, and by means of the preaching of John this generation was swept and this generation was garnished.

Now, with the rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus, they also remain empty, without a king.

Moreover, because that generation remains empty, the last state will be worse than the first.

Their final state

What was their state at first?

At the first:

They were under Roman domination. They had to pay annual tribute to Rome.

Nevertheless, Rome allowed them to retain their national identity.

Jerusalem was standing.

The temple was functioning with its Herodian glory.

They even had a semi-autonomous government in the Sanhedrin.

And what was their final state?

Forty years after these words are spoken:

The legions of Rome will invade the land. After a four year war and a two year siege:

the city will be destroyed,

the temple torn down until there was not one stone on top of another,

and the Jews dispersed all over the world.

The last state of that generation did become worse than the first.

Moreover, to this day the worldwide dispersion is still with us. There are still more Jews outside the land than are inside the land.

F. Revelation in view of Rejection, § 63 - 68

We will discuss § 63 at this stage, but keep in mind that it really belongs in the middle of § 64. In § 64 he tells first of all public parables and secondly private parables, and the story of § 63 belongs in the middle of § 64 between the public and the private parables. That's where it fits chronologically.

1. The Repudiation of all Earthly Relations, § 63, Mark 3:31-35; [Matthew 12:46-50](#); [Luke 8:19-21](#)

Read Matthew 12:46 – 50, and Luke 8:21.

Now, while He was yet speaking to the multitudes in Matthew verse 46, and contextually that would happen after speaking the first few parables, His mother and His half-brothers tried to approach Him and tried to rescue Him out of the situation. And someone mentions to Him that His mother and His brothers wanted to get to Him.

But in verse 48-50:

Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! "For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."

And in Luke 8:21,

²¹*But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."*

Repudiation of earthly relations

What is the significance of this response?

His mother and His brothers are His blood relations. And the Pharisees claimed the right of entry into the kingdom by virtue of their blood relationship to Abraham.

However, a blood relationship to Abraham is not sufficient qualification to enter the kingdom. Only those who do the will of the Father, those who hear the word of God and do it, will enter the kingdom. Only those who believe in Him will be found in the kingdom.

Therefore, in light of the unpardonable sin, in His response here, Jesus repudiated all earthly blood relations and accepted only spiritual relationships.

Lo Ammi

What happens here is also something that was prophesied by Hosea the prophet. (Hosea 1-3)

The Jewish people were "Ammi" meaning "my people", and "Ruhamah", those who obtain mercy. For a long period of time they will be "Lo Ammi" meaning "not my people", and "Lo-Ruhamah" meaning "not having obtained mercy". But in the future they will again become "Ammi", my people, and "Ruhamah", "receiving mercy".

Essentially that's what has happened here. The Jewish people have become Lo Ammi, not my people.

Now, in view of God's covenants, the Jewish people have always been, and will always be, the people of God, but they do not receive the benefits of being the covenant people - the disciplines yes, but not the benefits – until they finally come back to him.

Because they rejected Jesus as the Messiah, the Jewish people have moved from being Ammi to being Lo Ammi.

Therefore, here Jesus is rejecting earthly ties in favour of spiritual ones.

2. A crucial turning point

The unpardonable sin, the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, is a crucial turning point in the life and ministry of the Messiah, and it precipitates some very significant changes in His ministry.

As a result of the unpardonable sin the ministry of Jesus changes. It changes radically. It changes in four important areas.

1. *Signs*

And the first area has to do with the signs. We already mentioned this previously.

We mentioned that up until this point the purpose of His miracles was to be signs for the nation to get them to make a decision. Now they have made the decision irrevocably. Therefore, for the nation He points out there will be no more signs except the sign of Jonah, the sign of the resurrection.

He will continue to perform many miracles after this event, but the purpose of his miracles now will be to train the twelve disciples for the future work of the book of Acts.

Therefore, His miracles go from being signs for the nation to being lessons for the apostles.

We can summarise it this way:

Signs now go from the nation to the apostles.

2. *Miracles*

The second change concerns the people for whom He performed His miracles.

This change has two facets:

a. *Faith*

The first facet is this: until the events of § 61 He performed miracles for the benefit of the masses. He did not require them to have faith first.

A good example of this is the one where we saw Him healing the man at the Pool of Bethesda (§49, John 5:1-17). We notice that Jesus simply healed him of His own initiative. The man didn't even know who Jesus was, or who He claimed to be. There is no faith on the part of the man at all. At that time, faith was not essential for miracles to occur.

But now, after § 61 that will change. From now on, He will perform miracles only in response to the needs of individuals, and now He will require them to have faith first.

We summarise it this way:

Miracles go from the crowds without faith to individuals with faith.

b. *Proclamation*

The second facet is this:

Until § 61, when He healed someone He would tell them:

“go and proclaim what God has done for you.”

For example, in Luke 5:14 after the Jewish leper has been healed he is told to go and show himself to the priests *as a testimony to them*.

After § 61 every time He heals someone He will tell them:

“don’t tell anyone what God has done for you”.

(We will see this for example in Matthew 9:30 in § 68 where he heals two blind men.)

He won’t apply the prohibition to the Gentiles He heals, as we will see. But as for the Jews He heals, they must follow the policy of silence, and those who benefit from His messianic power are forbidden to tell anyone about it.

We can summarise it this way:

He went from tell all to tell no one.

3. *Message*

The third change deals with the message He and His apostles will proclaim.

Until Matthew 12, as we already saw previously, both He and they went all over Israel, city to city and synagogue to synagogue, proclaiming Jesus to be the messianic king, offering to Israel the kingdom of the Jewish prophets.

But now after § 61 He will also forbid the apostles to tell anyone who He is. And we will see in a later section, when Peter makes His famous confession and says, “you are the Messiah, the son of the God, the Living One”, Messiah says to Peter: “Don’t tell anyone I am the Messiah”. And they too must follow the policy of silence until that is rescinded with the Great Commission of Mathew 28.

We can summarise it this way:

His message goes from proclamation of his Messiahship to silence about his Messiahship.

4. *Teaching method*

The fourth change is in His method of teaching.

Prior to His rejection, He taught clearly and distinctly in ways that they could and did understand. (Also § 42 Mark 1:22, 27; Luke 4:32, 36)

The Sermon on the Mount is a good example of this. When He was finished, we noticed that the people understood what He was saying, and they also understood where He differed from the Scribes and the Pharisees. (§ 54 Matthew 7:28-29)

Now, after His rejection, He teaches them only in parables. Moreover, as we will soon see, the primary purpose of His parabolic teaching is to hide the truth from the masses, to teach them in ways they could not and would not understand.

Why is that?

Because by now they have received sufficient light to respond correctly, they responded incorrectly with the unpardonable sin, and therefore, no further light would be given to them.

Consequently, whenever He teaches publicly now it is only in parables, so no one understands. Even the apostles, as we will see, would not understand until He explains the parables to them.

We can summarise it as:

Jesus went from being very clear to being parabolic in His teaching.

A pivotal event

The unpardonable sin is a pivotal event in the life of the Messiah and sets the stage for four things:

1. *The second half of His ministry*

It sets the stage for the second half of his ministry.

Now we will begin to see why he says to people, “don’t tell anyone what I have done for you”, “don’t spread the news about the miracles”, “don’t spell out the Messiahship”, why He speaks in parables to the masses, and so on.

This only begins after the unpardonable sin is committed.

2. *The events of the book of Acts*

It sets the stage for the events coming up in the book of Acts.

We will summarise these things at the end of the course, and we will note that the events of the book of Acts are set based upon what happens in § 61 – 64.

3. *The birth of the church*

It sets the stage for a new entity to come into being, the Ecclesia, the Church, the Body of the Messiah.

It is His rejection that will lead to the birth of the new entity in Acts 2.

4. *Jewish history*

It sets the stage for Jewish history for the next 2,000 years.

It is indeed a very crucial turning point.

3. **The Course of the Kingdom Program in the Present Age, § 64, Mark 4:1-34; Matthew 13:1-53; Luke 8:4-18**

Jesus Teaches in Parables

Background

We have just seen the leaders of Israel reject Jesus as their Messiah and explain that He performs his miracles in the power of the prince of demons. Then we saw that Jesus responded by pronouncing a unique judgement upon that generation.

He was interrupted in the middle of His judgement when the scribes and Pharisees asked Him for another sign. He responded by announcing His new policy regarding signs. Until that time the purpose of His signs was to authenticate His message that He is the Messiah, and to get them to make their decision about His Messiahship. Now they have made that decision, and consequently He will give them no further signs except one, the sign of Jonah, which is the sign of resurrection.

Now in this section we see the beginning of His parabolic teaching. He now begins to teach them in parables.

Read Matthew 13:1-3a.

On that day

Matthew begins, *on that day*. On which day?

On the very same day that the rejection occurred. On the day the unpardonable sin was committed. On that day, verse 3 says: *He spoke many things to them in parables*. So his parabolic method of teaching begins with the rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus. And it begins as a result of the unpardonable sin.

Disciples' question

Now notice the reaction of the disciples.

Read Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35.

How did the disciples respond to the fact that Jesus was now teaching the crowds using parables? They ask Him, *why do you speak to them in parables?*

What does this question show us?

