

# Notes on

## The Good Message, according to Matthaiah

### Authorship and Date

Both Papias (c. 130?) and Irenaeus (c. 190) affirm that Matthaiah the tribute taker wrote an account of Jesus' life in Hebrew/Aramaic. The Shem-Tob (Shem-Tov) tradition of Matthaiah, which appears to be mostly independent of the Greek tradition, supports the notion that this account was written by the tribute taker, first in Hebrew and then in Greek. The author's account of the conversion of Matthaiah the tribute taker, the strongly Jewish style, the testimony of Lukas that some of his sources were eyewitnesses, and certain of the themes add to the likelihood that it was this Matthaiah who wrote the account of Jesus' work on earth. Those who believe in Markan priority, however, reject Matthean authorship for the gospel.

The earliest manuscript of "According to Matthaiah" has its date currently in dispute, and that is p<sup>64+67</sup>. Carsten Thiede has argued for a date during the 1st century, but he has received significant opposition to this dating. The time of writing, however, is not very much in dispute, since Lukas (c.60-63) uses it as a source to some degree, since Mt. was reported to have circulated in Hebrew before it was passed around in Greek, and since the themes are so strongly Jewish as to render the gentile world virtually irrelevant (or at least unknown to the author).

Given apostolic authorship, the writing called "According to Matthaiah" was probably written during the 40's CE.

### Theory of Composition

Given that over 90% of the account attributed to Markus is reproduced somewhere in either Matthaiah's or Lukas' version, there is clearly a literary relationship between the three. Lukas openly claims to have used sources, so no problem exists in claiming that he used one or both of the other Synoptics when he compiled his own account of the events.

Since there are cases wherein each pair of the Synoptics agrees with one another in the details but differs with the third, the third must have employed the other two as sources. It is also distinctly likely that the first employed the second as a source. Whether Markus was written before or after Lukas cannot be so readily determined; however, there are factors leading us to the conclusion that Markus copied Matthaiah and not the other way around. [Here](#) is a brief argument that Markus was written last, and that Lukas used Matthaiah as a source, meaning that Matthaiah's account was written first.

Not wishing to dismiss the patristic testimony, we favor Augustine's hypothesis: that Matthaiah was written first. His account was condensed by Markus, and then Lukas compared both accounts as sources.

# Commentary

## The lineage of Jesus

*ONE 1:1 A scroll of the lineage of Anointed Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham.*

*Abraham fathered Isaak; Isaak fathered Jacob; Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers; Judah fathered Phares and Zarah (from Tamar); Phares fathered Hezron; Hezron fathered Aram; Aram fathered Aminadab; Aminadab fathered Na-ashon; Na-ashon fathered Salmon; Salmon fathered Boaz (from Rahab); Boaz fathered Yobed (from Ruth); Yobed fathered Yeshai; Yeshai fathered David the king.*

*Now David fathered Solomon (from the wife of Uriah); Solomon fathered Rheoboam; Rheoboam fathered Abijah; Abijah fathered Asaf; Asaf fathered Yosafat; Yosafat fathered Yoram; Yoram fathered Uzziah; Uzziah fathered Yoatham; Yoatham fathered Ahaz; Ahaz fathered Hezekiah; Hezekiah fathered Amos; Amos fathered Yosiah; Yosiah fathered Yeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the Babylonian captivity.*

*Now after the Babylonian captivity, Yeconiah fathered Salathiel; Salathiel fathered Zerubabel; Zerubabel fathered Abijud; Abijud fathered Eliakim; Eliakim fathered Azor; Azor fathered Zadok; Zadok fathered Achim; Achim fathered Elijud; Elijud fathered Eleazar; Eleazar fathered Matthan; Matthan fathered Yakob; Yakob fathered Yosef, Miriam's husband, from whom was born Jesus who is called Anointed.*

*Therefore, all the generations from Abraham until David were fourteen generations, and from David until the Babylonian captivity there were fourteen generations, and from the Babylonian captivity until the Anointed One there were fourteen generations.*

The author does not intend for the lineage to be complete. Instead, he lists prominent members of each time group. The first time group is from Abraham (from whom the covenant originated) to David (who was a type of the Anointed One [Messiah]). The second time group stretches from David until the captivity (c.587 BCE), and the third covers the period that we would largely call intertestamental.

The three periods are divided into fourteen "generations". The use of the number 14 is generally attributed to the fact that David's name in Hebrew characters adds to 14. Thus, the author is deliberately making an allusion to David, and therefore to Jesus being the promised Anointed One. This is a literary teaching tool, not a comprehensive genealogy.

## The Birth of Jesus

*Now the birth of Anointed Jesus was this way: While his mother Miriam was engaged to Yosef, before they came together, she was found to have a baby in her belly out of holy breath. Now Yosef her husband, being just and not wanting to make her a public spectacle, planned to privately let her go. But while he was reflecting on these things, look! Yahweh's messenger appeared to him by a dream, saying, "Yosef, son of David, do not be afraid to take aside Miriam*

*to be your wife. For that which is being born in her is out of holy breath. Now she will give birth to a son, and you will call his name Jesus ((Yeshua)), for he will save his people from their sins."*

*Now this whole thing happened so that the declaration from Yahweh through the prophet would be fulfilled, which said, "Look, the virgin will have a baby in her belly, and she will give birth to a son, and his name will be called Imma-nu-El," that is, "God is with us."*

*Now Yosef got up from sleeping and did as Yahweh's messenger had put it to him, and he took aside his wife, and he did not know her sexually until she gave birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

Miriam (probably named after Moses' sister) and Yosef are deliberately presented to us as engaged, not married. That is to say, they had not consummated the relationship. The author states this bluntly for emphasis. Miriam was a virgin. Therefore, we can understand Yosef's reaction when she turns up pregnant! All we are told in Matt's account is that she became pregnant "out of holy breath" -- that is, as the result of a miracle. There are no details laid out for us in advance. She's pregnant, and therefore Yosef has the right to have her stoned to death (according to Dt 22:23-24). Nice guy that he was, he chose to divorce her secretly, so as not to "make her a public spectacle."

At this time, all was revealed to Yosef through Yahweh's messenger. Yosef is called "son (descendant) of David" -- again referring to an important identifier of the lineage of the Anointed One. He was comforted by being told of the miracle and is instructed to name the boy Yeshua. The name comes from the same root as "Joshua" and means "Yahweh is salvation." We are told that Jesus will be given his name on account of his role. That is, he is the promised Anointed One.

## **The Magians**

### *TWO*

*2:1 Now after Jesus was born in Beth-Lehem of Judea during the days of Herod the king, look, magians from the East happened by Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn King of the Jews? For we saw his star while in the East, and we have come to bow down to him."*

*But when he heard, King Herod alarmed, and all Jerusalem was alarmed with him. And he gathered all of the high priests and scribes of the people and asked from them where the Anointed One would be born. Now they said to him, "In Beth-Lehem of Judea. For it was so written through the prophet:*

*"And you, Beth-Lehem," land of Judah, "by no means are you last among the governors of Judah. For out of you will come a governor who will feed my people Israel."*

*Then Herod called the magians privately, and by them he obtained the time of the star's appearing. And he sent them into Beth-Lehem and said, "Go and obtain information accurately*

*about the young child. Now as soon as you have found him, relate it to me, so that I too may come and bow down to him."*

*Now after hearing the king, they went. And look! The star that they had seen while in the East was in front of them until it came and stood on top of the place where the young child was. Now when they noticed the star, they rejoiced with an exceedingly great joy. And they came into the house and saw the young child with Miriam his mother, and they dropped down and bowed to him. And after opening their treasuries, they offered him gifts: gold, and incense, and myrrh.*

*And since they had been divinely warned by a dream not to find their way back to Herod, they went off into their country by another road.*

*Now after they withdrew, look: Yahweh's messenger appeared to Yosef by a dream and said, "Get up, and take along the young child and its mother, and flee into Egypt, and be there until I tell you. For Herod is about to seek the young child, to destroy it." Now he got up, took along the young child and its mother by night and withdrew into Egypt. And he was there until Herod's completion, so that the declaration by the Lord to the prophet would be fulfilled, saying, "Out of Egypt I called my son."*

*Then when Herod noticed that he had been mocked by the magians, he was enraged greatly. And, sending people forth, he killed all those boys who were in Beth-Lehem and all its borders, from two years old and down, according to the time that he had obtained from the magians. Then the declaration that was through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled, saying, "A voice was heard in Ramah, crying and much mourning. Rachel is crying for her children, and she does not want to be comforted, because they are not."*

*Now when Herod was completed, look: Yahweh's messenger appeared to Yosef in Egypt by a dream, saying, "Get up and take along the young child and its mother, and go into Israel. For the ones who were seeking the young child's life have been completed." Now he got up, took along the young child and its mother, and entered into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus reigned in Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. But since he was divinely warned by a dream, he withdrew into Galilaian parts.*

*And when he came into a city called Nazareth, he dwelt there, so that the declaration through the prophet might be fulfilled, that "He will be called a Nazarene."*

This set of events takes place within the first two years of Jesus' life, probably closer to age two than to his birth.

Jesus had been born in Beth-Lehem, we are now told, and this was David's city -- a point that would be important to readers wishing to identify the Anointed One. In the event that the reader is unfamiliar with the passage, the author includes a citation from Micah. The passage (beginning in 5:2) continues with a forecast of the Messianic role: *And he will stand and feed his flock with Yahweh's might, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God. And they will live safely, for now he will be great -- to the ends of the land; and he will be the one of peace.* As Micah continues, he predicts that the Anointed One would purify the worship of Yahweh (vv. 10f.), and that God

would bring judgment on those Jewish people who did not follow him (v. 15). As will continue to be the case, the reader is expected to be familiar with the context of any passage cited from the Hebrew Bible -- or he is expected to look it up. Here, Matthaiah points out that the Anointed One, a governor who will feed Israel, was born in Beth-Lehem.

"King Herod" or "Herod the Great" was not Jewish. However, shortly after the death of Julius Caesar, he was appointed Tetrarch of Galilaiah. By 37 BCE (after the deaths of both Fasael and Antigonus), Herod stood as ruler of all Palestine, where he took on the title of king. He aggravated the Jewish people by taxing them, by erecting a golden eagle in the temple, and (according to rumor) by robbing the temple of certain artifacts. The king was known as someone who favored Roman ways over Jewish ones. Therefore, Herod ordered the magians to discover the child under the pretext of bowing down to him -- an act that would have indicated that Jesus was his superior. The reader would recognize that having Jewish children executed was within Herod's character.

The magians found Jesus' family at home and offered gifts worthy of the king of Israel, but God (?) had told them not to return to Herod.

Meanwhile, Herod was going ballistic. He ordered all children in the area around Beth-Lehem of Jesus' approximate age to be slain. No king would rise up to take his place. This is supposed to shock the reader, but it is also meant to prepare the reader for the fact that the leaders of Jesus' people -- indeed, the most religious of the day -- would eventually attempt to have Jesus killed, so that Jesus' death would prove no more unjust than Herod's baby-killing.

But a messenger had warned Yosef to get his family out of there and to flee to Egypt -- an action which reminded the author of a saying. That saying comes from Hosea 11:1, where it is written: *When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.* The passage describes God's faithfulness to the people of Israel. The young Messiah was like Israel as a child, without the unfaithfulness that would cause God to say, "They will return to the land of Egypt" (v. 5). Therefore, our author likens God's rescue of Jesus to his rescue of Israel, and in a sense he was rescuing Israel here by saving the life of his Anointed One.

The slaughter of the youths was said to fulfill a section of Jeremiah 31 (v. 15), which also takes on a Messianic character. Rachel's weeping for her children was symbolic (in Jeremiah) of the exile of the northern tribes. Here, "they are no more" (or "they are not") refers to the deaths of literal Jewish children. Just as Jeremiah continues with the promise of restoration, so also Matthaiah most likely looks ahead to the vindication of the Jewish people (such as vv. 31ff.).

After Herod's death in 4 BCE, Yosef's family returned, choosing to be located in Nazareth. The saying, "He will be called a Nazarene," appears to have been a popular saying that was circulated by oral tradition. There is nothing directly like it in the Hebrew Bible, and the author does not claim that it is a direct quotation. It is possible that a play on words is intended, for "nazarene" is similar to the word "netzar," which signifies a tender (or green) branch. This is the word used to describe the Messiah in Isa 11:1 -- "a shoot will come out from the stump of Yeshai, and a branch will grow out of his roots."

By this time, the Jewish reader would be well aware of Jesus' identity. He is the Anointed One. Now, that theme will submerge, so that the author can bring up other matters, such as why the Anointed One came and what information he left behind.

## **John the Baptizer**

*3:1 Now during those days, John the Baptizer happened along, heralding in the desert of Judea, saying, "Change your minds, for the kingdom of the heavens is near." For this is the one declared about through Isaiah the prophet, saying, "A voice crying out in the desert, "Make ready Yahweh's way. Make his paths straight.""*

*Now he, John, had his coat of camel's hair and a belt of leather around his waist. Now his food was locusts and wild honey.*

*Then Jerusalem went out to him, and all Judea, and all the country surrounding the Jordan, and he they were baptized in the Jordan River by him, fully acknowledging their sins.*

*But when he noticed many of the Perushim and Zadokites coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who pointed out to you to flee from the coming anger? Therefore, make fruit worthy of the mental change, and do not think to say among yourselves, 'We have Abraham as a father.' For I am telling you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones! But the axe is already lying toward the roots of the trees. Therefore, each tree that does not make nice fruit will be chopped down and cast into fire.*

*"I indeed am baptizing in water into mental change. But the one who is coming after me is stronger than me, whose sandals I am not strong enough to carry. He will baptize you with holy breath and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean out his threshing floor. And he will gather the wheat into the storehouse, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

In this section, the author introduces one of his central themes, and he does so in dramatic form.