It shows us that the disciples were not accustomed to Him teaching in this manner. As we have seen, up until the events of section 61, when Jesus spoke to the crowds He spoke in clear language that all could understand. His teaching at the Sermon on the Mount is a good example. As a result of this sermon they understood what He said and clearly understood where He differed from the Scribes and Pharisees.

But now, the very same day when the leadership of Israel rejected His messianic claims, He begins to teach in parables. This takes them by surprise, so they ask Him why He is speaking to them in parables because they want to understand why He has changed from speaking plainly to speaking in parables.

In His answer Jesus gives three main reasons for this change in His method of teaching.

i. *To illustrate the truth for the disciples*

He begins:

to you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

So the first purpose of His parables is to illustrate the truth to the disciples.

The content of the truth is *the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*, which we will discuss in detail shortly.

Here Jesus points out to them that the reason for His parables is that it has been granted to them to know the truth that He is speaking about.

ii. *To hide the truth from the crowds*

Then He continues:

but to them it has not been granted.

It has not been granted to those who have rejected Him to know about *the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*.

And the reason follows in verse 12. In rejecting His Messiahship they rejected the light that they had. And if one rejects the light that he has, he will not be given any more light. Even the light that he has will be removed from him.

So for the crowds the purpose will be to hide the truth, to teach them in terms they cannot and will not understand.

iii. *To fulfil prophecy*

The third reason was to fulfil prophecy. Jesus quoted Isaiah 6:9-10 and declared that *in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled*. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would speak to the Jewish people in such a way that they would not understand.

Matthew repeats this point in verses 34-35 where he emphasises that Jesus *did not speak to them without a parable*, and quotes from Psalm 78:2, which foretold that the Messiah would end up speaking in parables.

By speaking to them in parables He was fulfilling Old Testament prophecy and thereby proving His very Messiahship which they had rejected.

These, then, are the three purposes of His parabolic method of teaching: to give more light and understanding to the disciples; to hide that light from the unbelieving crowd; and to fulfil prophecy thereby proving His Messiahship.

Mark adds, at the end of verse 34 of his account, that

He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.

This indicates that even the disciples didn't understand the parables, but afterwards, when He is alone with them, he will explain the meaning of the parables to them, because for them the purpose is to illustrate the truth.

The content of the parables

That is the purpose of the parables and answers their question about why He is speaking to the crowds in parables. But, in His answer to their question, Jesus also comments on the content of the parables. Did you notice what He says about the content of the parables?

Matthew 13:11.

To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

Mark 4:11.

To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God.

What He is speaking about in His parables is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. And those two terms are used interchangeably. They are synonymous.

Matthew uses the term, *kingdom of heaven*, because he is writing his gospel to Jews, and they are sensitive to using the name of God vainly. They would try to avoid using the term when they were writing or speaking and tended to use the term only in the synagogue or other religious meetings. In place of saying "God", they would say "the name" or "heaven". Therefore Matthew used the term *kingdom of heaven* so that it would be readily acceptable to his Jewish readers.

However Mark wrote to Romans, and Luke wrote to Greeks, who did not have these sensitivities, and therefore they used the expression, *the kingdom of God*.

Both expressions mean the same thing and they are synonymous.

Mystery

Now, what did He mean by the word mystery?

The term "mystery" is not used in the New Testament in the same way as we use it in English. In English we use it for something we don't yet have an answer for – something we don't yet have a solution for, such as on the program "Unsolved Mysteries". That is not its meaning in the New Testament.

To see what Jesus means by the word mystery here, read again verses 17 and 35 of Matthew's account.

Matthew 13:17.

For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Matthew 13:35.

³⁵*This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD."*

In verse 17, Jesus says that the things He is revealing to the disciples are things that many prophets and righteous men desired to see and hear, but it was not shown to them or spoken to them.

And in verse 35 Matthew points out that Jesus was fulfilling prophecy by uttering *THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD*.

Therefore, the things Jesus was speaking in the parables and, which He describes as mysteries, are things that were not revealed until He spoke of them, which means that they were not revealed in the Old Testament.

We can define the word mystery as:

Something not revealed in the Old Testament but revealed for the first time by the New.

This same use of the word can also be seen in Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, where Paul speaks of:

Colossians 1:25-27

The mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things.

And

Ephesians 3:1-10

the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.

To repeat the definition:

A mystery is something that was not revealed in the Old Testament, but is revealed for the first time in the New Testament.

Five Facets of God's Kingdom Program

Kingdom

Now Jesus tells His disciples that it has been granted to them to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, and His parables are explaining this mystery to them.

The Scriptures reveal many things about God's Kingdom, and so that we can see the full significance of what Jesus is revealing for the first time, we first need to review what was already known.

The word kingdom refers to the rule of a king, so the kingdom of God may be defined as God's rule. It is the sphere over which the sovereign God rules. And when we look at what the Scriptures reveal about the rule of God, or the kingdom of God, we find that there are actually five different facets of God's Kingdom Program. Four of them were already known in the Old Testament times, and the fifth facet is the mystery that Jesus reveals in His parables.

1. The Eternal or Universal Kingdom

- a. This facet refers to God's rule in providence and in sovereignty in that God is always in control. Everything that happens in this entire universe is always within the control of God. So things happen either because of his permissive will, such as the fall of man, or by His directive will, such as the worldwide flood, but nothing happens outside His will. Nothing catches God by surprise. God never looks down upon the earth and sees what people are doing and says, "I can't believe they did that". He never says this. He knows what they are capable of, and He knew very well what they would do.
- b. The different names only emphasise different aspects of this kingdom. The term eternal emphasises the timeless aspect. The fact is God is always in control, in time past, present and future.
- c. The term universal emphasises the sphere and the scope, that no matter where things exist, everything is within the sovereign will and control of God.
- d. 1 Chron. 29:11-12; Psalm 106; Daniel 4 (God raises up kings, he puts down kings, he even has the basest of men to sit on thrones);

1 Chronicles 29:11–12 (NASB95)

¹¹ *"Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. ¹² "Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone.*

Daniel 4:34–35 (NASB95)

³⁴ *"But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. ³⁵ "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'*

- e. See also I Chronicles 29:11-12, Psalms 10:16, 29:10, 74:12, 90:1-6, 93:1-5, 103:19-22, 145:1-21, 148:8, Proverbs 21:11, Jeremiah 10:10, Lamentations 5:19, Daniel 4:17, 6:27, Acts 17:24; I Cor. 15:50; II Tim. 4:18.

2. The Spiritual Kingdom

- a. The Spiritual Kingdom is God's rule in the heart of the believer.
- b. It consists of all believers, and only believers, from Adam until the end of human history.
- c. In the present age, and only in the present age, the church and the Spiritual Kingdom are synonymous (because all who are members of the Spiritual Kingdom are also members of the church, but that is only true in this present age). But the Spiritual Kingdom existed before the church was born in Acts chapter 2, and will continue to exist after the church is gone at the rapture.
- d. This is the kingdom Jesus is referring to in Matt. 6:33 when He exhorted His hearers to *seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness*; and as He told Nicodemus in John 3:3-16, the way to enter this kingdom is by the new birth which is given to those who believe in Him.
- e. This facet is found in passages like Matthew 6:33, 19:16, John 3:3-5, Acts 8:12, 14:22, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, I Corinthians 4:20, 6:9-10, Galatians 5:21, Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 1:13-14, 4:11, I Thessalonians 2:12, and II Thessalonians 1:5.

3. The Theocratic Kingdom

- a. This was God's rule over Israel, because Israel was a theocracy.
- b. It refers to God's rule by means of and through a theocracy over one nation: Israel.
- c. It was established under Moses at Mt. Sinai with the Mosaic Law serving as the constitution of the kingdom. At Mt. Sinai the people of Israel became the nation of Israel. (1450 BCE)
- d. It underwent two distinct phases in its history:
 - i. The Mediatorial Kingdom where God ruled His theocracy through mediators: Moses, Joshua, and all the Judges until Samuel. And Samuel becomes a transitional character. He is the last of the Judges, and the one who anoints David to be king over Israel.
 - ii. The Monarchial Kingdom where God ruled His theocracy through the House of David.
- e. The theocratic kingdom ended when Zedekiah, the last Davidic king was removed from the Davidic throne with the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. (586 BCE)

And when he was removed from the Davidic throne the theocracy ended and the "Times of the Gentiles" began. And the Times of the Gentiles will continue until once again we have a theocracy with a Davidic king, the Messiah sitting upon the throne of David.

- f. The scriptures for this facet of the kingdom start in Exodus 20 and go all the way through the historical books until 2 Chronicles 36. This is the history of the theocratic kingdom.
- g. In the closing eras of the theocratic kingdom, as the theocratic kingdom began to decline, through the prophets God began to announce a new facet of His kingdom program: The Messianic Kingdom. And that becomes the fourth facet of God's kingdom program.

4. The Messianic or Millennial Kingdom

- a. The name Messianic is more popular in Jewish circles, and Millennial is more popular in Gentile circles.
- b. Definition: The Messianic Kingdom is Messiah's rule over Israel, and over the world, from Jerusalem from the throne of David.
- c. The term "Messianic Kingdom" emphasises that in this kingdom the Messiah Himself will rule directly. The Messiah Himself rules it personally.
- d. The term "Millennial Kingdom" focuses on the timing element. How long will this kingdom last? It will last for a whole millennium, for 1,000 years.
- e. The basis of this kingdom is found in the Old Testament – two things in particular:
 - i. The Davidic Covenant, where God promised David an eternal descendant who will rule upon the throne of David over a saved Israel. 2 Sam. 7:11b-16; 1 Chron. 17:10b-14.
 - ii. The Messianic Kingdom is a major subject of Old Testament prophecy.
- f. This was the kingdom that was offered through the ministry of John and Yeshua, Jesus, and it was this kingdom that they rejected with the unpardonable sin.