All we are told about John was that he "*happened along, heralding in the desert of Judea.*" How he came to be doing what he was doing, the author does not tell. But WHY he was there we do know:

*"Change your minds, for the kingdom of the heavens is near."*

The statement has two parts, a warning and a reason. The warning is that the Jewish listeners who had come to the desert to hear him required a mental change. What made this so urgent? The kingdom is near. John may have explained this "kingdom," but Matthaiah leaves it until later. His warnings become even stronger.

Matthaiah interjects, though, to remind the Jewish reader that it was predicted by Isaiah that John would come before the Anointed One. John was dressed in traditional prophets' garb and ate off the land.

The Jewish religious structure believed that all genuine prophecy had ceased (based on their interpretation of Zech 13). They would later use this belief in order to close the canon (c.65, 90 CE). Apparently, this caused them to question vigorously all those who claimed to be prophets. These people (such as John and Jesus) existed outside the established political structure. Therefore, it is not surprising that groups of them approached to try to trap him. These consisted of:

**Perushim** (what we call "Pharisees" -- the word roughly signifies a stickler for details. They were the strongest advocates of Rabbinical Judaism, the form of belief that came to replace Priestly Judaism after the fall of the temple in 70 CE.)

**Zadokites** (what we call "Sadducees" -- if the etymology is correct, these named themselves after Zadok the priest. They were the strongest advocates of Priestly Judaism.)

So anyway, he calls them a "*brood of vipers*." Why? Because they were hypocrites who did not "make fruit worthy of the mental change." They claimed to be spiritual, but their lives said otherwise. They were also the "good old boys"--the ones who would resist the changes brought about by the Anointed One. John says..."Who pointed out to you to flee from the coming anger?"

This is the first clear indication the reader has that the whole system is about to come down. John is referring ahead to the events of the First Revolt (66-73 CE), during which the nation of Israel would be wiped out, the Temple would be destroyed, and the lineage to the priesthood cut off. Thus, from what little we know about John, he was calling people to national reformation, for soon their nation would come to an end.

But John continues to warn them that their lineage (which was so important to the Jewish people) would not save them. Why not? "*God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones!*" In saying that, John plays a word game in Aramaic. The word for sons is "banim," and the word for stones is "abanim." God can turn these abanim into banim if he needs to! Your lineage is worthless to you!

*"But the axe is already lying toward the roots of the trees."* It's too late! The Jewish system is coming down. The trees that get "cast into fire" are the trees that don't experience "mental change". We will see later, especially in chapters 5 - 7 that this means shucking off the shackles of a system of activities and rituals in favor of God's internal, spiritual, code.

Then John makes his famous prediction. The Anointed One was coming soon, and what would he accomplish? "*His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean out his threshing floor....*" He was coming to separate the spiritual worshipers from the ritual-followers! The defenders of the orthodoxy, including those he's speaking to, were going to be destroyed. Everything they stood for would not exist under the new covenant. Matthaiah has not yet mentioned this covenant, but the Jewish readers understand that the Anointed One brings a new covenant that is not like the old (Jer 31). The readers have their first warning, which ought to instill fear in the hearts of those who have not accepted their Messiah.

## **The Baptism of Jesus**

*13 Then Jesus happened by from Galilaiah to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. Now John prevented him, saying, "I have a need to be baptized by you, and you are coming to me!" But Jesus answered, saying to him, "Allow it for now. For it is appropriate for us to fulfill every right deed this way." Then he allowed him.*

*Now when Jesus had been baptized, he came up immediately away from the water, and look! The heavens were opened to him, and God's Spirit was there, coming down like a dove and coming upon him. And look, a voice from the heavens, saying, "This is my son, the beloved, in whom I delight."*

The account here is brief. John had initiated a covenant of mental change. Jesus found it necessary to publically acknowledge the way of mental change, and so, he was baptized in the Jordan River by John.

Then came a sign, understood by many as Jesus' official anointing as the Anointed One. God provided an audio-visual sign to everyone watching that he was anointing Jesus. *"This is my son, the beloved, in whom I delight."* The statement, "This is my son," meant the same as "This is the Messiah," for one title of the Anointed One was "God's son." God left no doubt as to Jesus' identity, an identification that was also witnessed by John and (as we see in the 'fourth' gospel) by several of John's students.

Matthaiah has been sketching out for us what it means for the Anointed One to come. First of all, he proved that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Second, he claimed that the purpose of the Messiah's coming involved a complete replacement of the old system (Priestly Judaism) with something new. After one interlude, Matthaiah will present his readers with a sample of the teachings that explain this new system.

## **The Testing**

*4:1 Then Jesus was led into the desert by the spirit to be tested by the Accuser. And after fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tester came to him, saying, "If you are God's son, say that these rocks should become loaves of bread." But he answered, saying, "It was written, "Humanity does not live by bread alone, but by every declaration that goes out through God's mouth.""*

*Then the Accuser took him aside into the holy city, and he stood him on the wing of the Temple and said to him, "If you are a son of God, cast yourself down, for it was written that, "He will give a precept to his messengers concerning you, and they will bear you on their hands, lest you should strike your foot on a stone."" Jesus said to him, "It was written again, "You will not test out Yahweh your God.""*

*Again the Accuser took him aside into a very high mountain, and he showed him all of the kingdoms of creation and their glory. And he said to him, "I will give you all of these if you drop down and bow to me." Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Enemy, for it was written, "You will bow down to Yahweh your God, and you will give religious service to him alone.""*

*Then the Accuser went away from him, and look, messengers came to him and served him.*

In this section the Enemy appears in his traditional Jewish form as the Accuser of the people. Translating διαβολος as "devil" instead of "accuser" completely obscures this fact. Normally, in the OT, the Enemy takes on the role as an Accuser (e.g., Job), testing humanity. Here, he applies a triple test to the Anointed One.

The first test began with *"If you are God's son,"* which is to say, "If you're really the Anointed One." The Accuser then asked him to use his spiritual gifts to provide food for himself. After all, although this is not mentioned explicitly here, the OT prophets could call upon God to provide sustenance. God always provided for his people (e.g., the manna in the desert). Rather than use his relationship with God for self-directed purposes, Jesus replied that humanity is to live by God's declarations (Dt 8:3), and not merely by food. In that, he indicated that God has provided for him already.

Then Jesus was made to view Jerusalem from the Temple. The setting itself may have been a test. If anything could have made Jesus feel like assuming a role of authority, being positioned in the "holy city" at the temple itself would have done so. And the Accuser asked Jesus to use his authority to direct the messengers to protect him (from falling)...if he really was the Anointed One. Here, the Enemy explicitly mentioned that the Anointed deserved such authority (Psa 91:11-12). But Jesus considered this a test not of himself but of God. He had no doubt that God would protect him if need be, and so he replied that it is wrong to test Yahweh God (Dt 6:16).

The third test by the Accuser is to give up his anointed status for political authority, for bowing to the Accuser would have signified him as a superior. Jesus replies that only God deserves bowing (worship) and religious service. (Dt 6:13)

All three passages are answered by citations from Deuteronomy, and all of them offer Jesus authority: first, over nature; second, over spiritual beings; third, over the kingdoms of the earth. In every case, Jesus refuses to seize authority. It is intimated that to do so would run contrary to his identity as God's Anointed One. Matthaiah's Jesus will later establish that the followers of Jesus are to have no authority structure; this passage, in which Jesus denies certain forms of authority, paves the way for that teaching.

When the Accuser left, messengers went to Jesus and served him; yet this is not by Jesus' order but of their own volition and purpose.

## **Preparing to Teach**

*12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been delivered up, he withdrew into Galilaiah. And after leaving Nazareth, he came to Kafar-Nahum and dwelt, at the lake, within the borders of Zebulun and Naftali, so that what was declared through Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled, saying, "Land of Zebulun and land of Naftali...way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilaiah of the nations: those people who are sitting in darkness saw a great light, and a light rose for those who are sitting in the country and death's shadow."*

Lukas' chronological account shows that other things happened before this. Comparison to Johannes' account shows that Jesus already had students following him by this time. In fact, those mentioned in this section were already his followers. Yet this represents something important in Matthaiah's set of reasons for writing his treatise.

Jesus left Nazareth and traveled to Kafar-Nahum (the village of Nahum), fulfilling another prophecy as he went. This stems from Isa 9:1-2 and introduces the Anointed One as the ideal king. V.6 contains the well-known segment: "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests on his shoulders; and he is named "Wonderful Advisor"; "God is Mighty"; "the Father is Everlasting"; "Prince of Peace." His authority will grow continually, and there will be endless peace for David's throne and kingdom."

*17 From then, Jesus began to herald and to say, "Change your minds, for the kingdom of the heavens is near."*

Matthaiah reports that Jesus began heralding a message similar to that of John: *"Change your minds, for the kingdom of the heavens is near."* He too was forecasting doom for the state of Israel.

*18 Now as he walked by the Sea of Galilaiah, he saw two brothers, Simon (the one called Peter) and Andreas his brother, casting a dragnet into the sea. For they were fishers. And he said to them, "Come, behind me, and I will make you fishers of human beings." Now they let the nets go immediately and followed him. And he went forward from there and noticed two others who were brothers, Jacob the son of Zebediah and Johannes his brother, in the ship with Zebediah their father, repairing their nets. And he called them. Now they let the ship go immediately, and their father, and they followed him.*

Matthaiah appears to include the statements Jesus made to his students because something important was about to happen -- something that his soon-to-be envoys would need to be a part of. From a group of followers, Jesus selected a few fishermen, telling them that they would catch human beings from that point on. We see in John 21 that they continued to fish for sustenance, but these men were being prepared to share in the Anointed One's mission. They were going to be sent to share his message with others (chapter 10). The account reports that Peter, Jacob, and Johannes, immediately went to listen to Jesus -- to begin their preparation.

*23 And he went around in the whole of Galilaiah teaching in their gatherings and heralding the good message of the kingdom and curing every disease and every illness among the people.*

*And his hearing went out into the whole of Syria. And they brought to him all those who had something bad: those who were held by various diseases and torments; and those affected by spirit beings; and those affected by the moon; and paralytics. And he cured them.*

*25 And many people, crowds, followed him from Galilaiah and Dekapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. Now when he noticed the crowds, he went up to the mountain, and after he set himself down, his students came to him.*

And so, as this section ends, Jesus' fame spreads as he and his students travel around to the Jewish gatherings throughout Galilaiah, *"heralding the good message of the kingdom,"* with Jesus healing people from ailments both natural and apparently supernatural. And as he walked around, crowds began to follow him. Eventually, he went to the Mount of Olives, being followed by an enormous crowd at this time.

So far, the only thing we have been told about Jesus' mission was that it included the end of the current Jewish way of thinking. Next, the author plans to clue us in on a great deal!

## The Beatitudes

*And, opening his mouth, he taught them, saying:*

*5:3 "Blessed are the poor-spirited,*

*Because the Kingdom of the Heavens belongs to them.*

*Blessed are the ones who mourn,*

*Because they will be given comforting advice.*

*Blessed are the meek,*

*Because they will inherit the land.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is right,*

*Because they will be well fed.*

*Blessed are the merciful,*

*Because they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the clean-hearted,*

*Because they will see God.*

*Blessed are those who make peace,*

*Because will be called sons of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of what is right,*

*Because the Kingdom of the Heavens belongs to them.*

*"Blessed are you when they say foul things of you, and persecute you, and say every evil thing, lying against you for my sake.*

*Rejoice and be glad, because your reward is great in the heavens. For they persecuted those prophets before you in this way.*

People have written entire books about the beatitudes, and much of what they've written appears to be correct. The beatitudes are very deep thoughts. Some have seen structure in the beatitudes in three different ways:

- Each one is supposed to lead to the next one.
- Four of them relate to trust, and four of them relate to love.
- Four of them are personal, and four are directed toward others.

These observations may all be right. For this look at the beatitudes, I choose to compare them to what they oppose.

- A. The opposite of poor-spirited is rich-spirited. The rich spirited person believes he lacks nothing. This is the person in Laodikeia in Revelation. God is not so important to

him/her. But the poor-spirited person realizes that she needs God. Surely, this is an important step in spiritual growth. Although Jesus nowhere mentions the religious leaders of his day, he might very well have had their know-it-all ways in mind when he said this.

- B. Those who do not mourn feel little for others pain. They need no comforting advice, but then again, they feel close to no one. Jesus said that the ones who do mourn will be comforted. Part of that comfort comes in the closeness of the relationships that the mourner has with others.
- C. The meek are the ones who are submissive toward God. The haughty (high minded or proud) are not submissive to God. They do whatever they see fit. But it is God's people who will inherit the land, for this is a gift from God--not something they can take for themselves.
- D. *"Those who hunger and thirst."* This may seem an awful lot like "poor-spirited," but this beatitude implies activity of intellect. The opposite of the truth-seeker, the God-seeker is the complacent pew-sitter. The person who seeks will find (as we'll see later) -- his hunger will be met with satisfaction.
- E. The merciless will receive their appropriate judgment -- we'll see that later, too. The merciful will receive mercy. Justice can be merciless sometimes, but those who are merciful toward others will experience God's mercy.
- F. *"The clean-hearted...will see God."* The dirty-hearted has a consciousness of sin. He sees his own sin and guilt. The clean-hearted, who seeks God knowing that her sins are forgiven, will see not sin but God.
- G. The ones who do not make peace or who oppose peace are not following the ways of the God of Peace. Those who make peace are taking after God, and therefore (in Jewish lingo), God is their father. (You might remember in Johannes' account that Abraham is not the Leaders' father because they don't do what Abraham would do.) The one you take after is your father.
- H. Those who are persecuted for other reasons are merely suffering persecution. Those who are persecuted for doing wrong are receiving their just rewards. But Jesus says that the kingdom belongs to those who suffer because of what is right. They endure on God's behalf, and they will by no means lose their reward. God's heritage will pass to them.

What is often called the final beatitude is a product of the one above it, except that Jesus directs this one specifically at the listeners: *"Blessed are YOU when THEY say foul things of YOU, and persecute YOU, and say every evil thing, lying against YOU for MY sake... For THEY persecuted those prophets before you in this way."*

This is both the conclusion of the preceding section and the beginning of the one to come. This bridge identifies everyone, doesn't it? "YOU" are the listeners, the ones who are seeking to draw closer to God -- the ones who want to attain to the beatitudes. Jesus warned the faithful listener that THEY, the Jewish leaders who run the structured system -- the antitypes of the very people who murdered the prophets -- THEY would do all these nasty things to you, the first century Jew who accepts his Messiah. But *"your reward is great in the heavens."* It might not seem like much of a reward here on earth, but in the kingdom of the heavens, the one who endures such things -- possibly even being cast out of the gatherings and having your own relatives against you -- the one who would endure will have a great reward. Placed alongside the other beatitudes, Jesus

only stops somewhat short of saying that this is the most difficult task of all, and the one with the greatest praise from God -- suffering on account of God's Anointed One.

## Salt and Light

13 *"You are the salt of the ground. But if the salt becomes foolish, in what will it be salted? It can no longer prevail in anything except to be cast out and trampled on by people."*

This whole section bridges the beatitudes -- Jesus' instructions to the crowd -- with Jesus' exegesis of the Torah.

*"You are the salt of the ground"* is his first analogy. There were and are salts for different uses. Table salt, the finer salt, would be used to spice up food (and increase sodium intake!). The other salt to which Jesus refers is what we would call rock salt. Rock salt was used on pathways; it does not require refinement. But what does he MEAN by "you are the salt?" His explanation is given:

If you "become foolish," you're no longer fit for consumption. The salting is the follower's lifestyle, which is supposed to reflect life on the path marked out by the beatitudes. Be poor-spirited, a mourner, meek. Hunger and thirst for what is right, etc.. This is the wise way. If your lifestyle indicates that you're foolish, your example is worthless. Your example needs to be tasty!

*"You are the light of creation."* This isn't the light of the earth, this is the light of the universe. We're talking about the stars and sun here -- the light permeates. People see your light -- your example -- wherever you go. The comments here, given what has already been said about salt, assume that the listener's example is a good one.

14 *"You are the light of creation. It is impossible to hide a city that is located on a hill. Nor do they light a lamp and place it under a measure of grain, but on the lampstand. And it lights all those who are in the house."*

*"Let your light shine in this way in the presence of people, so that they might notice your good deeds and might glorify that Father of yours in the heavens."*

We don't need to guess about what Jesus meant by this, because he explains it...

Since the word "glorify" literally means "brighten," there is a play on words here. The people who notice your good deeds give praise and honor to God, and this brightens (gives glory to) him. You've got a good example. Don't HIDE it. Don't be ashamed of who you are: you're a follower of the Anointed One now!

Jesus dwelt on example for a moment, but he was about to make a crucial distinction. The example is only a good one if it flows from within. Doing "lip-service" to God is not what he wants, but a follower who is clean and who is filled with light.

And so, the Jewish person who was interested in becoming a follower of the Messiah needed to first realize that everyone's example would precede him. A good example, therefore, needed to be allowed to be tasty and shine.

## **Introduction to the Torah**

17 *"Do not think that I came to let the Torah or the Prophets go. I have not come to let them go, but to fulfill them.*

*"For indeed I am telling you: until the sky and the land pass away, not one yod or diacritical mark will by any means pass from the Torah, until all has happened. Therefore, whoever lets one of the least of these precepts go and teaches people this way shall be called least in the Kingdom of the Heavens. But whoever does and teaches the Torah, he will be called great in the Kingdom of the Heavens.*

*"For I am telling you that unless your ethics are more abundant than those of the scribes and Perushim, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of the Heavens."*

There are those who believed that the new covenant would completely nullify everything the Jews had. But the principles of the Torah are from God. These principles will not be discarded; they will be made complete through the teachings/explanation of Jesus.

Jesus looks ahead, briefly, to the consummation of the Messianic mission, which terminates as the First Revolt comes to an end. Not one *yod* -- the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet -- or diacritical mark (points that indicate inflection) will pass from the Torah until all is "fulfilled." It may be argued here that the principle of the Torah is eternal, whereas the words on the page are temporary. Notice that Jesus does not praise hypocrisy. Instead, he praises "whoever does and teaches the Torah." This bridges back to the previous section and ahead to Jesus' midrash (explanation) of the Torah.

## **Murder Internalized**

21 *"You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'Do not murder,' and that whoever murders will be liable to the judges.*

*"But I am telling you that each one who is angry with his brother will be liable to the tribunal.*

*"Now whoever says to his brother, 'You S.O.B.!' will be liable to the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to the fire of Gehenna.*

*"Therefore, if you are bringing your gift to the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

*"Be willing quickly to have good will toward the one who speaks against you, while you are with him in the road. Otherwise the one speaking against you may deliver you up to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into jail."*

*"Indeed, I am telling you: you will by no means be let out from there until you have paid the last quadrans."*

Jesus pulls a statement from the Torah, *"Do not murder."* The custom said that the murderer would go before the judges and afterwards be put to death. Therefore, murder was harshly punished under their legal code. But what is the real problem behind murder?

Does Jesus say that anger is as bad as murder? Yes. To drive his point home, he continues with two more examples.

*"Now whoever says to his brother, 'You [rakka]!' will be liable to the Sanhedrin."*

The Aramaic word *rakka* has a literal meaning that is close to "dog." It was also taken as an insult to one's family. In English, our expression that is often abbreviated S.O.B. is a good modern analog for the ancient word. It was a vulgar insult. Jesus says that for this insult, the person should go before the Sanhedrin -- a stronger punishment than being angry and a HIGHER court than normally heard murder cases!!

*"But whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to the fire of Gehenna."*

Great Scott! "You fool" was only a slight insult, and Jesus condemns the insulter to Gehenna -- to spiritual oblivion. No eternal life...for a mild insult!

Some Jews who later wrote about Jesus would say that he was rejected because he made the Torah so much more difficult. Not only couldn't a person murder, but now, harboring any ill will at all towards another person would cause the same or worse penalties!

How does Jesus' explanation work? As Jesus will explain better later, the same angry emotions are at play regarding insults and murder. If you feed that negative emotion one way (to insult or slander) but not another way (to murder), the internal problem is still the same. You cannot deal with the ill-feeling toward someone if you address only the outer manifestation. Walking around hating someone is NOT what the Torah intended. Jesus provides the "cure":

*"If you are bringing your gift to the altar..."*

Don't let anger exist between you and your fellow Jew/Christian. The wording has been reversed deliberately, so that (taken together), the thought is all-inclusive. If you're the one who's angry, or if she is, the problem still requires a peaceful solution. God's priority is not for religious "duty" but for the relationship you have with that person. Be reconciled, THEN offer a gift.

Finally, he reminds the listener that by not settling matters quickly, troubles on earth might result as well...including jail time, if you're not careful! The *quadrans* was a coin that was worth one-

fourth of the value of an *assarius*. While the assarius was the cost of something small (such as two sparrows, 10:29), the quadrans was worth only two *lepta*, or one-sixteenth of a *denarius*. Very little could be bought with it. Thus, what Jesus was saying indicates that the person who pursues anger in his life would be judged by God with the utmost legalism. Therefore, the person who viewed the Torah legalistically would be judged legalistically. It made sense, then, to regard the Torah as Jesus was explaining it.

## **Adultery Internalized**

27 *"You have heard that it was said, 'You will not commit adultery.' But I am telling you that each one who looks at a woman in order to strongly desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

*"Now if your right eye should make you stumble, pluck it out and cast it from you. For it makes sense for you that one of your members should be destroyed, and not that your whole body should be cast into Gehenna. And if your right hand should make you stumble, cut it off and cast it from you. For it makes sense for you that one of your members should be destroyed, and not that your whole body should depart into Gehenna.*

Again, Jesus quotes the Torah, *"You will not commit adultery."*

God regards commitment with the highest possible esteem. Any glance at the punishment in the OT for disgracing one's spouse by sleeping with another will show that; the punishment is death. God wants people to respect the relationship and its commitments. Now look at the extension of the statute to the principle behind it.

This is a hard saying for the married man. If you're looking at a woman, imagining sex with her, deliberately becoming aroused, but you don't actually go through with the act -- how is your commitment toward your wife? You walk around thinking of sex with other women -- an act that is supposed to indicate permanent commitment -- and yet you claim to be devoted to your spouse? Jesus says it's the same as adultery. The physical act is but a manifestation of the infidelity you harbor inside.

What a strong thing he says next: *"Now if your right eye should make you stumble, pluck it out and cast it from you...and if your right hand should make you stumble, cut it off and cast it from you."* It makes better sense to do this than to forfeit the life that God offers you and have *"your whole body...depart into Gehenna."* In context, the problem isn't the adultery (or the murder); it's deeper than that. Jesus explains that it is absolutely necessary to deal with the real problem, rather than addressing the result or symptom of that problem.

## **Divorce Internalized**

31 *"Now it was said that 'whoever lets his wife go away, he should give her a certificate of separation.'*

*"But I am telling you that whoever lets his wife go away (except on a matter of prostitution) makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries the one who was let go is committing adultery.*

This matter is almost puzzling until later on in Matthaiah's account. For he quotes the Torah and seems to strengthen it!

There were legitimate conditions for such things, according to God. Moses allowed people to separate from one another rather than inflict the death penalty on their spouse for adultery. But the Jewish schools of thought in Jesus' day weakened it. One school of thought, the more conservative, essentially considered any valid reason a means for divorce. Most Americans follow this belief today. The more exacting legalistic school of thought considered even overcooking a meal to be legitimate grounds for divorce. After all, that passage itself didn't exactly SAY. All it said was that a certificate of separation was required! See, just give her the paper, and you can go.

But Jesus returns to the original thought: that separation was only a gentle substitution for demanding the unfaithful spouse's life, which the wronged party could do. He further adds that God does not regard the relationship as "ended" by the divorce; it is merely a separation.

*"Whoever lets his wife go away ...makes her commit adultery."*

Why? Because the relationship isn't over, but he's sending her away... presumably to other men.

*"And whoever marries the one who was let go is committing adultery."*

Why? Because she still belongs with the guy who separated from her.

The internal principle to respect is commitment. God regards such commitments as permanent, and the couple is expected to make it work...except in situations of infidelity (called prostitution here as in the OT).

## **The Principle behind Swearing**

33 *"Again you have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You will not make oaths falsely', but 'you will perform your oaths to the Lord.'"*

*"But I am telling you: don't swear at all, neither by the sky (because it is a throne of God), nor by the earth (because it is a footstool for his feet), nor by Jerusalem (because it is the great King's city), nor should you swear by your head (because you are not able to make one hair white or black). But let your statement be, 'Yes yes; no no.' But that which is beyond these is from the evil one."*

When Jesus cites, *"You will not make oaths falsely,"* and *"You will perform your oaths to Yahweh"* (Num 30:3; Dt. 23:21-3), he intends to restore the intention of the passage. The Jewish practice of swearing was almost similar to the modern practice here. If someone was disbelieved about something, they might say, "I swear it's true." Even the "A-mein" was an assurance of fact, a stronger form of 'yes' or 'indeed.' If a stronger assurance was required, they would swear by something valued or holy, "I swear by the temple," or "I swear by my soul."

Jesus' explanation is simple: there would be no need to take such oaths if everyone knew you told the truth in the first place!

Swearing by things is expressly outlawed: the sky is God's throne; the earth is his footstool; Jerusalem is his city. Everything, in essence, does not belong to you but to God. *"But let your statement be, 'Yes yes; no no.' But that which is beyond these is from the evil one."* Tell the truth always, and there is no need for taking such oaths. In fact, this was in the Torah to begin with. Dt. 23:22 reads, *"If you refrain from vowing, it shall be no sin to you,"* and Jesus has this passage in mind.

Now, the Jew must have truthfulness in his heart at all times, not only when taking a sacred vow before God.

## **The Eyes Don't Have It**

38 *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye' and 'a tooth for a tooth.'"*

*"But I am telling you: do not withstand the evil person. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him also. And to the one who wants to sue you and take your tunic, give him your cloak also. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go two with him. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not reject the one who wants to borrow money from you."*

The Jewish code of restitution allowed someone to exact a fitting punishment from an offender. This punishment could be as much as the victim suffered, but no more. *"When a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbor, what he has done will be done to him: eye for eye; tooth for tooth. As he has disfigured a man, he will be disfigured."* (Lv 14:19-20) The Torah also reads (Ex 21:23-5), *"If any harm (to the pregnant woman's child) follows, then you will give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe."*

This is a limitation on emotional vengeance. The exacting of vengeance might tempt one to take a life in repayment for an injury. The Torah limits this, saying, "You may only take the eye." Revenge can be measureless, but God limits the punishments to what is suitable.

Jesus says, "You don't have to take your neighbor's eye." Instead of filling yourself with revenge, you can be filled with mercy. Your neighbor owes you the life, or the tooth, or the eye, but you can resist the temptation toward vengeance altogether.

Is your shirt that important that you would fill yourself with negative emotions toward your fellow Jew? If he wants to take, why not give? The Roman soldiers, as is well known now, were allowed by Roman law to conscript citizens into carrying their packs for one mile at a time. Jesus says, *"If anyone forces you to go one mile, go two with him."*

How far does this generosity extend? If you can give to the needy, give. If you can loan to the needy, loan. It will be said elsewhere that when you loan, don't charge interest, and don't even expect to be repaid! Why?? Because it is better to lose some money or property than to harbor resentment for a brother or sister (a fellow Messianic Jew).