And the offer of this kingdom was withdrawn from that generation. But it will be given to a future generation of Israel.

5. So now, in the parables of the kingdom Jesus introduces the fifth facet of God's kingdom program, the Mystery Kingdom. These parables describe the Mystery Kingdom.

- a. It is referred to as the Mystery Kingdom because it is an aspect of God's Kingdom Program that was not revealed in the Old Testament, but is revealed for the first time here in the New Testament.
- b. Definition: It can be described by the word "Christendom" and means people anywhere in the world who claim loyalty to Yeshua, both false and true loyalty – not so much Christianity, but Christendom, derived from the words Christ and kingdom.
- c. It describes conditions on this earth while the King is absent from the earth and is in heaven.
- d. The timing element: the mystery kingdom is between the first and second coming, but to be more precise: It began with Israel's rejection of the Messiahship of Yeshua in § 61 through § 64 and will end with Israel's acceptance of the Messiahship of Yeshua.

So, the mystery kingdom extends from the rejection by Israel until the acceptance by Israel of the Messiahship of Jesus.

- e. The parables of § 64 simply give us the outworking of the mystery kingdom.

The Parables of the Mystery Kingdom

Parable defined

By way of definition, a parable is a figure of speech illustrating a moral or spiritual truth using something familiar from everyday life and experience.

Parables often use the principle of going from the known to the unknown. The figure drawn from everyday life and experience is the known. The spiritual reality is the unknown.

Purpose of a parable

Parables are designed to solve a problem or to answer a question. Before interpreting a parable, it is important to examine the immediate context to discover the question it answers or the problem it solves.

What is the question addressed by these parables? What is the reality they are describing?

The question they address is:

Now that Israel has rejected the King, and consequently the Messianic Kingdom will not be established until the Messiah returns at His second coming, what form will the kingdom of God take in the period between the two comings?

One major point

Now each parable makes one major point, and it might have some sub-points. If it does, they will be clearly pointed out.

Understanding a parable

Before we can understand the reality described by a parable, we first need to understand the figure drawn from everyday life and experience. We need to understand the literal figure before we can understand its spiritual significance.

Symbols in these parables

Now in these parables Jesus uses a number of symbols. We already know the meaning of some of these symbols from their use in the Old Testament, but some of the symbols are brand new and those He defines Himself.

The key parable

Look for a moment in Mark's account in verse 13:

And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?"

The point of this verse is that understanding this parable happens to be the key to understanding all the other parables.

Therefore, He himself gives a detailed explanation of both the first and third parables, defining what the symbols mean. So when He uses the same symbols again later, we will know their meaning.

So let us look at these parables one by one, and then we will summarise them all together.

a. *The Parable of the Sower, Mark 4:1-9, 13-20; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23; Luke 8:4-8, 11-15*

Read this parable and the explanations that Jesus gives to the disciples.

The figure of this parable has more elements than most. What is the figure Jesus draws from everyday life, and what are its elements?

The figure of the sower is readily understood. The elements appearing here are: the seed, the four different soils, and three different forms of opposition to the growing of the seed: the birds, the rocky places, and the thorns.

And what are the realities represented by these elements of the figure?

1. The seed, we are told, is *the word of God*.
2. The soil into which the seed is sown is the heart of the one who hears the word of God. And there are four different preparations of the heart and four different responses of the heart to the word of God.
3. The birds represent Satan and his agents who *snatch away what has been sown in his heart* (Matthew).
4. The rocky places represent a *time of temptation* (Luke), or *affliction or persecution that arises because of the word* (Matthew).
5. The thorns represent *worries and riches and pleasures of this life* (Luke), and *the worry of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth* (Matthew), and *the desire for other things* (Mark).

This is an example of a parable with several sub-points, each of which Jesus explains. But before we delve into the sub-points it is important to remember that each parable has one major point. What is the major point made in this parable?

Jesus gives the answer in verse 11 of Luke's account. *Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God*. The major point made by this parable is that the period of the mystery kingdom will be characterised by the sowing of the seed, which is the word of God.

He goes on to say that this seed, the word of God will find four different preparations of the soil, meaning four different preparations of the heart and consequently four different responses. And it will face three different forms of opposition. These are the sub-points He makes, but the major point is that during the age of the mystery kingdom God will plant His word in the hearts of men.

Now we'll look in turn at each of the four different soils and the four different responses to the seed that is sown.

1. The first response is called the wayside response.

They hear the word of God, but their heart is like the soil beside the road. The word does not penetrate it and Satan comes and snatches it away with the end result, at the end of Luke's verse 12, *they will not believe and be saved*.

So this refers to people who have actually heard the gospel but choose not to believe.

2. The second response is the rocky ground response.

When these people hear the word, they receive it with joy, but they have no firm root. They do believe, we are told in Luke verse 13, but *when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away*. (Mark verse 17)

And the reason they fall away is that *they have no firm root*.

These people do believe and as a result they are born again. But they never mature in the faith. They don't go from milk to meat. They are never rooted in the Word of God. They are wishy-washy, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, and usually going from one supernatural event to another trying to meet their spiritual needs.

They lack knowledge, and they never produce the kind of fruit that believers are supposed to produce.

3. The third response is the thorny ground response.

These are also people who do believe. But *the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful*. (Mark verse 19).

Unlike those whose hearts are like rocky soil, who are unfruitful because they are not rooted in the word of God, the ones whose hearts are like thorny ground are unfruitful because they are involved in the cares of the world. They may even know their Bibles well, but the word is choked by their concern for the things of the world and by the deceitfulness of riches.

So there are two different groups of people who are saved. Both receive the gospel. But some do not mature because they are not well grounded in the Word. And others do not mature because they fail to apply the Word in daily living.

On the one hand we must study the text of Scripture and study the Word of God. But knowledge alone does not provide spiritual maturity. There must be the application of what we learn to daily life.

This group are also unfruitful, and they are unfruitful because they fail to overcome the world.

4. The fourth response is the good ground response.

These are the people who believe and are rooted in the word of God, and they overcome the world, and as a result they are productive in their spiritual lives.

Luke says they *have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.*

Notice also that there are three different forms of opposition to the seed, which is the word of God,

1. In those with hearts like wayside soil it was opposed by the devil.
2. In those with hearts like rocky soil it was opposed by persecution that arose because of the word.
3. And in those whose hearts are like thorny ground it was opposed by the cares of the world.

b. The Parable of the Seed that is sown, Mark 4:26-29

Now the second parable is found only in Mark's account: the parable of the seed that is sown. And the main point is that the seed will spring to life and grow of its own accord, inexplicably. The growth of the seed does not depend upon the sower. The sower doesn't even know how it grows, and there is nothing he can do to make it grow. All he can do is harvest it when it is ready.

And that is the mystery of regeneration. A simple gospel message accepted suddenly changes the person. He is born again and we see major changes in his or her life. We can observe these changes, but we cannot explain them.

c. *The Parable of the Tares, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43*

The third parable is the parable of the tares. Read both the parable and Jesus' explanation of it.

Elements of the figure

What are the elements of this parable, and what does Jesus say they represent?

1. The sower of good seed is the Son of Man, Jesus Himself.
2. The enemy who sowed the tares is the devil.
3. The field is the world.
4. The good seed are the sons of the Kingdom, the believers.
5. The tares are the sons of the evil one.
6. The harvest is the end of the age, just before the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom.
7. The reapers are angels.

The meaning of the parable

This parable makes three main points.

1. And the first point that it makes is that a false counter-sowing will follow the true sowing. There will be a counter-sowing of false believers. They claim to be believers, but are not.
2. Secondly there will be side-by-side development of believers and unbelievers as a result of the two sowings. And so in every church we will have people we are sure are believers, who do not end up being that, although they have all the terms and outward appearance of believers.
3. Thirdly, the judgement at the end of the Mystery Kingdom age will separate the two, with the wheat entering the Messianic Kingdom, represented by the barn, and the tares being excluded and thrown into the fire.

d. *The Parable of the Mustard Seed, Mark 4:30-32; Matthew 13:31-32*

Now what is the figure drawn from everyday life here in this parable?

Elements of the figure

A man takes a mustard seed and plants it in his field. The word for field is *agros*, meaning area of cultivated ground.

The mustard seed is the smallest of seeds, but when it is fully grown it is larger than the garden plants and Matthew says it becomes a tree and Mark says it forms large branches.

The word for *garden plants* is **λάχανον *láchanon***; which means literally a plant in tilled ground, hence a garden plant, herb. So it conveys the idea of a plant or herb growing in a tilled garden.

The Contrast

What is the contrast made in this parable? The word *but* in Matthew's account points it out to us: Although it begins as the smallest of seeds, the mustard plant grows to the size of a tree, *larger than all the garden plants*. It becomes huge.

The Result

And what is the result? The words *so that* at the end of the passage point it out: *So that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES.*

The point made in the figure

That is the figure drawn from everyday life: a plant that grows to monstrous proportions and becomes a nesting place for birds.

The reality

What are the realities represented by the elements of the parable?

1. The man who sowed the mustard seed is again the Son of Man, Jesus Himself.
2. The mustard seed is the Mystery Kingdom, Christendom.
3. The field is the world, as it is in the third parable.
4. The birds of the air, Jesus tells us in the first parable, are the agents of Satan.

The meaning of the parable

What, then, does this parable tell us about the Mystery Kingdom?

1. The first point is that there will be an abnormal external growth of the mystery kingdom until it becomes a monstrosity.
2. And secondly, this monstrosity becomes the nesting place for the agents of Satan.

Within Christendom we will find not only the true Bible believing church, but also various cultic groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, and Mormonism. They all claim to believe in Jesus, but each cultic group has one essential truth which they deny. They too, we are told, are within Christendom or the Mystery Kingdom.

e. *The Parable of the Leaven, Matthew 13:33*

The fifth parable is the parable of the leaven.

What is the example taken from everyday life? A woman takes leaven and kneads it into three measures of flour, until it is all leavened.

So the elements here are the woman, leaven, and three measures of flour.

What happens to the leaven? The woman works it into the flour until it is all leavened. In other words all the flour is influenced by the leaven. This is the point made by the everyday life example.

Now what does it represent?

A Woman

Whenever a woman is used symbolically she represents a religious entity, which could be good or bad. For example, Israel is the wife of Jehovah, and the church is the bride of Messiah. These are good elements. On the bad side you have the Jezebel of Revelation 2:20, and the great harlot of Revelation 17:1-8, both representing false religious systems.

Here in this parable it is used negatively. The point represented by the woman is that a false religious system will be introduced into the mystery kingdom.

Leaven

When the word leaven is used symbolically it is always symbolic of sin, and in Matthew's gospel a specific type of sin: the sin of false doctrine.

So the point of this parable is that false teaching will be introduced into the mystery kingdom resulting in corruption of doctrine.

Three measures

Furthermore there are three measures of wheat because Christendom eventually divides into three major divisions: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. All three divisions will have lesser or greater degrees of false teaching. There will be some degree of inward doctrinal corruption in each division of Christendom.

f. *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure, Matthew 13:44*

The sixth parable is the parable of the hidden treasure.

The figure

The example taken from everyday life of the first century is that treasure would be hidden in a field for security. In this case a man discovered some treasure that had been hidden in the field, and he hid it again, *and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

Elements of the figure

The elements of the figure are the man, the treasure, the field, and all that he had.

The point made in the figure

The point made by the figure is that the man was overjoyed to find treasure in the field and so, at the cost of all that he had, he purchased the field. He purchased the field for the sake of the treasure that it contained.

The reality

What are the realities represented by the elements of the parable?

Treasure

The Old Testament reveals to us what God considers to be His treasure. Read the following passages.

Exodus 19:5 (ESV)

⁵ *Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;*

Deuteronomy 14:2 (ESV)

² *For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*

Deuteronomy 26:18 (NASB95)

¹⁸ *"The Lord has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments;*

Psalms 135:4 (NASB95)

⁴ *For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession, or His own special treasure.*

The word that is translated *possession* in these verses means **treasured possession**, something for which the owner has a special affection, or which holds a special value for him.

So we see that Israel is God's treasured possession.

The Man, the field, and the price

Now read Hebrews 12:1-2 with this parable in mind and notice what Jesus did.

Hebrews 12:1–2 (NASB95)

¹ Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross! Surely He gave all that He had, His own life, to purchase the world.

The man is Jesus the Messiah.

The field is the world.

And the price of the field is His own life, all that He had!

The meaning of the parable

What, then, does this parable tell us about the Mystery Kingdom?

Jesus, the Messiah, found His treasured possession, Israel, hidden in the world. And from joy over His treasure, He purchased the whole world with His own life by dying on a cross.

The man's joy was over the treasure, and in order to have the treasure he purchased the field. And in like manner, Jesus' joy is over Israel, and in order to have His treasure, Israel, he purchased the whole world.

The main point

And the main point of the parable is that there will be many in Israel who will become believers. In spite of Israel's rejecting the Messiah, there will still be a remnant coming to faith.

And there will always be a number of Jews, small or large, who come to believe in the Messiahship of Jesus. And the messianic Jewish community in our day, numbering about 150,000 strong at the present time, will be the testimony to this.

g. *The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price, Matthew 13: 45-46*

The figure

The everyday life figure of this parable is very similar to the previous one. Here a man finds a pearl of great value, sold all that he had, and bought it.

Elements of the figure

The elements of the figure are the man, the pearl of great value, and all that he had.

The point made in the figure

The point made by the figure is that when the man found a pearl of great value, he sold all that he had, and bought it. And the pearl becomes his possession as a result of the purchase.

The reality

What are the realities represented by the elements of the parable?

Again the man is Jesus the Messiah.

And all that He had is His own life.

The Pearl

But what about the pearl?

While the Old Testament reveals clearly that the treasure represents Israel, it doesn't state anywhere what the pearl represents. And therefore we must determine the meaning in some other way.

Knowing that both Jews and Gentiles become believers in this age and therefore the mystery kingdom contains both Jews and Gentiles, it is very likely that, just as the treasure in the previous parable represented the Jews, so the pearl in this parable represents the Gentiles.

Furthermore, the pearl originates from the sea, and what the Bible does make clear in places like Daniel 7:1-3; Revelation 17:1, 15; 13:1; and Isaiah 17:12-13 is that the sea represents the Gentile world.

The meaning of the parable

And so this parable points out that there will also be many among the Gentiles who come to faith in the Messiahship of Jesus.

h. The Parable of the Dragnet, Matthew 13:47-50

The eighth parable is the parable of the net. And with the parable we are given the explanation of its meaning.

The figure

In the figure we have a dragnet gathering fish from the sea. And when the net is filled, the fish are separated into two groups, those that are kept in containers and those that are thrown away.

The sea

The sea is again prominent in this parable, and again it represents the Gentile world. So the net is gathering Gentiles.

The reality

The reality pictured here is that the mystery kingdom age will end with a judgement of the Gentiles. The righteous Gentiles will enter into the messianic kingdom, and the unrighteous will be excluded from that kingdom and thrown into the fires of hell.

What about the Jews you may be wondering? Why does this judgement only include the Gentiles? We know from other passages that by the time of this judgement at the end of the age, the Jews have already been judged. Two thirds of them have perished, and without exception, every living Jew is a believer.

The judgement depicted here is the same judgement of the Gentiles found in Joel 3:1-3 and in Matthew 25:31-46.

i. The Parable of the Householder, Matthew 13:51-52

The ninth parable is the parable of the householder.

The figure

The figure here is of the head of a household who brings out of his treasure both new things and old things. The elements of the figure are the head of the household, and his treasure.

The reality

The head of the household is a *scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven*. The treasure of the scribe is his knowledge of the Word of God.

So the reality depicted by the parable is that the scribe in the kingdom will bring out of the Word of God things both new and old in relationship to the mystery kingdom.

The meaning

And the point He makes is that some aspects of the mystery kingdom have similarities with the other facets of God's kingdom program, and other aspects are completely new, never found before - hence the mystery.

Summary of the Parables

Now I will give a one-sentence summary of each of these nine parables to show the overview of the mystery kingdom age.

1. The sower:

There will be the sowing of the gospel seed throughout this age.

2. The seed growing of itself:

This seed which has been sown will have an inner energy so that it will spring to life and grow of its own accord.

3. The Tares:

The true sowing will be imitated by false counter-sowing.

And because of the false counter-sowing two things follow:

4. The Mustard Seed:

The Mystery Kingdom will assume huge outer proportions until it becomes a monstrosity harbouring the agents of Satan.

5. The Leaven:

It will be marked by inward doctrinal corruption.

Nevertheless, because the seed is sown and grows of itself two other things follow:

6. The Treasure:

The Lord will gain a remnant from Israel.

7. The Pearl:

God will gain a people from among the Gentiles.

Then:

8. The Net:

The Mystery Kingdom age will end with the judgement of the Gentiles; the unrighteous will be excluded from the Messianic Kingdom, and the righteous will be taken in.

And:

9. The Householder:

The Mystery Kingdom has both similarities and dissimilarities with the other facets of God's Kingdom Program.

Distinction between the Mystery Kingdom and the other facets of God's Kingdom Program

Let's see how the Mystery Kingdom is distinct from the other four facets.

1. It is not the same as the Universal Kingdom or Eternal Kingdom because the Mystery Kingdom is limited in time from the rejection until the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah and therefore it is not eternal.

And the Mystery Kingdom is not universal because it is limited to the earth only.

2. It is not the same as the Spiritual Kingdom because the Spiritual Kingdom consists of believers only, from Adam until the end of human history, but this kingdom has both believers and unbelievers in it.
3. It is not the same as the Theocratic Kingdom, which was God's rule over Israel only. The Mystery Kingdom is not limited to one nation, the nation of Israel, but has both Jews and Gentiles in it.
4. It is not the same as the Messianic Kingdom because the Messianic Kingdom does not qualify to be a mystery. There are far more details about the Messianic Kingdom in the Old Testament than in the New Testament. But the Mystery Kingdom qualifies to be a mystery: It was not revealed anywhere in the Old Testament.