## **Love Your Enemies**

43 *"You have heard that it was said, "'You will love your neighbor," and hate your enemy.'*

*"But I am telling you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father in the heavens--because his sun rises on evil and good people, and it rains on just and unjust people.*

As if Jesus couldn't take this principle (above) to any further extreme, he goes to the logical conclusion. The passage from which he quotes a part reads as follows:

*"You will not hate your brother in your heart, but you will reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You will not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you will love your neighbor as yourself. I am Yahweh." (Lv 19:17-18)*

God himself had already spoken about taking vengeance, and about the deeper problem of harboring resentment or grudges. Here, the implicit question (answered also by the analogy of the Good Samaritan) is, "Who is considered my neighbor?" Jesus speaks quite logically:

This can't be talking only about people who love you, because everyone finds it easy to love those who love them in return. No, this is talking about people who DON'T love you. *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* God himself does the same, by allowing the sun and rain to bless both those who love him and those who hate him. God has set the example for us to follow. Instead of bearing grudges, you can choose to offer kindness in return for evil.

## **Be Complete**

*"For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tribute-takers do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing? Don't even the gentiles do this?"*

*"Therefore, you will be complete just as your Father, who is in the heavens, is complete. Be careful not to do what right things you do in the presence of people, in order to be shown to them. Now if you do otherwise, you have no reward with your Father, who is in the heavens.*

This section is a bridge between Jesus' spiritual exegesis of the Torah and his practical applications of the principles that he has just outlined. Jesus is about to make great statements about acting out of one's heart and not hypocritically: it has to be REAL to count before God. Here, he says to be complete.

Being complete means doing what you do from the heart. For Jesus, it specifically means following the principles of the Torah out of the heart. This is a difficult task, and these are hard sayings to hear, and so Jesus will point to the people around him for examples of what the crowd recognizes as BAD examples. He'll simply say, "You know not to do that. So do this instead."

## **Hypocrites At Work**

6:2 *"Therefore, when you are doing charitable deeds, don't blow a trumpet in your presence like the hypocrites do (in the gatherings and in the streets) so that they may receive glory from people.*

*"Indeed I am telling you, they are obtaining their reward. But you, when you are doing your charitable deeds, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your charitable deeds may be secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will repay you."*

As in the rest of the "sermon," Jesus does not directly address the spiritual leaders of his time, but he comes close. The wealthy were regarded very highly, and whether they were genuine leaders or not, most of the time they were looked on as spiritual, since wealth was seen as a sign of God's blessing. When giving great gifts, the wealthy sought public regard for what they were doing. Of course, that doesn't happen AT ALL today. (Wink.)

Jesus says, "Don't do like you've seen them do." As to what to do, the meaning here is pretty straightforward, and it follows from what Jesus was already saying about internal principles vs. a religion of externals. The point of doing charity is to help others, not to grandstand. If you're going to do it, do it for the right reason.

## **Hypocrites Talking**

6 *"And when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites, because they are affectionate toward standing up to pray in the gatherings and in the corners of the open places, so that they may appear to people.*

*"Indeed I am telling you, they have their full reward. But you, when you are praying, enter into your private place and pray to your Father in secret after locking your door. And your father, who sees in the secret place, will repay you.*

*"But those who pray should not babble like the gentiles. For they imagine that they will be heard because of their verbosity. Therefore, don't be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

Jesus says roughly this: "You've all seen the guys who are the first ones to leap up and pray publically. They do it all the time, and they try to be overly eloquent. Why? Because they're really addressing the people at the gathering--not God. They have their full reward." Hmm...I've seen this in the 20th century. What about you? Maybe we've even done it once or twice?

*"But those who pray should not babble like the gentiles."* This is a slap at the Jews who pray to be seen publically. Jesus likens their verbosity to the gentile babbling. The gentiles often spoke as many names of gods as they could cram into a prayer, thinking that one of the gods would hear them. There are even recorded examples of them using human names they'd heard of (such as Abraham) in the middle of their prayers! More must be better. Jesus says without accusing that the Jews who seek public recognition are just babbling on. *"Don't be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."*

## Then How Should we Pray?

9 *"So, pray like this:*

*"Our Father, who is in the heavens,  
your name has been made holy.*

*Let your kingdom come. Let what you want also be done on earth, as in heaven.*

*Give us the bread we need today and forgive us our debts as we also we have forgiven our  
debtors.*

*And don't carry us into trial, but rescue us from the evil one.*

*"For if you forgive people of their faults, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you  
do not forgive people, neither will your Father forgive your faults."*

Jesus provides a sample of a most humble prayer, clearly directed toward God. He doesn't intend for the words to be repeated as a formula, but for his listeners to examine the attitude that Jesus has toward talking to his Father.

*"Our Father"*--He deliberately includes the listeners in saying "our"

*"Your name has been made holy."*--Praises an attribute of God. Remember, this praise is supposed to be genuine, if we believe everything Jesus has said so far.

*"Let your kingdom come. Let what you want also be done on earth, as in heaven."* --Here, Jesus humbly submits his own desires to God's will. Later on, he'll say, *"Let not what I want but what you want be done."*

*"Give us the bread we need today"* -- Give us what we NEED. He doesn't address God as Santa Claus. He asks for what he really needs.

*"forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors."* --Now THIS is tough! He's just said, "Love your enemies," and now he tells us to ask for as much forgiveness as we've shown others!

*"And don't carry us into trial, but rescue us from the evil one."* --This echoes many of the Davidic Psalms. Jesus has recognized that God is in control. He has praised God for who he is. Now, he looks to God for guidance through his daily life...in the matters that are most important. "Rescue us from the evil one." Again, the wording continues to show that he is including the listeners.

Having said this, he looks to the crowd and speaks a sobering thought, *"If you forgive people of their faults, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people, neither will your Father forgive your faults."*

Your faults, your wanderings, they will be judged. How harsh a measuring stick you get judged by is up to you. If you're a forgiving person, you'll receive mercy. Jesus will return to this thought in a moment.

## Hypocrites Complaining

16 *"Now when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, dejected ones. For they distort their faces so that they may appear to people to be fasting. Indeed I am telling you that they are obtaining their reward. But you, anoint your head when fasting, and wash your face, so that you will not*

*appear to people to be fasting, but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*

"Oh, Iiiii'm sorry. \*Moan\* I can't have dinner with you now. I'm fasting. Yes, I know how HARD it is, but I've got to do my duty to God, don't I? You don't fast, DO you?"

The people in the crowd were accustomed to seeing people walk the streets--people who refused to wash themselves so that everyone would know they were fasting. These people were fasting as much for public praise of how spiritual they were as they were fasting for God. Jesus says, "When you're fasting, act normally." God will know you're fasting, and HE will reward you.

In mentioning prayer, fasting, and charitable deeds, Jesus sums up the religious duties that were not required of everyone. Should people pray? Sure, and the other things are good too--IF they're really done for God, and not for public praise. If you want public praise, that's all you'll get!

## **Where are Your Priorities?**

19 *"Do not store up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust make things disappear and where thieves dig through and steal.*

*"But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust makes things disappear and where thieves do not dig through and steal. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

*"The eye is the lamp of the body. Therefore if your eye is sound, your whole body will be lit. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be dark. Therefore, if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

Jesus begins to address another problem common in his day... and ours: the overestimation of the value of money and possessions. These "treasures" are virtually worthless, since "moth and rust make things disappear and thieves dig through and steal." Your possessions can be stolen away or may rot away. If you rely on them, you're relying on something temporary.

I've personally known a number of people who depend on their money. Some of them thought they were "self-reliant," but if their money supply was low, they went into a panic. The money was too important to them.

Jesus points out that there are treasures "in heaven" that are permanent. Actually, he has already mentioned several of them! Good relationships, virtuous conduct, etc.. provide treasures for themselves, and God provides the "reward in heaven" for these things.

*"Wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*

"Your treasure" here is your priority system. Jesus asked, What's your top priority? Your highest priorities have your heart -- your deepest self and motivations -- behind them.

*"The eye is the lamp of the body" bears some explanation. The ancients believed that light came out from the eye, struck objects, and was reflected back into the eye, enabling sight. If you have a good eye, you can see quite clearly. Jesus uses "your eye" to signify your desires. Whatever you're looking at, whatever you want, that shows whether or not your eye is good. If you're seeking godly things, your "whole body will be lit. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be dark." If what you seek after are bad things, since the eye lightens the body (as it were), you become dark. "Therefore, if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

It's what you value. What is THE most important thing in your life? God? I hope so. Money? Power? Social graces?

Whenever two priorities conflict, a decision is made between them. Do I study tonight, or go see a movie? The more important priority wins that decision. A TOP priority would be one that always wins in any conflict.

## **Top Priorities**

*24 "No one is able to be enslaved to two lords. For either he will hate one and love the other, or he will hold on to one and ignore the other. You are unable to serve God and Mammon. For this reason I am telling you: do not be anxious about your life -- what you may eat, or what you may drink, nor what you may clothe your body with. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?"*

*"Look closely at the birds in the sky, because they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into granaries. And your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth much more than they are?"*

*"Now which of you by being anxious is able to add one moment to his lifespan? And why are you anxious about clothing? Learn from the lilies of the field. How do they grow? They neither labor nor spin. But I am telling you that not even Solomon in all his glory was dressed like one of these!"*

*"Now, since God clothes the grass of the field this way, though it exists today and is cast into a furnace tomorrow, how much rather will he give you, oh you who scarcely trust?!"*

*"Therefore, don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we be dressed in?'. These are all things that the gentile is hunting. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all of these things. But you seek first his kingdom and what is right, and all of these things will be added to you. So do not be anxious about the next day, for the next day will be anxious about itself. One day's trouble is enough."*

*"No one is able to be enslaved to two lords." The "lords" here are top priorities. You can only have ONE top priority. When they conflict, you will stick with one and not the other. That one is obviously the TOP one.*

*"You are unable to serve God and Mammon."* Mammon is money personified. If possessions are your top priority, then God is not. If God is first, then when God conflicts with other things, then the decision is made for God.

Jesus gives a word of advice, followed by some motivational examples:

Don't worry about food or clothing. Food, clothing, and shelter are said to be the basic needs. If there's no need to worry about those, then there's no need to worry about anything!

*"Look closely at the birds in the sky."* They don't do all the slaving away that you do. They don't have the focus on physical things that you do, but God feeds them. Why don't you believe he'll provide food for you?

*"Learn from the lilies of the field,"* he says about clothing. They don't do all the labor you do to make or buy clothing, but God clothes them. And he clothes them in a most wonderful way. Why don't you believe he'll provide clothing for you, *"oh you who scarcely trust?!"*

Now (as we have seen) if you don't need to worry about the basic needs, then "don't be anxious" about anything. The physical things of this world are what *"the gentile is hunting."* The true follower of God, however, is not like the uninitiated gentile. God will provide what you need, and he knows what you need. Your top priority should NOT be based on any of these things.

Instead, *"you seek first his kingdom and what is right, and all of these things will be added to you."* If you're doing what God wants, you needn't fear. You'll have everything you need. This is supposed to be a COMFORT, not a challenge. The listeners are presumed devout. If they just trust God more, they'll be able to let go of their anxiety about such temporary things. "So don't be anxious about the next day, for the next day will be anxious about itself. One day's trouble is enough." Why worry about "what might happen?" Whatever IS happening, you deal with, but you can't even plan for everything that *might* happen.

And aren't we most often worried about what might happen? You might get killed on the plane trip. Your house might burn down. You might be carjacked. You might be mugged. You might get any one of 1000 diseases. There's no way to successfully deal with all of what MIGHT happen, and NO amount of worry on your part will help the situation at all. Therefore, Jesus says, just trust God, whom you know will take care of you, and all those worries won't really matter so much.

In short, let God be your TOP priority.

## **Against hypocritical judgment**

7:1 *"Do not judge, so that you might not be judged. For you will be judged with the kind of judgment you pass, and it will be measured to you with the measure you employ."*

*"Now why do you see the splinter in your brother's eye, but you don't perceive the beam in your own eye? Or how will you say to your brother, 'Let me pull the splinter out of your eye,' and*

*look, there is a beam in your eye? You hypocrite! Pull the beam out of your eye first, and then you will see your way through to pull the splinter out of your brother's eye."*

Most of this passage is to be understood in the traditional manner. Jesus is indeed saying that if you do not examine yourself carefully, you might be jumping down someone else's throat about a problem, when you may have the same problem in spades! Therefore, you must be careful, so that when you judge, your judgment is not hypocritical.

Passages in Paulus' letters clearly indicate that Christians ought to judge one another (e.g., 1 Cor 5), especially if the alternative is to allow outsiders to be judge. But many people cite Mt 7:1 as saying "don't judge at all." This is quoted especially frequently coming from people who have sins that they don't want to rid themselves of. However, the context explains that IF you judge and are a stickler (like the Perushim), then an exacting judgment will be applied to YOU by God. So, if you have the same problem, you could have some serious accounting to do.

### **Final things it's best not to do**

*6 "Don't give the holy things to dogs. Nor should you cast your pearls in front of pigs. Otherwise, they trample them with their feet, and they will turn and rend you."*

Jesus explains the two together, with an explanation that may appear cryptic:

*"Otherwise, they trample them with their feet, and they will turn and rend you."*

Here, Jesus is again alluding to the religious leaders of his day. They were the ones who simply would not understand what he had to say. If people have the mindset where they really don't want to listen, Jesus says you can't try to make them listen. What will result? First, they ignore your teaching (trample the pearls), then "they will turn and rend you." Has anyone here been rent?

This is a signal that Jesus has nearly finished speaking. He has one more positive admonition to make, and then he makes concluding statements.

### **Summing up Everything**

*7 "Ask, and it will be given to you.  
Seek, and you will find.  
Knock, and it will be opened for you.*

*"For each one who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and it is opened for the one who knocks.*

*"Or what person is there among you who will give his son a stone if he asks for bread? And if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? So, if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in the heavens give good things to those who ask him?"*

*"Therefore, everything whatsoever that you want people to do for you, you are to do also for them. For this is the Torah and the Prophets."*

The path of the true Jew (Christian) is one of effort. The "fried dove of absolute knowledge" isn't going to be spoonfed to you. If you want to know God, there are three things you will have to do.

*"Ask."* If you ask God for spiritual truths, you'll get an answer. Wisdom might come at the expense of having many seemingly terrible things happen to you, but if you ask God for help in your spiritual walk, that help is guaranteed.

*"Seek."* Asking might not seem to require so much effort, but seeking certainly does. Seeking is not something you can do by accident. Jesus tells his listeners to LOOK for God and for his spiritual truths. Are these things hidden? No, because *"the one who seeks finds."* They are only hidden from the one who isn't looking.

*"Knock."* Like the statement about asking, this one concludes with GOD's action. If you knock, GOD will open the door. If you ask, GOD will provide an answer. Your effort in looking for God is rewarded, because God is eagerly waiting to help you in your quest to find him.

But this method of truth-seeking does NOT involve rituals (which Jesus is essentially eliminating). Nor does it involve memorizing things passed on to you by other people (see also ch. 15). It requires conscious effort.

But everyone who follows this path is rewarded. After all, if you ask someone who loves you for something good, would he give you something bad instead? *"How much more will your Father who is in the heavens give good things to those who ask him?"*

Then follows the summation:

*"Therefore, everything whatsoever that you want people to do for you, you are to do also for them. This is the Torah and the Prophets."*

Jesus has just said that seeking and asking for good things is rewarded. Now, he applies that to people within his own community as well, and not just to God. But this requires effort. If you are loving and generous, others will mirror that.

This is often called the **"golden rule,"** and in its basic form, it was nothing new. The ancients had said it this way, **"Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you."** In that sense it was NEGATIVE. The ancients said it like, "Every bad thing will come back to you." But Jesus applies it to GOOD things as well. His teaching, uniquely his, is POSITIVE: "Do good things to others."

He doesn't PROMISE that they will do good in return, but Jesus takes something passive-"don't do"-and makes it something active: "do it for them." For how can you expect anything good from them if you are treating them badly?

In this, he sums up the Torah in one statement, and that one saying is a simple one. Always do good things for others.

## **First Admonition about the Teaching**

13 *"Enter through the small gate, because the gate is wide and the road is broad that lead to destruction. And there are many who are entering through it. How small the gate is, and how afflicted the road is that lead into life. And there are few who are finding it."*

From here on, Jesus is wrapping things up. This short section is a bridge between what he has just said (the golden rule, and "ask, seek, knock") and his final warnings.

*"Enter through the small gate."* It is easy to put no effort into your spiritual walk whatsoever, and people often take the path that requires the least effort. But as he started (with the beatitudes), he also finishes (ask, seek, knock). The beatitudes included such things as "being poor-spirited," "hungering and thirsting for what is right," and "being a peace maker." These things all require effort. Jesus says you can put effort into your walk with God, which few people do, or you can do what everyone else does and go "to destruction."

## **Watch Out!**

15 *"Be careful about false prophets, who are coming to you in a sheep's clothing, but inside they are ravenous wolves. 'You will recognize them by their fruits.' What? Do they collect grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? In this way, every good tree bears nice fruit, but the corrupt tree bears evil fruit. A good tree is not able to bear evil fruit, nor can a corrupt tree bear nice fruit. Each tree which does not bear nice fruit is chopped down and cast into fire. Consequently, you will recognize them by their fruits."*

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'O Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of the heavens--only the one who does what my Father in the heavens wants. Many will say to me in that day, 'O Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name? And didn't we cast out spirit beings in your name? And didn't we do many wonders in your name?' And then I will acknowledge to them that, 'I never knew you. 'Get those people away from me who are working lawlessness!'"*

There have always been false prophets. These are people who claim to have been told a teaching from God via special revelation. When questioned from what God has already taught -- for us that would mean it is in the Bible -- they contradict it by saying, "God told me this personally." In modern days, people have regarded Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, David Koresh, and a host of others as false prophets.

The false prophet is someone who deliberately distorts the truth for his own purposes, and so Jesus likens them to *"wolves in sheep's clothing"*. (And yes, this is where we get the expression.) The saying was also similar to the tales of Aesop, and perhaps that is why he brings to mind the saying of Aesop that a tree is known by its fruit. At any rate, the saying is true, but Jesus adds:

*"Every tree which does not bear nice fruit is chopped down and cast into fire."*

This saying is supposed to call to mind the fact that the end of the Jewish state is near. Look back at Mt 3:11-12 and compare the very similar wording! If you don't bear fruit worthy of the mental change, you'll be destroyed. But what about ritualistic pew-sitting?

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'O Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of the heavens -- only the one who does what my Father in the heavens wants."*

This is taken by preachers to mean a great many things. You need baptism. You need spiritual gifts. You need to go to church. You need to study the Bible. At this point, though, Jesus only means one thing. You can follow the Torah from within -- the stuff of the Sermon on the Mount--or you can continue doing lip-service to God, calling him Lord but following tradition. But what if they accomplished a lot of nice things? Jesus answers that question by adding that if they ask, "Didn't we do many wonders in your name," God will say that he never knew them! No amount of deeds can give someone a relationship with him. The relationship is essential. Jesus even adds the citation from the Hebrew Bible (Psa 6:8):

*"Get those people away from me who are working lawlessness!"* Lawlessness, to the Jew, is whatever rejects the Torah and runs contrary to it. Deeds alone cannot follow the Torah; the child of God must be a follower of God.

## **The Sound Sayings of Jesus**

24 *"Therefore, each one who hears these sayings from me and does them will be compared to a thoughtful man who constructed his house on the rock. And the rain came down, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house. And it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.*

*"And each one who hears these sayings from me and does not do them will be compared to a foolish man who constructed his house on the sand. And the rain came down, and the floods came, and the winds blew and dashed against that house. And it fell, and its fall was a great one."*

*And it happened that when Jesus had finished these sayings, the crowds were astounded at his teaching. For he was teaching them as though he had authority, and not like their scribes did.*

If you take what Jesus has said to heart, you will have firm convictions, and a foundation which will not be shaken. But if you reject his explanation of the Torah, then when bad times come, you will have no morals to fall back on. If your relationship to God is not a relationship WITH God, then you'll abandon your religion when hard times come.

When Jesus stepped down from the mountain, the crowds started muttering. The rabbinic style of teaching was to cite other persons' opinions and interpretations. "Rabbi Hillel says...." But Jesus cited his own understanding and asserted that it was from God. Preachers often make assertions today that what they are teaching is the same as the truth, but for a Jew in Jesus' time to teach "with authority" was unheard of. He basically ignored the traditions and went straight to the Torah. This is the spirit of Restoration: traditions are useful in explaining the historical

development of beliefs, but it is what God taught us in the Torah that is important. Jesus set himself up AT LEAST to be equal to the most well-known of their rabbis: Gamaliel, Shammai, Hillel.

**8:1-9:34** contains a section of confirming signs. These signs are NOT in chronological order, as evidenced by a comparison to Lukas' account, which IS in order. The signs have been collected together to suit the author's priorities. First, he gave us a series of clues as to why the Anointed One was coming and also established his identity (as Jesus). Then, he offered us a complete set of Jesus' teachings on the Torah, which only need to be "fleshed out" later on. Now, further confirmation that Jesus is who he claimed to be and therefore that his teachings are to be listened to and followed.

## **The Leper**

*8:1 Now after he came down from the mountain, many crowds followed him. And look, a leper came toward him and bowed down, saying, "Sir, if you want it, you are able to cleanse me." And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I want it. Be cleansed." And his leprosy was cleansed immediately, and Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses arranged for a witness to them."*

Jesus was walking along and met a man stricken with Hansen's Disease (leprosy) or another skin ailment. It is well known that lepers were shunned by the common people who feared the incurable disease that they carried. Although leprosy is not as communicable as it was once thought to be, lepers then were not allowed to mingle with society. In fact, one explanation of the Qumran community is that they were a colony for the diseased -- people forced to live off by themselves in a separate community near the Dead Sea.

The Torah itself prescribed the following:

*"When a man is afflicted with leprosy...the priest will pronounce him unclean; he will not quarantine him [i.e., for further examination], for the leper is unclean." (Lv 13:9f.)* And of course, the people would have nothing to do with anything unclean.

Therefore, it is surprising that when Jesus meets the leper, he not only converses with him, but he touches the leper! Jesus' touch was healing, then, in two ways. First of all, it accompanied the actual curing of the leprosy. Second, it showed loving compassion toward a man who probably had not been touched even by his family members since the disease broke out. Following the Torah (Lv 13:17), Jesus instructs the former leper to show himself to the priest for inspection -- to verify his curing.

## **The Centurion's Servant Boy**

*5 Now after entering into Kafar-Nahum, a centurion came to him, calling him aside, and saying, "Sir, my servant boy is laid paralyzed in the house, severely tormented." And he said to him, "I will come and cure him." And the centurion answered, saying, "Sir, I am not considerable enough, that you should enter under my roof. On the contrary, only say a word, and my servant boy will be healed. For I too am a person under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say*

*to this one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."*

*But when Jesus heard, he wondered, and he said to those who were following, "Indeed I am telling you: I have found such trust from no one in Israel! But I am telling you that many will come from east and west and will recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens, but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; weeping and gnashing of teeth will be there."*

*And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go, it has happened for you, as you trusted." And his servant boy was healed during that hour.*

On this occasion, Jesus was approached by a centurion, a Roman soldier in command of 100 infantry men. The humility of the Roman, undoubtedly a gentile, is particularly touching. It is possible that the servant boy was Jewish, but the passage does not say. Still, the centurion believed strongly enough to trust that Jesus could cure the servant without venturing to see or touch him.

This prompts Jesus to say something that the author finds important: *"I have found such trust from no one in Israel!"* The Jewish reader may have become enraged in reading that the Anointed One had said such a thing, but Jesus' feelings toward his own people would also be pointed out later in the account.

At this point, Jesus again predicted the outcome of the First Revolt, also noting correctly that many gentiles would eventually become Christians. To say that this refers only to the latter (gentiles becoming Christians) would do a disservice to the forcefulness of the statement. The Jews being "cast out into the outer darkness" reflects God's reaction to their rejection of the Messiah. Always in Matthaiah, the destruction of the Jewish state is in mind--a topic that builds in intensity through chs. 24-25.

Oh yeah, the servant was healed. Of course.

## **Peter's Mother-in-Law**

*14 And when Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law, lying down and burning with a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever went away from her, and she got up and served him.*

*Now when evening happened, they brought many people to him who were possessed by spirit beings. And he cast out the spirits with a word, and he cured all those who had a bad thing. And so the declaration through Isaiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "He took our weaknesses and bore our diseases."*

This event actually occurred earlier in Jesus' life (Lk 4), even before he spoke to his students at the lake (Lk 5). Here, there is no emphasis placed on the mother-in-law, per se. The author presents this account because it is the first of a group of healings that fulfill a prophecy about the

"suffering servant" of Isaiah -- *"He took our weaknesses and bore our diseases."* (Isa 52:13-53:12)

## **INTERLUDE: Somewhere to Lay his Head**

*18 Now when Jesus noticed a crowd around him, he gave word to come away to the other side. And one of the scribes came toward him, saying, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you should go out." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man does not have a place where he might bow his head."*

*Now another of his students said to him, "Lord, permit me to go away first and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and allow the dead to bury their dead."*

By this time, Jesus was so popular that he was having to flee from the overwhelming throng that followed him. Interestingly, one of the scribes makes the decision to follow him. Jesus replies that what he needs is shelter (presumably from the crowd).

Another student says that he too will go with Jesus, if only Jesus will wait until his father's funeral [or, alternatively, the conclusion of the father's financial affairs]. Jesus' reply seems harsh -- *"Let the dead bury their dead"* -- but such is the cost of being a student of his. God must be the top priority over EVERYTHING else (6:33), even over one's own family. This theme too will recur later.

## **Jesus Calms the Sea**

*23 And he went into the ship, and his students followed him. And look, a great earthquake happened in the sea, and so the ship was covered by the waves. But he was asleep.*

*And they went to him and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us. We are being destroyed!" And he said to them, "How timid are you who scarcely trust!" Then he got up and censured the winds and the sea, and a great calm happened. Now the people wondered, saying, "What sort of person is this, that even the winds and the sea listen to him?!"*

The "sea" here is the Sea of Galilaiah, and the situation is simple: An underwater earthquake rocks the sea while Jesus and his students are crossing it. His students respond in a fearful and natural way, begging Jesus for help. He calms the sea, but notes that there was no reason for their fear: "How timid are you who scarcely trust!" Periodically, Jesus calls on them to trust God more, and this is one of those times.

## **Demon Pigs**

*28 And when he came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two who were possessed by spirit beings met him. They came out from the tombs. They were very harsh, and so one was unable to come by through that road. And look, they called out, saying, "What is there between us and you, oh son of God? Are you coming here to torment us before a season?"*

*Now at a large distance there was a herd of many pigs, feeding. Now the divinities called him aside, saying, "If you cast us out, send us forth into the herd of pigs." And he said to them, "Go on." Now they exited and went into the pigs, and look: all the herd rushed down the cliff into the sea, and they died in the waters.*

*But the swine herders fled, and when they had gone away into the city, they related all things, even the things about the ones who were possessed by spirit beings. And look, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they advised him so that he would depart from their shore. And stepping into a ship, he went across, and he came into his own city.*

There is some dispute as to whose territory Jesus entered. The accounts and their variants read Gaderenes, Geresenes, or Gergesenes. Still, the nature of what occurred is clear.

Two men who were possessed by spirit beings approach Jesus, one of whom carries on a conversation with him. The spirit beings assume that the Anointed One has come to torment them, but instead he sends them out into a herd of pigs.

The spirit beings clearly subject themselves to the Anointed One, just as the diseases and nature have done, and it has been pointed out that the pigs were smart enough to kill themselves rather than remain possessed by the spirits, who are also called divinities in this passage.

Another point to note is that the pigs were unclean animals which were not suitable for food (until Jesus cleansed all foods). Jesus' sending the spirits into pigs rather than, say, cattle, makes a statement to the Jewish people in and of itself that he is one of them, even if their leaders reject him.