Nor is the Mystery Kingdom the same as the Church. The church is part of the Mystery Kingdom. It is the wheat segment, the believing segment of the Mystery Kingdom. But it is not equivalent to the Mystery Kingdom, which is more extensive than the church.

Conclusion

So, with these points Jesus introduces a new facet of God's Kingdom Program that will come into being because of the nature of the unpardonable sin.

4. Power over Nature, § 65, Matthew 8:18; Mark 4:35-42; Luke 8:22-25

In section 64 and in response to His rejection by the leaders of Israel we saw Jesus announcing a new form of the Kingdom of God, the Mystery Kingdom. And, beginning with this section, we will see that the miracles He performs from this point on will illustrate his new policy concerning his miracles and teaching.

He changes the focus of His teaching. No longer is He addressing Israel the nation. Now he begins to teach the disciples to depend on him. And His miracles are part of that teaching.

Read Mark 4:35 – 41.

On that day

First of all, notice how Mark begins: *On that day, when evening came*. The same day that has been around since His rejection. It has been a very long day. And he is finally alone with his apostles.

What happens?

Then what happens?

As they are going across the Sea of Galilee *there arose a great storm on the sea*, and the waves were beating against the boat and washing over it, and they were in danger.

And the extremity of the situation is at the end of Luke's account in verse 23: *they began to be swamped and to be in danger*. Their lives are now at stake.

As for the Messiah, he wasn't being shaken at all by these events. Mark verse 38 says he was just down in the stern of the boat, asleep on a cushion.

The disciples' response

How did the disciples respond to this situation?

According to Luke, they *woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing."* And I'm sure there was a sense of urgency in their voices. When Jesus responds to them we learn that they were afraid.

And according to Matthew, they *woke Him saying, "Save us Lord; we are perishing!"* So in their fear of perishing they come to the Messiah and ask Him to save them.

Jesus' response

How does Jesus respond to their request?

All three accounts tell us that He rebuked the wind and the sea. The Greek word here has the meaning "to restrain or to muzzle". He literally muzzled the wind. Mark points out in verse 39: *the wind died down and it became perfectly calm*. Moreover, this was instantaneous. Suddenly the wind ceased to blow, and just as quickly, the scene is as calm as it can be.

Jesus' questions

He said to them in Mark verse 40: *"Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?"* Matthew records it, in verse 26, as: *"Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?"* And in Luke He says: *"Where is your faith?"*

What point is Jesus making by asking these questions?

To begin to answer that, let's contrast Jesus and the disciples in the storm.

Jesus was asleep, exhausted, and confident in His Father. He knows who He is. He knows why He is on earth. He knows His Father's purposes for Him will be accomplished. And He knows that no storm can defeat those purposes.

The disciples understand their danger from their human perspective, and based on their experience of the sea, they are about to perish.

What they know of Jesus

What do they know of Jesus?

In section 28 where they began to follow Him they acknowledge that He is the Lamb of God; He is the Messiah, the King of Israel; He is the Son of God; He is the Son of Man; He is the one of whom Moses in the Law, and also the prophets, wrote.

They witnessed the miracle at the wedding at Cana, and they believed. Since then they have witnessed many other miracles, including two messianic miracles. They saw Him take possession of the temple. And they have listened to Him preach and teach.

That very day, after watching Him cast out the mute demon, they saw Him rejected by the Jewish leadership, and they heard His response. They heard Him pronounce judgement upon that generation. And they listened to Him teaching them about the new facet of God's kingdom that will come about as a result of the unpardonable sin.

Then, in the midst of the storm, when they are fearful for their lives, they turn to Him and ask Him to save them. This actually demonstrates their faith! They applied what they knew about Him and called on Him to save them. Then they trusted Him to do that.

The purpose of Jesus' question

What, then, is the purpose of Jesus' question?

Jesus is telling them that, since they know who He is, they should also know that no storm is going to cause Him to perish!

The point of His question is that they actually had enough knowledge of Him that they did not need to be afraid of the storm. There is no way it could have caused Him, or them, to perish. The issue is not that they needed more faith, but that they need not have feared!

The disciples' reaction

How did the disciples respond to the miracle and the question?

We are told they responded with fear and amazement.

However, this fear is a different kind of fear from the fear they had in the storm, and a different Greek word is used.

In the storm the word was *deilos*, meaning fear in the sense of being timid or cowardly.

Now the word is *phobos*, meaning fear, terror, reverence, respect, honour. It includes the idea of astonishment and amazement.

In response to the miracle, they were in awe of God. They recognize that God is the one who worked the miracle. This contrasts with the response of the Pharisees who explained His miracles as the work of Satan.

The lesson learned by the disciples

What did the disciples learn from this event?

Even the winds and the sea obey Him.

With this miracle, Jesus teaches them that He has power and authority over nature.

They also learn that God will bring about His purpose....

5. Power over Demons, § 66, Matthew 8:28-24; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39

It was a very long day in which –

the Pharisees rejected Him; and in which

He began to teach in parables about the nature of the mystery kingdom that would come because of the unpardonable sin.

At the end of that very long day, in the evening He set out in boats with His disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee from the north west side to the north east side.

In that day the north east side was Gentile territory. The Jewish territory went all the way from Bethsaida down to Magdala. And then from Tiberias all the way round and up again was the Gentile side of the lake.

This is one of the few times He crossed over into Gentile territory to get away from the Jewish crowds to be able to teach his disciples privately.

Gadarene or Gerasene?

Read Matthew 8:28a; Mark 5:1; and Luke 8:26.

Now you will notice that Matthew says they came *into the country of the Gadarenes*, while Mark and Matthew say it was *the country of the Gerasenes*. Some consider that is a contradiction arguing against the inspiration of the text. However, that argument only reveals their lack of knowledge of the geography of the day.

The area on the eastern side of the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee was called Gedara. It was primarily Gentile with a small Jewish population. Within the region of Gedara were several cities, two of which play a role here.

- i. One was the city of Gedara.

Therefore, the word Gedara can refer to either a city or a region, similar to New York in the United States. When I say New York do I mean New York City or New York State? Only by the context can you tell. The same thing applies here. Gedara might refer to a region, or it might refer to a city.

Essentially Matthew is giving us the region. He is not giving us the city.

- ii. Another city within the region of Gedara was the city of Gergasa. Therefore, the event described here takes place in Gergasa in the region of Gedara.

Therefore, there is no real contradiction here.

The demoniac

Read Mark, verses 2-5.

Now notice that although He has cast out demons before, we were simply told what a demon did: he made him blind, he made him dumb, and he made him deaf, and so on. Now on this occasion, only after He Himself has been accused of being demonised, for the first time we have a detailed description of an extreme demonic state. And what he describes here is a very extreme form of demonism. Not all demonised people were as extreme as this.

This is a situation where the One who has been accused of being demonised will now be facing a legion of demons and this event shows that He has power over them, but they do not have power over Him.

Also notice that Mathew records that there were two demon-possessed men, but both Mark and Luke choose to focus their attention on one of them.

What demons know

Read Mark 5: 6-7 and Matthew 8:29.

Here we see what demons commonly know:

1. First of all they have no problem recognising who Jesus is. They recognise that He is the Messiah, *the Son of the Most High God*.
2. Also notice that they know their future doom.

In Matthew's account in verse 29 they say: *Have You come here to torment us before the time?*

They know they are destined to go into the lake of fire at the appointed time. Originally the lake of fire was not intended for fallen humanity, but for fallen angels. But now it will also be for fallen humanity.

So they recognise who Jesus is. And they also recognise their future.

Legion

Read Mark, verses 8-10.

Here Jesus uses the traditional Jewish method for casting out demons. He asks them: *What is your name?*

And he says *My name is Legion, for we are many*. Notice the change of pronouns from "my" to "we". A legion of demons was anywhere from three thousand to six thousand. A small legion was three thousand. A full legion was six thousand. Therefore, in this demonic state there are at least three thousand demons.

Abyss

Read Luke verse 31:

They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss.

The Abyss is a section of Sheol of Hades, and is a place for the temporary confinement of fallen angels or demons. And we'll have more to say about it in a future section. When a demon was cast out he must spend some time in the Abyss and then be released again.

Here they asked Jesus not to be sent into the Abyss.

The herd of pigs

Read Luke, verses 32-33.

Instead of being sent into the Abyss, they ask to be sent into the pigs. And Jesus *gave them permission*.

And when the demons enter these pigs, they all run into the Sea of Galilee in a mass suicide and drown themselves.

Why did He grant the demons' request? Was He having compassion on them?

The reason He allowed them to go into the pigs was not likely to be compassion for them, but for the reaction of the herdsmen that followed.

The results

Read Luke verses 34-37a.

Here we see three results of this event.

1. The herdsmen run and tell everything in both the city and the country.
2. *The man from whom the demons had gone out was sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.*
3. *All the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear.*

The healed man

Now read Luke 8:37b-39.

In verse 35 we saw the man *sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind*. This is a picture of the man listening to Jesus' teaching.