## **The Paralytic Cured**

*9:1 And look, they carried a paralytic to him, lying on a bed. And when Jesus noticed their trust, he said to the paralyzed person, "Take courage, child. Your sins are forgiven."*

*And look, some of the scribes said among themselves, "This one is speaking evil." And when Jesus noticed their reflections, he said, "Why are you reflecting in your hearts on evil things? For what is easier? To say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?' But so that you would know that the Son of Man has authority on the earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralyzed person, "Rise, take up your mat, and go into your house." And he got up and went away into his house. But when the crowds notice, they were afraid, and they glorified the God who had given such authority to human beings.*

Jesus has already made statements (in his "sermon") that surely caused upset among the religious leaders. Yet up until this point, he never did anything that they could oppose vocally. Even the various healings and miracles could hardly help the leadership to stir up the people against Jesus. After all, he had been going around doing good deeds, asking for nothing in return.

However, when a paralyzed child is brought to Jesus, instead of merely healing him, Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven." As the Anointed One, he had the ability to see into a person's heart and

could honestly tell someone that God would forgive their sins. But the leadership heard Jesus proclaiming himself equal to the priesthood. It is then that Jesus heals the paralytic, as a sign that God indeed gave Jesus authority (see also Mt 28:18). The scribes went away upset no doubt, but the crowds *"glorified the God who had given such authority to human beings."*

### **INTERLUDE: The Call of Matthaiah**

*9 And as Jesus passed through, he noticed a person called Matthaiah sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.*

Matthaiah's call had occurred reasonably early in Jesus' time of service (Lk 5), but since historically it happened right after the healing just quoted, the author reports it here. One clue that this is the author is the unassuming manner in which it is mentioned, almost as though it were scarcely important. Jesus saw Matthaiah at the tax office; Matthaiah got up and followed him.

### **INTERLUDE: The End of the System**

This is placed between various healing accounts and shows the growing resentment the leaders have for Jesus. The author owes us an explanation of sorts, since the source of the conflict has only been alluded to until this point.

#### **9:10-13 Mercy, Not Sacrifice**

*10 And as he was reclining in the house, it happened that, look: many tribute takers and sinners came and reclined together with Jesus and his students. And when the Perushim noticed, they said to his students, "Why does your teacher dine with tribute takers and sinners?" But he heard them, and said, "The healthy have no need of a healer; rather, the ones who have a malady. But you go and learn what this is: "I want mercy and not sacrifice." For I have not come to call just people but sinners."*

The Perushim are mingling with Jesus' students, apparently trying to cause them to stop following him. For it is not Jesus himself but his followers that they ask, *"Why does your teacher dine with tribute takers and sinners?"*

Apparently, one reason that this account is placed here is that some of the tribute takers may have been the author's friends. At any rate, the tribute taker was loathed by the Jews, and for good reason. They made their living by exacting usury from the people. Whatever they could rake in, above what the Roman government mandated, they could keep for themselves. As a result, many of them were both wealthy and crooked. The "sinners" are those Jews who had wandered from the Torah. They were in violation of its teachings, and Jesus as a rabbi ought to know better than to eat dinner with them.

*"The healthy have no need of a healer; rather, the ones who have a malady."*

Jesus' first response is interesting. He casts himself as a healer, which his physical acts surely have shown. But here, the healing is internal, spiritual. There are those who need no healing--the

ones who simply follow God without being prodded. There are also those, not mentioned, who don't want to be healed. Jesus is talking to some of them. But those who know they need spiritual healing come to Jesus.

His instruction, then, is that the rituals of the system are not what provides spiritual healing. Also, the role of a priest is not merely to administer rituals. Jesus cites the passage, *"I desire mercy, and not sacrifice"* (Hos 6:6). The passage continues with, *"...and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."* It is a specific proof that Jesus' interpretation of the Torah as a set of spiritual principles rather than as a legal code was correct. In telling his opponents to learn what the passage means, Jesus makes a direct attack on the Perushim, whose lives were bound by legalism. Clearly, they did not understand that the Torah was always intended to be internalized.

## **Down Comes the System**

14 *Then John's students came to him, saying, "Why is it that we and the Perushim fast a lot, but your students do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "The sons of wedding hall are unable to mourn, as long as the groom is with them. But days will come when he will be taken from them, and then they will fast."*

*"Now no one puts a patch of unbleached cloth on an old cloak. For its filler takes away from the cloak, and a worse division occurs. Neither do they cast new wine into old wineskins. But if indeed they do, the wineskins burst, and the wine is spilled out, and the wineskins are destroyed. On the contrary, they cast new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."*

Now some of John the Baptizer's students ask a legitimate question -- to Jesus himself. Why don't Jesus' students fast? Well, they do fast in reality, and in the "sermon," he mentions fasting. But they don't fast publically and legalistically like the Perushim, who did so on a regular basis.

The direct answer to the question is that fasting is generally a sign of mourning, and if his students fasted all the time, it would appear like mourning. This is not a time for mourning-- while Jesus is still with them, but when he dies, they will mourn. Here, Jesus also predicts his death, although it's spoken matter-of-fact.

The real problem, though, is the religion, and not whether Jesus' students fast. Even John's students have become accustomed to seeing the ritualistic religion of their day. Jesus came to eliminate the old in preparation for the new.

*"No one puts a patch of unbleached cloth on an old cloak."* Jesus is bringing a teaching that is new, and the old system will not contain it. This is already in evidence by the attitude that the leaders are beginning to take toward him.

*"Neither do they cast new wine into old wineskins."* This says the same thing. New wine (Jesus' teaching) MUST be put in new wineskins (systems). A system such as the Jews have will not contain the new teachings; they are incompatible.

Lukas' account adds a saying about paradigms, giving the reason WHY the system cannot contain Jesus' teachings. When people hear something new and compare it to something familiar

and liked, they generally reject the new teaching without seriously considering it. Paradigms resist change, and therefore it is difficult to accept something so radically different. Instead, they say, *"The old is good."* (Lk 5:39)

## **The Ruler's Daughter Healed**

9:18-19; 9:23-26

*18 While he was speaking these things to them, look, a certain ruler came and bowed down to him, saying, "My daughter is finished now. But come, and place your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus and his students got up and followed him.*

...and...

*23 And when Jesus came into the ruler's house and noticed the flautists and the crowd being disrupted, he said, "Withdraw. For the girl is not dead, but she is sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when they had cast out the crowd, he entered and held on to her hand, and the girl was raised. And the report of this thing went out into that whole land.*

"A certain ruler" approaches Jesus on behalf of his dead daughter. Just about the only thing that Jesus has NOT displayed authority over (in his capacity as the Anointed One) is death itself. When he arrives at the man's house, a funeral wake is in progress. Jesus tells the crowd to leave, since the girl is only asleep. The account says that people laughed at him on account of his apparently stupid remark, but after they leave, he takes her hand, and she gets up.

Here again, Jesus does something subtle that would have upset the religious leaders. The girl had been officially pronounced dead, and Jesus touched her. Touching a corpse rendered a person ritually unclean, and no rabbi would dare do so.

## **The Bleeding Woman**

*20 And look, a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years came to him from behind and touched the tuft of his cloak. For she had said within herself, "If only I should touch his cloak, I will be saved." But, turning and seeing her, Jesus said, "Take courage, daughter. Your trust has saved you." And from that hour the woman was safe.*

The exact nature of the woman's twelve year hemorrhage is not known, but most commentators believe that it was vaginal bleeding. In this case, Jesus would not have been allowed to come into contact with the woman, because at the time of her bleeding, she was ritually impure. She was doubly unclean because it was a bleeding disorder.

This time, however, Jesus does not act to touch the woman. Instead, she touches the fringe of his cloak (Num 15:37-41). If a rabbi or priest was considered a prophet, this was the appropriate thing to do in order to be healed. Sensing that something unusual was happening (the parallel says he knew power had gone out from him), he turns to look at her. Seeing how much she

trusted God--to the point where she believed that touching the Messiah's cloak would heal her, Jesus commends her trust rather than censuring her.

In Matthaiah's account, this happens on the way to the ruler's house.

## **Two Blind Men**

*27 And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind people followed him, and they called out, saying, "Be merciful to us, son of David!" Now when he had come into the house, the blind people came to him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you trust that I am powerful enough to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, lord." Then he touched their eyes, saying, "Let it happen to you according to your trust," and their eyes were opened. And Jesus agitated them, saying, "See that you make this known to no one." But after they exited, they sounded out about him in the whole of that land.*

The two blind men address Jesus with the Messianic title of "son of David." They know who he is, so when Jesus asks if they trust that he is "powerful enough" to heal them, they know that he is. Since they trusted God, he says, *"Let it happen to you, according to your trust."* We shouldn't interpret this as being healed to the measure of one's faith. Rather, since they trusted, Jesus healed them.

By this time, his fame was spreading to the point where he didn't want everyone proclaiming him as the Anointed One. Nevertheless, the blind men ignore his plea not to tell, and more people discover who he is.

## **The Mute Man**

*32 Now as they were exiting, look: a mute man who was possessed by a spirit being was brought to him. And after the spirit being had been cast out, the mute man spoke, and the people wondered, saying, "It has never appeared this way in Israel!" But the Perushim said, "He is casting out the spirit beings by the ruler of the spirit beings!"*

*And Jesus went around all the cities and villages, teaching in their gatherings and heralding the good message of the kingdom and curing every disease and every malady.*

Just as the blind guys were leaving, a man who could not speak because a spirit being had gripped him is brought to Jesus for healing. Jesus expels the spirit, and the man speaks. The crowd is behind Jesus, proclaiming that *"it has never happened this way in Israel!"*

The Perushim, on the other hand, know who Jesus must be. Therefore, it is with hypocrisy that they proclaim, *"He is casting out the spirit beings by the ruler of spirit beings!"* They know that this is impossible, but they are so determined to call something "evil" which they know is really good.

The passage concludes by saying that Jesus continued to go about teaching, heralding the good message, and curing every disease. We have seen that the message is as follows: that the end of

the Israeli state is coming, but that the Anointed One has come to explain the Torah to those who want to be saved.

## **The Great Commission**

*36 Now when he noticed the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were troubled and scattered "like sheep who have no shepherd." Then he said to his students, "Indeed, the harvest is much, but the workers are scarce. Therefore, make a supplication to the lord of the harvest, so that he would cast out workers into his harvest." And he called his Twelve students to himself, and he gave them authority over unclean spirits, so as to cast them out and to cure every disease and every malady.*

*10:2 Now the names of the Twelve envoys are these: first Simon who is called Peter and Andreas his brother; and Jacob the son of Zebediah and Johannes his brother; Filippus and Bar-Talmi; Thomas and Matthaiah the tribute taker; Jacob the son of Alfeus; and Thaddeus; Simon the Jealous; and Judah Iscariot (the one who also delivered him up).*

In Matthaiah's account, Jesus notices the size of the crowds that are now following him. He realizes that they are *"like sheep who have no shepherd."* This is a citation from Num 27:16, which reads:

*"Let Yahweh, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set down a man over the assembly, who will go out ahead of them and come in ahead of them, who will lead them out and bring them in, so that Yahweh's assembly would not be like sheep who have no shepherd." Thus, Joshua (the one chosen) became a type or example for the Anointed One. Jesus is the successor to Joshua.*

But as Jesus observes the size of the crowd, he chooses twelve to be his spokespeople and assistants. (In Revelation, we are told that their number signifies the twelve tribes.) *"And he called his Twelve students to himself, and he gave them authority over unclean spirits, so as to cast them out and to cure every disease and every malady."* Jesus himself already had this authority--direct from God. Now, he passes on that authority to twelve special people. An exact listing of those twelve people is then provided, so that the reader will know precisely who these gifted men are.

*Jesus sent out these twelve, charging them, saying, "You should not go out into a road of gentiles, and you should not enter into a city of Samaritans. But go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Now after you go, herald, saying that, "The kingdom of the heavens has neared." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out spirit beings. You have received freely; give freely."*

There are several instructions given to the Twelve. They are sent out to travel, and it is the Greek word for "send out" which gives us the commonly used term "apostle". That word signifies an envoy or emissary--an official representative. It is clear from the beginning to whom they are emissaries: *...go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

These Jewish men, representatives of the twelve tribes, were sent to their own people--Jesus' people--the people for whom the Anointed One came (see also ch. 15). Their message is to be a simple one: *"The kingdom of the heavens has neared."* The end is near. The crucifixion (scarcely mentioned yet), the resurrection (not yet mentioned), and the First Revolt with the destruction of the temple are all imminent events.

The Twelve are to heal people of their maladies without asking for anything in return--just as Jesus has done. *"You have received freely; give freely."* Their free gifts are to be used for free.

*"Do not gain possession of gold, nor silver, nor copper for your belts. Do not gain possession of a bag for the way, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff. For the worker is worthy of his food. Now in whatever city or town you may enter, inquire as to who in it is worthy, and stay there until you exit. Now when you go into the household, greet them. And if the household should indeed be worthy, let your peace come upon them. But if it should not be worthy, let your peace turn back to you. And who ever will not receive you nor hear your words: exit from that household or the city and shake the dust from your feet. Indeed I am telling you: it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city."*

The next warning is about acquiring wealth. Jesus makes it clear that not only should they not take money for their favors and for speaking their message, but they should take nothing but food and shelter.

If people will not accept your message, go somewhere where they will. Just as Jesus did not waste his time trying to "convert" Perushim and Zadokites, so also his envoys needed to realize that it was not useful for them to waste their time arguing with people who were not open to hear their message.

*"Look, I am sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, become mindful like the serpents and harmless like the doves."*

*"But watch out for the people. They will deliver you over to Sanhedrins, and they will whip you in their gatherings. And you will be led to governors (but also kings) on account of me, as witnesses to them and to the nations. But when they deliver you up, do not be anxious about how or what you should speak, for what you should speak will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you that will speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaks within you."*

Just as Jesus has faced some mild opposition, he is aware that the opposition would increase and spread to anyone who says the things that he has been teaching. "Become mindful like the serpents" -- watch what you say. "Become harmless like the doves" -- and do not attack others (with word, or presumably deed).

A second warning about opposition:

*"Watch out for the people. They will deliver you over to Sanhedrins, and they will whip you in their gatherings...."* Jesus warns the Twelve that the opposition will become violent. They should say what God wants them to say, and don't worry about what the opposition will do.

*"Then brother will deliver up brother for death, and father will deliver up child. And children will rise up at their parents, and they will cause them to die. And you will stand as hated by all people on account of my name, but the one who endures to the end, this one will be saved."*

This is a prediction of the First Revolt. As the troubles escalate, the violence by Jews against Jesus' students will increase. The gentiles, too, would hate them, he says, looking ahead to Nero and Vespasian and their persecutions.

*"Now when they persecute you in this city, flee into the other. For indeed I am telling you: you should by no means complete the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes."*

Notice how much stronger this is than what he said earlier. As he first sends them out, the situation is not so violent. People will refuse to hear them, so they should move on. But during the period surrounding the Revolt, the Twelve will face persecution. In fact, we know that several of them including Peter were put to death during the persecution years (64 on).

The scope of the envoys' mission is limited to "the cities of Israel." But before they have been to every town (within 40 years, we can say with hindsight), there would be a "second coming" -- the coming in judgment: the destruction of the temple.

*"A student is not over his teacher, nor is a slave over his lord. There is enough for the student so that he should become like his teacher is, and the slave like his lord. If they have called the ruler of the house Ba'al Zebul, how much rather will they call those of his household?"*

*"Therefore, do not be afraid of them. For nothing is covered that will not be revealed, and nothing is secret that will not be made known. What I am telling you in the darkness, say in the light. And what you hear in your ear, herald on the rooftops."*

*"And you should not be afraid of those who kill the body, but who are unable to kill the soul. But you should fear rather the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Aren't two sparrows sold for an assarius? And not one of them falls onto the ground without your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Therefore, do not be afraid: you are worth many sparrows."*

*"Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me in the presence of people, I too will acknowledge him in the presence of my Father, the one who is in the heavens. But whoever will deny me in the presence of people, I too will deny him in the presence of my Father, the one who is in the heavens."*

*"Don't think that I have come to cast peace on the land. I have not come to cast peace but a sword. For I have come to divide "a person against his father and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's household are his enemies."*

*"The one who has more affection for father or mother than for me is not worthy of me. And the one who has more affection for son or daughter than for me is not worthy of me. And the one*

*who does not take his cross and follow behind me is not worthy of me. The one who finds his life will lose it, and the one who loses his life on account of me will find it.*

*"The one who accepts you is accepting me, and the one who accepts me is accepting the one who sent me forth. The one who accepts a prophet in a prophet's name receives a prophet's reward. And the one who accepts a just person in a just person's name receives a just person's reward. And whoever, in the name of a student, should give one of these little ones only a cup of cold water to drink: Indeed I am telling you, he will by no means lose his reward."*

Next, Jesus spurred the Twelve on with several statements, first assuring them that persecution will follow them, then urging them to be ever more fearless when the persecution does come. God is watching and guiding you, he tells the Twelve.

In case they think, "Maybe there will be peace," he again assures them that *"I have not come to cast peace but a sword [onto the land]."* Then he quotes Micah 7:6, that *"a person's household will be his enemies"* in those days.

A stiff saying follows, provoking a decision. If they aren't ready to go, they'd better say so. *"The one who has more affection for father or mother than for me is not worthy of me...."* Why? Because this is a matter of priorities. If God and the mission of Jesus to the Jewish people are not the highest priority, you WILL have to face a conflict of priorities, and if you are not ready to make that choice now (he says), don't even attempt this task.

Then he pointed out that as Jesus' representatives, anyone who accepts or rejects them is accepting or rejecting him (and therefore God, since Jesus was God's representative).

This was a rude awakening for the Twelve, who had not heard such strong talk about the coming Revolt since they were with John the Baptizer. The Twelve was a special lot, as we see when Judah is replaced (Acts 1). They had a particular purpose for their people, and from the time when they were first sent out, they knew what they were getting themselves into. Jesus did not send them with naivety but with the knowledge that their lives would cease to be pleasant -- as people view pleasure -- from that point on.

Nearly all of the Twelve would be put to death for their beliefs. If Jesus' message for his people was merely one he made up, or if the miracles he performed were "snake oil," then he was so good that he fooled the ones closest to him...because they all DIED for it! Jesus himself would die for it, too, leaving his students to finish their commitment to take his message with them to Jews everywhere.

## **The Way was Prepared**

11:1 *And when Jesus had completed arranging for his students, it happened that he departed from there, to teach and to herald in their cities. Now when John, in prison, heard the deeds of the Anointed One, he sent a message by his students, saying to Jesus, "Are you the one who is coming, or should we expect another?"*

*And Jesus answered, saying to him, "Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen: "Blind people see again," and lame people walk, lepers are cleansed, and "deaf people hear," and "dead people are raised," and the good message is announced to poor people. And blessed is whoever does not stumble over me."*

*Now as they were going, Jesus began to tell the crowds about John. "What did you come out into the desert to observe? A reed being shaken by the wind? But what did you come out to see? A person clothed in soft things? Look, the ones who wear soft things are in the houses of the kings. But what did you come out to see? A prophet? I am telling you yes, and more abundant than a prophet. This is the one about whom it was written,*

*""Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of your presence, who will prepare your way in your presence."*

*"Indeed I am telling you: No greater person has risen up among those born of a woman than John the Baptizer. But the littlest one in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he.*

*"From the days of John the Baptizer until the present the kingdom of the heavens has been invaded, and invaders have been seizing it. For all the prophets and the Torah prophesied until John. And if you want to accept it, he is Elijah who is about to come. The one who has ears should hear.*

As Jesus' fame grew, the news eventually reached John the Baptizer, who was in prison and about to be beheaded. Confirming the fact that Jesus and John knew very little of each other although they were related, John sends a message back to Jesus saying, *"Are you the one who is coming, or should we expect another?"*

The fact that John would ask such a question shows that indeed he knew of his own role in the Messianic scheme of things. When he was questioned at the Jordan River, he reported that he was not the Anointed One but was *"a voice crying out in the desert"* to prepare God's way. However, in that account, he said he was not Elijah.

Here, Jesus reports back to John that *"Blind people see again...deaf people hear...dead people are raised."* Jesus adds several things to this list, which comes from Isa 29:18-19 -- proof that he is the Anointed One.

As Jesus and his students are traveling, he tells the crowds about John. Who did you think he was? He was a prophet, but even more than a prophet. For he was the messenger, the forerunner of the Messiah, that was predicted by Malachi. Jesus cites Mal 3:1, *"I am sending my messenger..."*, but he also mentions Elijah. Just as Elijah was seen as having prepared the way for Elisha (who had a double measure of his spirit), someone like Elijah was to come before the coming of the Anointed One (Mal 4:5-6).

Therefore, it appears as though Jesus tells us that John is Elijah, whereas John himself says that he is not. However, John was NOT the person Elijah; he was the predicted person who filled the

role of Elijah, just as Jesus was "my servant David" from Ezekiel -- not David himself, but someone like him.

## **This Generation (1)**

16 *"Now to what will I liken this generation? It is like the boys who sit in the marketplaces and sound out to others, saying, 'We have played the flute for you, and you have not danced. We have mourned for you, and you have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and you say 'He has a spirit being.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a gluttonous person and a wine drinker, a friend of tribute takers and sinners,' and, 'Wisdom is judged by her deeds.'"*

This is the first of Jesus' censures against the people of his day. Although the things he says applied more to the religious leaders than to the common people, there were certainly plenty of ordinary folk to whom his statements applied. *"We have played the flute for you...."* The 'we' here is John and Jesus, who have been announcing the good message of the kingdom. Therefore, this follows directly from what has just happened. *"...and you have not danced. We have mourned for you, and you have not lamented."* The people have neither followed their Anointed One, nor have they chosen to recognize that they NEED him.

*"For John came neither eating nor drinking, and you say, 'He has a spirit being.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a gluttonous person and a wine drinker, a friend of tribute takers and sinners...."*

These people were willing to criticize just for the sake of criticism, so that they would not have to change. They picked on the fact that John adhered to a stricter dietary code, so that they wouldn't have to listen to his message. But Jesus' diet was more normal, and they insulted him for THAT and for the company he kept. Matthaiah has already shown us an example of this. They said these things about Jesus, too, so they wouldn't have to listen to him. If they could simply dismiss him as a person, they could ignore what he was saying, too.

## **The Censure against the Cities**

20 *Then he began to censure the cities in which the majority of his powers had been done, because they did not change their minds. "Woe to you, Chorazin, woe to you, Bethsaida, because if those powers that have happened among you had happened in Ture and Sidon, they would have changed their minds long ago in sackcloth and ashes! However, I am telling you, it will be more tolerable for Ture and Sidon during the day of judgment than for you."*

*"And you, Kafar-Nahum, you will not be elevated as far as heaven; you will be brought down as far as Hades. Because if those powers that have happened among you had happened in Sodom, they would have remained until today. However, I am telling you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom during the day of judgment than for you."*

Next, Jesus lamented about the state of his own people, who were choosing to follow their own traditions rather than the Anointed One whom God had sent to them. He compares the cities of

Israel to gentile cities, saying that the gentiles would have repented, surely, and that their punishment would be less than that of his own people.

## **Jesus and God**

*25 During that season, Jesus answered, saying, "I fully acknowledge you, Father, O Lord of Heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things from wise people and those with understanding, and you have revealed them to babies. Yes Father, because this way it became a delight in your presence.*

*"All things have been given over to me by my Father. And no one except the Father takes recognition of the son, neither does anyone take recognition of the Father except the son, and the one to whom the son plans to reveal him."*

Here, Jesus claimed for himself a special relationship to God. As in 28:18, Jesus acknowledges that the truth of his message is hidden from those who do not really want to find it. This is a corollary to "whoever seeks, finds." The one who isn't finding, isn't really looking.

## **Take My Yoke**

*28 "Come to me, all those who are laboring and who are burdened, and I will cause you to rest. Take my yoke on you, and learn from me, because I am meek and humble-hearted, and "You will find rest for your souls." For my yoke is gentle, and my burden is lightweight."*

We all have burdens to bear, and this is talking about ALL our life's troubles -- anything that might cause us worry or distress. Jesus has said earlier that we ought to be able to let go of our stress. Now, he says, "Give it to me."

The image he sets for himself is that of a strong ox. You are an ox that has been weighted down. He is carrying very little weight. Consequently, if you yoke yourself to him, he will share your load. Roll it up on Jesus' back. So many things in life give you a burden, but Jesus takes your burden away, and he can carry plenty more.

But what does he mean? *"Learn from me...."* Accept his teachings, and *"You will find rest for your souls."* What Jesus has been trying to explain to the people isn't a burden, is is freedom. It is rest. It is peace.

## **Lord of the Sabbath**

*12:1 During that season, Jesus went through the cornfields on the Sabbath. Now his students were hungry and began to pluck and eat ears of corn. But when the Perushim noticed, they said to him, "Look, your students are doing what it is illegal to do during a Sabbath." But he said to them, "Haven't you known what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry? How he entered into God's house and ate the loaves of design, which were not legal for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, except the priests alone? Or haven't you known in the Torah that the priests in the temple during the sabbaths profane the Sabbath and are blameless?"*

*But I am telling you that someone greater than the temple is here. Now if you had known what is, "I want mercy and not sacrifice," you wouldn't have condemned the blameless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."*

As Jesus and his students traveled, they happened to be near a cornfield one Sabbath day. The passage says that they *"were hungry and began to pluck and eat ears of corn."* One concludes that this corn was wild corn; otherwise, Jesus would simply be stealing, which he was not accused of doing.

The traditional legalistic view of Exodus 20:8-11 said that picking grain by hand constituted "work," and the Sabbath was supposed to be a day of rest from work. Therefore, the Perushim said, *"Look, your students are doing what it is illegal to do during a Sabbath."*

Jesus replies first with a strong analogy, proving that what they were doing on the Sabbath was NOT against the Torah.

1. David and his group ate the loaves of design (*bread of the presence*, 1 Sam 21:1-6), which only priests could eat. The point was that David's sustenance was more important than blind observation of a precept that was given so God would be glorified.
2. The priests in the temple profane the Sabbath. Why? Because on the Sabbath, they offer a burnt offering, which is work for them. See Num 28:9-10. But their service to God also glorifies God.

*"But I am telling you that someone greater than the temple is here."* Jesus does not mention David, but there is the implication, too, that the Anointed One is beyond the temple and even David.

Again we read the quotation from Hosea: a direct blow to legalism. The physical activity was never the point of the Torah. Honoring God was the thrust of the Sabbath precept in particular. It honors God to be as he wishes you to be. Going through ritual motions (as the Perushim advocated) does disservice to God.

*"The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."* Markus adds that *"The Sabbath was made for humanity, and not humanity for the Sabbath."* The precepts were made for US, as teaching tools. They are not our masters.

## **The Withered Man**

*9 And after he departed from there, he went into their gathering. And look! A person who had a withered hand was there. And they asked Jesus, so that they might accuse him, saying, "Is it legal to cure during sabbaths?"*

*Now he said to them, "What person among you, who has one sheep, would not take hold of it and lift it up if it should fall into a pit during a Sabbath? Therefore, how much more does this make sense for a person rather than a sheep? And so, it is legal to do well during sabbaths."*

*Then he said to the person, "Stretch out your hand," and he stretched it out, and it was restored well like the other one. But when the Perushim went out, they held a council against him, as to how they might destroy him.*

Jesus went on, and into a gathering of the Perushim, where there was a man with a withered (deformed) hand. Having failed to trap him earlier, they ask, *"Is it legal to cure during sabbaths?"*

This was a trap no matter how Jesus answered. The Perushim would have been happier with the answer, "No," because this agreed more with their beliefs. However, this would have made Jesus appear heartless before the withered man. To answer "yes" meant to advocate violating the Sabbath.