Now, as Jesus is getting into the boat to leave, the man begs Jesus to be allowed to accompany Him. He wants to become a disciple of Jesus, but Jesus would not accept Gentile disciples at this stage. He says in verse 19 of Mark: *"Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you."* And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Decapolis was a union of ten Greek speaking Gentile cities, nine of which were on the east side of the Jordan. Only one, Scythopolis, which in New Testament times was a Gentile city, was on the west side of the Jordan.

Two policies

We see two things here:

- i. At this point Jesus is not accepting Gentile disciples, and as a result the man cannot become His disciple at this stage.
- ii. The policy not to tell people about what he has done applies to Jews but not to Gentiles.

Results in Decapolis

What was the result of this miracle and this man's testimony?

Mark adds that *everyone was amazed*. When we come to the section about the feeding of the four thousand, we will see the success of this man's ministry.

For now, they ask Jesus to leave. Next time He comes, He will be welcomed.

6. Power over Disease and Death, § 67, Mark 5:21-43; Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-56

Now for the disciples the events in this section would be a lesson of Messiah's power. For the woman and Jairus it would be a lesson of faith.

Jairus

Read Mark verses 21-23.

Where is Jesus now?

Jesus is now back on the Jewish side of the Sea and a synagogue official *fell at His feet and implored Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live."*

What does this request show us about Jairus?

This shows us two things: his personal need, and his belief in Jesus.

Before His rejection, the miracles Jesus performed were signs to authenticate His message that He is the Messiah, and He did not require people to have faith before He performed a miracle. Now we are going to see that from the time He was rejected, Jesus will respond to personal needs on the basis of faith.

Notice what Luke, the physician, points out in verse 42. He point out that she is 12 years old at this time, and she was very close to death. He says *she was dying*.

Crowds pressing against Him

Read Luke verses 42b-44.

Both Mark and Luke point out here that *the crowds were pressing against Him*. The Greek word used by Luke, ***sumpnigō***, means: To choke or throttle and thus to suffocate. Figuratively it means to crowd, or press upon. In view of what we are about to read, it is important to note this because it means that a lot of people were touching him at this stage.

A woman with a haemorrhage

Along the way He encounters *a woman who had a haemorrhage for twelve years*, which was the same amount of time that Jairus' daughter had lived. She is twelve years old and the woman had twelve years of haemorage.

According to the Law in Leviticus chapter 15:19-32, her condition made her unclean, and therefore, for twelve years she has been untouchable and has not touched anyone else.

Now it is interesting to note that Luke the physician simply says *she could not be healed by anyone*. In some manuscripts, such as the one used for the ASV, Luke adds that she *had spent all her living upon physicians*.

Notice what Mark adds in verse 26.

She had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse.

Mark points out two things:

- i. firstly she had suffered much at the hands of many physicians,
- ii. and secondly she had spent all that she had but was not healed.

How does this compare with what Luke recorded?

Luke is a doctor and shows some professional courtesy here. Therefore, he will admit that she spent all her living and she could not get any better, but he leaves out the phrase about having suffered at the hands of many physicians.

Tzitzit - fringe

In verse 44, Luke points out that *she touched the fringe of his cloak*.

The word fringe refers to tassel. Tassels were commanded by the Mosaic Law. Because Jesus kept the Mosaic Law perfectly He had tassels on the borders of his garments.

Why would she touch the tassel of His garment?

She could not touch Him because of her uncleanness, but she could touch a tassel, and she believed that by touching the tassel she would be healed.

Rabbinic cures

Now, in dealing with the leper I mentioned that in the Rabbinic writings there are many cures for many diseases, but leprosy was not one of them.

However, they do have a way of curing a woman with blood disease and here is what they suggest you do, and this passage is quoted from rabbinic writings:

In order to heal a woman with a blood disease:

Take of gum of Alexandria, the weight of a zuzee, and alum, the weight of a zuzee, and a crocus hortensis, the weight of a zuzee; let them be bruised together, and be given in wine to the woman that hath an issue of blood.

But if this does not benefit: take of Persian onions thrice three logs, boil them in wine, and give it to her to drink, and say, arise from your flux.

But this does not prevail: Set her in a place where two ways meet, and let her hold a cup of wine in her hand; and let someone come up behind her and scare her, and say, arise from your flux.

But if that does not do any good: take a handful of cumin and a handful of crocus; let these be boiled in wine, and give them to her to drink, and also say, arise from your flux.

If this does not help: then let them "Dig seven ditches, in which let them burn in them some cuttings of trees that have not yet been circumcised (meaning not yet four years old); and let her take in her hand a cup of wine, and let them lead her away to the first ditch and make her sit down over that, let them then remove her to the second ditch to sit down over, and all seven ditches, and say, arise from your flux. And then if there is no cure from that, there is no cure for ever.

This woman may have undergone some of these treatments and spent all her money and suffered at the hands of many physicians.

Healed

What happened when she touched the tassel of His garment?

Read Mark verse 29:

Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.

She recognises that she was healed instantly.

Jesus' question

Jesus' first response is to ask a question.

Read Mark verses 30 – 36.

Mark points out that He was aware *that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth*. So He asks, *who touched My garments?*

Why do you think He asked this question?

To find out who touched Him?

Did Jesus ask this question to because He did not know who touched Him?

Notice verse 32: *And He looked around to see the woman who had done this.*

The ordinary Greek verb meaning to see is *blepo*. But here Mark chooses to use the word *eidon* which means:

- i. To behold, look upon, contemplate .
- ii. To see in order to know, to look at or into, examine.
- iii. To see face to face, to see and talk with, to visit, i.e., to have personal acquaintance and relationship with.

(Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers)

It shows He knew who it was. He knew exactly who did the touching.

Purpose

Therefore, the question remains, Why did Jesus ask who touched Him?

Perhaps the response of the disciples gives us a clue. How did they respond?

For the disciples this was a frustrating question. Therefore, they say to him in verse 31: *"You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' "* meaning: a lot of people touched you. What do you mean who touched you?

Now He has their attention!

Surely, that was His purpose: to catch the attention of the apostles so that they will learn a lesson from what He is about to say.

See if you can catch the lesson as we read and think about the next two verses.

Faith

Read Luke verse 47.

When the woman saw that He recognised what she did, she declared two things in the presence of all the people. What were they?

- i. The reason why she had touched Him, and
- ii. How she had been immediately healed.

Why did she touch Him (Mark verse 28)?

She thought, "If I just touch His garments, I will get well."

Notice what He says to her in Luke verse 48:

"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

He corrects her theology. It was not touching His garments that healed her. It was her faith that healed her. Touching His garment was merely the outworking of her faith.

Moreover, the power to heal did not issue from his clothing, it issued from Him.

The lesson for the apostles

What was the lesson that Jesus wanted to disciples to learn here?

The lesson is this: Faith is now required for miracles. Since His rejection, He will only perform miracles for individuals who come in faith with a personal need.

Her personal need is obvious. Her action demonstrated her faith.

Jairus' daughter dies

Now this incident causes a delay as they travel to the house of Jairus, where his daughter lay dying.

Read Luke verses 49-50 to see what happens.

A message comes to the party that the daughter has died. And therefore don't trouble the master any further. However, he says to them at the end of verse 36: *"Do not be afraid any longer, only believe, and she will be made well."*

Notice the prominent emphasis on believing.

Jairus too had come in faith with a personal need, and he had witnessed the woman's faith and heard Jesus' response to her. He understood the lesson of faith!

The policy of privacy

Read Mark, verses 37-40 and notice how Mark emphasises that the miracle was done in private.

- i. In verse 37 he says Jesus *allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John.*
- ii. In verse 38, *they came to the house.*
- iii. In verse 39, *they entered in.*
- iv. In verse 40, He *put them all out.* He put out all the people.
- v. Then, at last, also in verse 40, *He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was.*

Jesus no longer performs miracles for the sake of the public, and so He has everybody else removed from the house. The only ones He brings in are three of His apostles and the parents.

His policy now is to perform miracles privately, in response to personal need, and on the basis of faith.

Purpose

His purpose is to teach the disciples, and here they learn about His power over death.

Healing

Now read Mark verses 41-43.

He says to her, "*Talitha kum!*" Talitha is an Aramaic female name. That was her name, "*Talitha kum*", meaning rise up. As a result, she is resurrected from the dead.

Policy of silence

Now notice His new policy in verse 43:

And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this.

And Luke also records that *He instructed them to tell no one what had happened.*

However, Talitha's death was already public knowledge, and so, as Matthew points out in verse 26, his fame continues to spread.

7. Power over Blindness, § 68, Matthew 9:27-34

a. Two blind men

This section also describes two events: the healing of two blind men, and the casting out of a mute demon.

Read verses 27 to 31.

In verse 27, the two blind men call out, *“Have mercy on us, Son of David!”*

This statement reveals two significant things.

i. Personal need

First, they express a personal need: *Have mercy on us.*

ii. Son of David

Secondly, they call upon Jesus by His messianic title, *Son of David.*

How does Jesus respond to that?

He does not respond to them, He ignores them! Why?

They are asking for a miracle of healing based on His messianic character! However, the leaders of Israel have rejected Him as the Messiah. Therefore, on that basis He can do nothing for them. Therefore, He ignores them and enters the house.

The policy of privacy

When He enters the house, the blind men follow Him, and there, away from the crowds and in the privacy of the house Jesus questions them and heals them.

Therefore, the miracle will be a private one.

The policy of faith

Their personal need is obvious, but the next question is, do they have faith?

To find out, He asks them in verse 28:

“Do you believe that I am able to do this?”

Remember, there is no record of Him asking this kind of question before section 61, but now He raises these questions about faith.

When they say “yes”, then He heals them. And in healing them He emphasises the importance of faith by telling them: *It shall be done to you according to your faith.*

The policy of silence

Next, notice the new policy of silence here in verse 30:

Jesus sternly warned them: “See that no one knows about this!”

However, they went ahead and spread the news anyway, in spite of Him telling them not to.

b. Another dumb demon

Now, another mute demon-possessed man is brought to Him and He casts out the demon.

Read about it in verses 32-34.

Matthew begins,

“As they were going out, a mute, demon-possessed man was brought to Him.”

Where is Jesus when the demon-possessed man was brought to Him?

As the healed blind men went out of the house, Jesus remained inside and the demon-possessed man was brought to Him there. Therefore, the healing was performed in private.

However, when the man went out again and was able to speak, the crowds could see and hear what had happened, and they were amazed.

I guess that it is hard to heal such a man, even in private, without the fact becoming public knowledge.

However, He is following His policy. He healed the man in private in response to his personal need, and not in public as a demonstration of His messiahship.

The crowds are not following their leaders

Here Matthew focuses on the two different responses to this miracle. He draws a contrast between the response of the crowds and the response of the Pharisees.

How did the crowds respond?

They were amazed, and were saying, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.”

What was it that had never before been seen in the history of Israel?

Casting out demons was nothing new in Israel, however, Jesus was the first person in Jewish history to cast out a demon that caused muteness.

However, the explanation of the Pharisees remains the same. *They were saying, “He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.”*

Notice that the people are not yet following the leaders in rejecting Jesus. We will eventually see this change.

G. The Final Rejection in Nazareth, § 69, Mark 6:1-6a; Matthew 13:54-58

Now Jesus returns to Nazareth, His hometown. We are about to see what happened the following Sabbath.

Read Mark 6:1-6a.

Nazareth as a microcosm of Israel

In section 39, when Jesus proclaimed that He was the fulfilment of Isaiah 58:6, the people of Nazareth sought to cast Jesus off a cliff. This was their initial rejection of Him as Messiah. In this section we see the final rejection in Nazareth.

As stated in section 39, Nazareth was a microcosm of the nation of Israel as a whole in that what happened locally in Nazareth ultimately happened nationally in Israel.

We had the initial rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus by the nation in section 61. When we get to section 122 we will see the final rejection by the nation (John 11:45-54).

Jesus' family

In these passages we learn that Jesus and his foster father were carpenters, so he followed his foster father's profession.

We also learn that the names of Jesus' four half-brothers were James, Joseph, Judas and Simon; and that He had at least two half-sisters who were resident in Nazareth. So Jesus had at least six half siblings. So Mary became rather productive after Yeshuah was born contrary to the teaching of some that Mary stayed a virgin.

Joseph, His foster father, is not mentioned at all in the period of Jesus' ministry, so we can deduce that he has died some time before it began.

Offence

Why did the people of Nazareth take offence at Jesus?

These were the very people with whom He had grown up. Hearing Him teach and expound the Word, they *were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?"* (Mark 6:2). They knew that He could not have learned all this in the Nazareth school system. They also knew that Yeshua did not attend any rabbinic school, and so *they took offense at Him* because He had the arrogance to teach them.

Unbelief

Read Mark verses 5 – 6a, and Matthew verse 58.

Why was He unable to do many miracles there?

Because of their unbelief.

Therefore, because Jesus is now only doing miracles in response to faith, He heals only a few people. Moreover, He marvels at their lack of faith.

H. Witness in view of Rejection, § 70, Mark 6:6-13; Matthew 9:35-11:1; Luke 9:1-6

Now we come to section 70 where we see the kind of ministry made necessary by the rejection of section 61. We will find, as we read this section, that His ministry is a little different than it was before.

1. Introduction, Mark 6:6; Matthew 9:35-38

Read Matthew 9:35-38.

Jesus' ministry

In verse 35, Matthew summarises the ministry of Jesus before His rejection. It repeats the summary he gave at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, in Matthew 4:23 in section 43.

- i. Location: *Teaching in their synagogues*
- ii. Content: *Proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom.*
- iii. Authentication: *Healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.*

In section 43, this summary served as an introduction to the ministry of Jesus. Here Matthew uses it to provide the background for verse 36. This ministry of Jesus culminated in His rejection, and resulted in the people being like sheep without a shepherd.

Sheep without a shepherd

How are they like sheep without a shepherd?

In section 68, after the casting out of another mute demon, Matthew noted that:

*The crowds were amazed, and were saying, "nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel."
But the Pharisees were saying, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons."*

The crowds are not yet following their leaders in rejecting Jesus. Thus, they have stopped following their old shepherds. At the same time, they have not begun to follow Jesus, the new shepherd.

Therefore, in their time of indecision, they are like sheep without a shepherd.

Plentiful harvest

What is the plentiful harvest Jesus speaks about in verses 37 and 38?

Amongst the indecisive crowd, there are those who have already believed. Therefore, He instructs them to *beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.*

Those who believe are the remnant of Israel in that day.

2. The Ministry of the Twelve, Mark 6:7; Matthew 10:1; Luke 9:1-2

Message and authority

Read Luke 9:1-2.

Now He sends out the twelve. Mark notes that He sent them out in pairs. Thus, they would be able to encourage each other.

He sends them out to proclaim the message of the Mystery Kingdom.

With the message, He gives them delegated authority to authenticate their message by performing healing and casting out demons.

Notice to whom Jesus gives this authority to heal and to cast out demons. He gives it to the 12 apostles. Nowhere in scripture is this authority given to other believers. It was uniquely given to the apostles.

In verses 2-4 Matthew lists the names of the twelve.

As we will see, the apostles did not fully understand their present situation, or the facets of the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, they will have proclaimed what they understood.

3. Practical Instructions for the Mission, Mark 6:8-11; Matthew 10:5-15; Luke 9:3-5

Before sending them out, Jesus gives them some practical instructions for their mission. He instructs them on five things.

1) *To Jews only*

Read verses 5-8a.

Where are they to go?

In verses 5-6, He gives the territorial assignment, which is, only to Jews.

Jesus instructs the apostles to *go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. And until the time of the book of Acts their ministry is limited to a Jewish audience, and not even the Samaritans are to be targeted. They are to *go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*.

Notice that earlier He described the people as *sheep without a shepherd*. Now He describes them as *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. These are the ones they are to go to.

By the way, this is an example of a command that only applies to the apostles, and only for a limited time (while the Messiah was physically present on earth). Not all of His commands apply to all people, or for all time. After His resurrection, He will rescind this command when He commissions them to make disciples of all nations.

2) *The Message*

In verse 7 and 8a, they are to preach.

What is their message?

- The content of the message is that *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. This of course is the mystery kingdom, which He has just been explaining to them.
- They are to authenticate the message by the miracles they perform.

3) *Provisions*

Read verses 8b-10 in Matthew.

What are they not to take with them?

He also instructs them, as they move on, not to take any wealth or funds with them, or any extra provisions like a second coat or an extra pair of sandals, as God would provide all their needs.

Rabbis were not paid for teaching. Just as they receive freely, they should be able to give freely.

(An apparent contradiction regarding a staff is easily explained. In Mark He says to take nothing *except a mere* staff. In Matthew and Luke He instructs them not to take a staff. The Greek word for staff, like the English, can refer to a walking stick, or it can refer to a weapon used for fighting such as a quarterstaff - two different kinds of staff. The staff they are to take with them is not an aggressive staff, but only a walking staff.)

In verse 10 of Matthew, the worker is worthy of his support, meaning that God will provide for their needs as they proceed.

This is the principle here: they are to trust God to provide for their needs, and they are to give freely from what God provides.

Again, this principle does not apply for all believers for all time, but rather for the apostles for a limited period. At the end of His public ministry, Jesus told them to take the very things He had just told them here not to take. This illustrates again that certain things were true only while the Messiah was physically present on earth. Things would change when He ascended into heaven, and it is important to distinguish between things that apply during His presence on earth and things that apply during His absence from earth.

4) *Believers*

Where are they to stay?

Read verses 11-13 in Matthew.

When they go to a city they are to find and stay with someone who is worthy.

The word *worthy* in the Greek is *axios*, which means worthy in the sense of having inherent value as contrasted with *timios*, which means worthy because of attributed value, or esteemed, honoured, or valued.

This indicates that they are to find someone who actually believes. They are to make their home with a believer, and to give him a blessing of peace.

Therefore, while the nation as a nation is rejecting Him, the focus of their ministry is the individuals and families who believe.

5) *Unbelievers*

Read verses 14-15 in Matthew.

When they find those who are not worthy, those who will not receive them nor heed their words, He says *as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet*. Mark and Luke add that it is *for a testimony against them*. The act of shaking the dust off their feet is a symbolic action of witnessing against them. It is a sign of judgement, as Matthew emphasises.

While judgement will come upon the city, the worthy one within the city will be spared.

These are the five elements of practical instruction given to the twelve, but notice that the focus of their ministry is to be on the Jewish believers, the remnant of that day.

4. **Instructions in View of the Coming Persecution, Matt. 10:16-23**

In verses 16-23 Jesus tells them how to respond to the coming persecution and then He describes the scope of persecution.

Read verses 16-18.

What does it mean to be sent out *as sheep in the midst of wolves*?

It is not hard to imagine what happens when a wolf get in among the sheep, but here the picture is of sheep in the midst of wolves!

Response to persecution

How are they to respond to this?

So be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

What is the difference between being *as shrewd as serpents* and *as innocent as doves*?

Shrewd as serpents speaks about wisdom and *innocent as doves* speaks about actions.

Because they were being sent out *as sheep in the midst of wolves*, the apostles were to use their wisdom to avoid being hurt if possible. However, if it were not possible to avoid being hurt, like doves, they should be willing to be hurt and yet remain harmless themselves.

They should be willing to be taken before counsels and synagogues, and be ready to be scourged.

Future ministry

Notice that verse 17 mentions synagogues, which are Jewish places, while verse 18 mentions governors, kings, and Gentiles.

In verses 5-6, we noticed that at this time they He was sending them only to the Jews. Therefore, verse 18 refers to their future ministry after His ascension.

Persecution's reason and purpose

Notice the end of verse 18, where Jesus gives them the reason for the persecutions and the purpose for the persecutions.

What does He give as the reason for persecution?

For My sake.

What is the purpose of persecution?

As a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.

These persecutions happen for Jesus' sake, and their purpose is to be a testimony to two groups of people: *to them and to the Gentiles*. In other words to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

So He begins by instructing them not to go to Gentiles, but He promises that they will someday also have a Gentile ministry.

It will be God who speaks

Read verses 19-20.

Here He points out that they need not be concerned for what they will say. When the time comes to defend themselves, God will give them what to say for *it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you*. This is not dealing with Bible lessons or sermons. It is dealing with defending oneself in a court of law because of one's faith in Jesus.

Division in the family

Read verses 21-22.

Notice the change from using the second person, referring to the apostles, to using the third person: *Brother will betray brother to death*. This indicates that the betrayals referred to here do not apply to the apostles themselves, but to those who will believe through their testimony.

Normally the Jewish family is a very close-knit unit, but because of the rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus, He now becomes a point of division in the Jewish family unit.

Hatred and endurance

Another subtle switch occurs in this verse from the second person (*ye shall be hated*) to the third person (*but he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved*). Those who remain faithful to the end will not die in the A.D. 70 judgment, a point that will be developed further later in this study.

Flee to another city

Read verse 23.

He says, when you are persecuted in one city, just go to another.

Then He says at the end of verse 23: *you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes*.

What does this mean?

This could be a reference to the second coming. However, in this immediate context, because He addresses this to the apostles, it is probably a reference to how far they will get before He comes. They will not get through all the cities of Israel before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, prophesied by Zechariah 9:9.

5. Instructions in View of Rejection, Matt. 10:24-33

Next, He gives them some instructions in view of rejection.

Read verses 24-33.

Rejection

In verses 24-25, Jesus warns the apostles that they will be rejected on the same basis that He was rejected - on the basis of demon possession. Therefore, they should be ready for this.

Do not fear them

In verses 26-27, He tells them not to be afraid, but to boldly proclaim all that He has taught them.

Then, in verse 28, He encourages them not to fear those who can kill the body, but only to fear God who is able to send the soul to hell.

Then, in verses 29-31, He speaks words of comfort to them of God's great care for them, even to the tiniest details of their being - the hairs on their head are numbered. The result is that they should not fear.

The key issue

Then, in verses 32-33, He points out the key issue for that generation:

Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

The individual members of that generation have to make this choice: either affirm Him or deny Him. If they affirm him on earth, they will be affirmed in heaven. If they deny him on earth, they will be denied in heaven.

6. The Results of Rejection, Matt. 10:34-39

In verses 34-39, He describes some of the results of the rejection of His Messiahship.

Read verses 34-39.

Division

In the messianic kingdom, which He had been offering them, they would have had true peace and a unity within each household. However, the prerequisite to establishing that peace in the Kingdom was their accepting Him as Messiah. This they failed to do.

Therefore, now in place of peace it is a sword. In place of unity, it is now division: man against son, daughter against mother, and so on. He himself would now become the symbol of acceptance or rejection just as Simeon told Mary at the time of the presentation when He was 40 days old (Section 13, Luke 2:29-36), and as Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 8:9-15.

Identity

In verse 38: What does Jesus mean when He said, *he who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me?*

Take up his cross and follow Me

What does it mean to take up a cross and follow Him?

It was the Roman custom to make convicted criminals carry their own crosses to the place of crucifixion. So bearing a cross meant carrying their own execution device while facing ridicule and humiliation along the way to death.

Therefore, to take up a cross and follow Him means to choose to identify with Him, knowing that the consequence may very well be rejection and humiliation, and even death.

Not worthy of Me

Why does He say that those who do not identify with Him are *not worthy of Him?*

Again the word, *worthy*, is the Greek word *axios*, which is talking about inherent value. The inherent value demonstrated by those who identify with Him, even in rejection and suffering, is their belief in Him. Those who do not identify with Him are demonstrating that they do not have this inherent quality of believing in Him.

He who has found his life ...

What does Jesus mean when He says (verse 39):

³⁹“*He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it?*”

The context of this verse is important to consider. The context is His rejection by the leaders of Israel. Because of the unpardonable sin, Jesus pronounced a judgement against that generation that was fulfilled in A.D. 70. Now Jesus is instructing His apostles as He sends them out to the believing remnant of Israel, including instructions about the coming persecutions, the divisions that would occur within families, and the importance of identifying with Him in His rejection.

This is the context of this statement.

Then He says, *He who has found his life will lose it.*

In other words, whoever tried to save his life and escape persecution by denying Jesus would end up losing his life in the A.D. 70 judgment.

However, *He who has lost his life for My sake will find it.*

In other words, the one who died as a martyr for Jesus' sake, would find true life and will have his reward in the messianic kingdom.

7. Rewards for Individuals Who Accept, Matt. 10:40-42

Read verses 40 – 42.

In verse 40, He says that those who receive the apostles are receiving Him, and those who receive Him are receiving the One who sent Him, that is, the Father.

To receive Him is to believe in Him.

He says there will be rewards for those individuals who accept Him. Even giving them a cup of water will result in a reward.

8. The Fulfilment, Mark 6:12-13; Matt. 11:1; Luke 9:6

Read Luke 9:6.

Here we see that they went out preaching the gospel and healing, just as He told them to at the beginning of this section.

Mark adds an important detail. Read Mark 6:12.

Mark adds that they *preached that men should repent*. The word *repent* means to change one's mind. What do they need to change their mind about?

They need to change their mind about Jesus: He is not demon possessed; He is the Messiah. Furthermore, that will give them eternal life.

While the 70 AD judgement on that generation is now inevitable, it has not closed the door to individual salvation. Therefore, individuals who come to believe will receive eternal life, though the kingdom will not be established at this point of time.

I. The Death of the Herald, § 71, Mark 6:14-29; Matthew 14:1-12; Luke 9:7-9

Read Mark 6:14 – 29.

John the Baptist had been in jail for almost two years. This was for a longer time than he had been in active ministry - which had been for 12 - 14 months. His total time for ministry was three years, just like Jesus.

He was put in jail for criticizing the marriage of Herodias to Herod Antipas.

Herod Antipas was one of the sons of Herod the Great, who had ordered the death of all children under the age of two in Bethlehem.

Herodias was the granddaughter of Herod the Great to another son, one of the sons Herod killed. She was first married to her uncle Philip, which of course violated the Mosaic Law. She then left her uncle and became mistress to her step-uncle. Then she married Antipas while her first husband, Philip, was still living, which also violated the Mosaic Law.

Marrying his brother's wife is a violation of Leviticus 16:18; 20:21. The uncle – niece marriage was also a violation of Leviticus 18:12-14; 20:19-20.

Altogether she was guilty of triple adultery and guilty of incest: Two counts of incest and three counts of adultery.

Because of John's proclamations against her marriage, she convinced her husband to have him arrested, but she could not talk him into having John executed. In Mark verse 20, Antipas knew that John was a righteous man and a holy one. Therefore, he simply kept him in prison.

What changes is that he has a birthday party and the daughter of Herodias by a previous marriage did a dance that Herod Antipas liked and he made a commitment without thinking it through. He was also probably a bit drunk at this stage and promised her she could have anything she wanted.

Her name was Salome, which in Hebrew was Shulamit. When she asked for the head of John the Baptist, Antipas tried to avoid it, but he was trapped by his own commitment. As a result, John the Baptist was beheaded.

Keep in mind that John was arrested and killed for personal reasons, but the public charge against him was political, according to Josephus' writings.

For the last time we will note, what happens to the herald will happen to the King.

Discussion topic: What do you think about the timing of John's death as it relates to his message and purpose? John's role was to herald the King, to pave the way for Israel to accept Yeshua as Messiah. Now that the nation had rejected Yeshua and lost the chance to enter the Messianic Kingdom, at that point in time, John's mission was complete.

End Notes

ⁱ Buzan, Tony, *The Ultimate Book of Mind Maps*, Thorsons, 2005, p 133.

ⁱⁱ *ibid*, p 132.

ⁱⁱⁱ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.