Jesus turned it back on them. If one of their own sheep fell into a pit, wouldn't they help it on the Sabbath? Shouldn't we help a person, if we'd help a sheep? *"And so, it is legal to do well during sabbaths."*

As if winning the debate and evading their trap were not enough, Jesus promptly heals the man, simultaneously demonstrating God's power and incurring more wrath from the Leadership. At this point, they started seeking ways to kill him.

### **Jesus is the Anointed One--more proof**

*15 But Jesus, knowing this, withdrew from there. And crowds, many, followed him, and he cured all of them. And he censured them, so that they would not make him apparent, so that what was declared through Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled, saying, "Look at my servant boy, whom I have chosen: my beloved one, for whom my soul delights. I will put my breath on him, and he will announce justice to the nations. He will neither strive nor cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the open squares. He will not break a bruised reed, and he will not quench a smoldering wick, until he casts out judgment to the point of victory. And the nations will hope for his name."*

Jesus left the place where they were plotting to kill him, followed by a large throng. He cured them, telling them not to let the word out about him (for it was not yet time for him to die, nor to engage in a public debate). In this, he fulfilled a saying from Isaiah 42:1-4, a Messianic prophecy about the "suffering servant." The author quotes the saying more completely this time, establishing more firmly the identity of Jesus as the Anointed One.

### **Speaking against the holy breath**

*22 Then a blind and mute person who was affected by spirit beings was taken to him, and he cured him. And so, the mute person was able to speak and to see. And all the crowds were astonished and said, "Isn't this the Son of David?" But when the Perushim heard, they said, "This one is not casting out spirit beings except with Ba'al Zebul, the ruler of the spirit beings."*

*But since he knew their reflections, he said to them, "Every kingdom that is parted against itself is made desolate, and every city or household that is parted against itself will not stand. And if*

*the Enemy is casting out the Enemy, he is parted against himself. Therefore, how will his kingdom stand? And if I am casting out the spirit beings with Ba'al Zebul, with whom do your sons cast them out? On account of this, they will be your judges. But if in God's breath I am casting out the spirit beings, God's kingdom has appeared to you after all.*

*"Or how is anyone able to enter into the strong man's house and plunder his goods, if he does not first bind the strong man? And then he fully plunders his house.*

*"The one who is not with me is against me, and the one who does not gather with me is scattering. On account of this I am telling you: every sin and evil speaking will be forgiven people, but speaking evil of the breath will not be forgiven. And whoever should speak a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him. But whoever should speak against the holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in the one that is about to come. Either make the tree nice and its fruit nice, or make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt. For 'one knows the tree by the fruit.'*

*"You brood of vipers! How are you able to speak good things, when you are evil? For the mouth is speaking out of the abundance of the heart. The good person casts forth good things out of the good treasure, and the evil person casts forth evil things out of the evil treasure. Now I am telling you that during the day of judgment people will give back (concerning its message) every idle declaration that they speak. For you will be justified out of your statements, and out of your statements you will be condemned."*

The next healing mentioned to us was of a man who was both blind and mute, having been affected by spirit beings. The healing is presented as matter-of-fact: *"he cured him."* No theatrics whatsoever. The crowd was beginning to realize that Jesus was the Anointed One, and this angered the Perushim.

Knowing fully that Jesus must have had God with him, they said anyway that it was through *"Ba'al Zebul, the ruler of the spirit beings"* that he was casting out the spirits. Jesus realized that they knew who he was at this point.

Therefore, first he explains that there is no way he's casting out spirits by anyone's power but God's. And if they are only willing to accept him for who he is--that he has God's breath--then *"God's kingdom has appeared to you after all:"* then they would be ready to accept his message.

But no. They knew the truth and denied it anyway.

**Aside 1. The Strong Man.** If they know that God has the power, and if God has not been overcome, then they must realize who Jesus is.

**Aside 2.** *"The one who is not with me is against me, and the one who does not gather with me is scattering."* In this context, he's saying, "You who are denying who I am are in direct opposition to me." And his next breath indicates that they oppose God as well.

Whatever you say against Jesus (or anyone else) would be forgiven. But if you try to deny what God did, even though you know it to be true, then you will not be forgiven. Denying God the recognition for the deeds you know he performed is unforgivable.

Then again he cites Aesop, urging the Perushim to let Jesus be judged by his deeds. But also, he wants the crowd to judge the Perushim by their deeds. *"One knows the tree by the fruit."*

*"You brood of vipers"* is reminiscent of John the Baptizer. His strong censure, *"How are you able to speak good things, when you are evil,"* also reminds us of John's verbal attacks on the defenders of orthodoxy. Then he reminds them that under the Torah, they will be judged by their deeds, and, *"you will be justified out of your statements, and out of your statements you will be condemned."* Their failure to acknowledge God would condemn them.

## **This Generation (2)**

*38 Then some of the scribes and Perushim asked him, saying, "Teacher, we want to see signs from you." But he answered, saying to them, "An evil and adulterous generation hunts for a sign, and a sign will not be given to it except for the sign of Yonah the prophet. For just as "Yonah was in the abdomen of the great fish for three days and three nights," in the same way the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.*

*"Ninevite men will stand up during the judgment with this generation, and they will condemn it, because they changed their minds at Yonah's heralding, and look: greater than Yonah is here. The southern queen will rise up in judgment with this generation, and she will condemn it, because she came from the outlying areas of the land to hear Solomon's wisdom, and look: someone greater than Solomon is here.*

Jesus has just referred to the religious leadership as a brood of vipers and said that by their refusal to acknowledge what they know to be from God, they will be condemned. So when some of these same leaders, scribes and Perushim, say, *"Teacher, we want to see signs from you,"* this was obviously aggravating -- since he had been performing sign after sign.

In fact, this is a turning point, not only in Matthaiah but in the other accounts of his life as well. How? Let's see what Jesus says.

Jesus goes on to predict that he would spend time dead and then raise. But the thrust of his statement isn't his prediction. He tells the leaders that he's going to STOP giving signs. For some time now, he's been healing everything in sight, but from here on, the miracles are much fewer and farther between. Some commentators wrongly fixate on the expression "three days and three nights." Here, the expression simply means "a short time." Jesus did spend approximately three days in the tomb, but as all four accounts point out, he actually rose "during the third day." No, that wasn't why he brought up the "sign of Yonah."

Jesus was condemning the people of his generation, who were sent the Anointed One that they had been waiting for--but they did not accept him. He continues to indicate that the gentile population of Nineveh would be in the afterlife, enjoying God's presence, and they would

condemn the people of Jesus' generation. Why? THEY didn't reject the one that God sent. They had listened. And yet God sent a greater person, the Anointed One, to the people of first century Israel.

The Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1f.) was a gentile queen. She had gone to test Solomon and came away believing in Yahweh God. *"The report that I heard in my own land of your affairs and of your wisdom was true. But I didn't believe the report until I came, and my own eyes saw it .... Blessed be Yahweh your god, who has delighted in you and set you on Israel's throne! Because Yahweh has loved Israel forever, he has made you king..."* (1 Kgs 10:6-9)

The leaders of Jesus' day, however, came to him skeptical, and though they were shown more than the queen was shown, they were choosing to deliberately reject Jesus, who was greater than Solomon. Therefore, she too, another gentile dog, would be with God condemning them. These statements were very strong insults to their character.

43 *"Now when the unclean spirit has come out from a person, it goes through waterless places, seeking and not finding a resting place. Then it says, 'I will turn back to my house from which I came out.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept clean, and adorned. Then it goes and takes along with itself seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person has become worse than the first. It will be that way with this evil generation."*

The "unclean spirit" is the idolatry that had been present in Israel during much of the Old Testament period. It took many years to purge Israel of its idolatry, but this was at last done.

The people of Jesus' day did not worship other beings called gods. But the positional system was a god unto itself. The rituals, the temple, and even the priestly and rabbinical structure, had become "gods" -- metaphorically -- because they were more important than what God was trying to tell them. Jesus says that the Israel of his day was eight times more idolatrous than the Israel of Old Testament times.

*"It will be that way with this evil generation."* You guys are worse off now than with the idolatry you had before.

John Bland is correct in describing how their system was destroyed and built back "in spades" by Christians, who now have many religious structures, many temples, many creeds, and many blinders on. Perhaps indeed we are eight times as bad as the idolatry of the scribes and Perushim!

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## Mother and Brothers

46 *While he was still speaking to the crowds, look, his mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to him. Now someone said to him, 'Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with you.' But he answered, saying to him, telling him, 'Who is my mother? And who are my brothers?' And he stretched out his hand to his*

*students and said, "Look at my mother and my brothers. For whoever should do what my Father in the heavens wants, this one is my brother, and sister, and mother."*

By this time, apparently Jesus' dad, Yosef, was dead. We know he was dead before the cross, because Johannes was given the charge of taking care of Jesus' mother, but he seems to have died by this time. Jesus says then that relationship by physical birth is not so important. He doesn't mention Abraham and the Jewish sense of identity through physical birth, but this may have been in mind. He does say that whoever does what God wants is his brother, sister, or mother. In the spiritual sense, God's followers are relatives more than we could ever be otherwise. Remember that Jesus has already said (and says more strongly in Johannes' account) that the one whom one is following is one's father. You take after your father.

## **The Master Analogy -- The Sower**

**13:1** *During those days, Jesus exited the house and sat down by the sea. And many crowds came with him, and so he went down into a ship to sit down, and all the crowd stood at the shore.*

*And he spoke many things to them with analogies, saying, "Look: the sower of the seed went out to sow, and in sowing it, some seeds indeed fell by the road, and the birds came and devoured them. But others fell on rocky land, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they rose up (on account of not having any deep soil). Now when the sun rose, the plant was scorched, and it dried out on account of not having a root. But others fell on the acanthus plants, and the acanthus plants rose up and choked them.*

*"But others fell on the nice ground and yielded fruit: one indeed yielded a hundred; now another yielded sixty; now another yielded thirty. The one who has ears, let him hear."*

Jesus has left the phase of his work where he constantly healed people. Now, he turns to teaching, and specifically, teaching through analogies. The reason for doing this is presented in vv.10-17. The meaning of the analogy is given in vv.18-23. The analogy itself is here.

## **Why Analogies?**

*10 And the students came to him, saying, "Why do you speak to them with analogies?" Now he answered, saying to them, "To you it is given to know the secrets of the kingdom of the heavens, but it has not been given to them. For more will be given to whomever has, and he will have abundantly. But to the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. On account of this, I speak to them with analogies: that 'seeing, they do not see, and hearing, they do not hear,' nor do they understand. And Isaiah's prophecy is completely fulfilled in them, which says, "Hearing, you will hear, and you will by no means have understood; and seeing, you will see, and you will by no means have noticed. For the hearts of this people have become fat, and they hear heavily with their ears, and they shut their eyes. Otherwise, when noticing with their eyes, and hearing with their ears, and understanding with their hearts, they would also turn back, and I would heal them." "But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. For indeed I am telling you that many prophets and just people strongly*

*desired to see what you see, and they did not see. And they strongly desired to hear what you hear, and they did not hear."*

Jesus never told "preacher stories." When he spoke, he normally taught directly: "Here's what God says." In one phase of his work, though, he did speak by analogy, and he explains why:

*To is students "it is given to know the secrets of the kingdom of the heavens..."* This means that he would teach them directly.

*"...but it has not been given to them..."* The crowds, and in particular the Leadership, will have to search for answers if they want to learn. Jesus then says that he's speaking to the ones who AREN'T seeking with analogies so that they would be confused and not understand. He cites a prophecy in Isaiah (6:9-10), which adds that the people's hearts are fattened, and they are slow to listen and to look.

## **The Explanation of the Sower**

18 *"You, therefore, hear the analogy of the sower: Each one who hears the message of the kingdom and who does not understand, the evil one comes and takes away what was sown in his heart. This is what was sown by the road.*

*"Now what was sown on the rocky land, this is the one who hears the message and immediately receives it with joy. But he has no root within himself, but he is seasonal. Now when affliction or persecution happens on account of the message, he immediately stumbles.*

*"Now what was sown into the acanthus, this is the one who hears the message and in whom the cares of the age and the deceptiveness of wealth choke off the message, and he becomes fruitless.*

*"But what was sown on the nice ground, this is the one who hears the message and understands. He indeed bears fruit and makes: 'one indeed a hundred; now another, sixty; now another, thirty.'"*

Markus' account expressly adds that his students needed to understand how to interpret this analogy so that they would understand all the analogies. In other words, Jesus was introducing a teaching tool to them.

The sower is not identified by Matthaiah. The sower might be God, or Jesus, or the Twelve themselves (who are assisting Jesus). Most likely, the sower is God.

The seed is not identified by Matthaiah, but in the parallels it is said to be God's message. That expression in the New Testament always refers to the message brought by Jesus. As the author has explained it, the message includes a statement of Jesus' identity as the Anointed One and a deeper explanation of the Torah, for there would soon be an end to the nation that viewed the Torah superficially.

The fate of the seed sown by the road represents what happens to those who hear but do not understand. *"The evil one comes and takes away what was sown in his heart."* This category most fits the Perushim and scribes, although others surely belonged here as well.

The fate of the seed sown on rocky land represents what happens to those who experience only the emotion attached to the freedom that the message brings. Freedom from the legalistic view of the Torah was bound to be euphoric. But then what happens? If there's no foundation there other than a good feeling, when conflict arises, it's real easy to fall away altogether. For those of us who have accepted the "freedom from rituals and legalism," this is the pitfall that might most closely apply to us -- if we have no foundation!

The acanthus is a sticker plant, and the message that falls into the acanthus plants tells what happens to those who reject the message because of the higher priorities that it calls on them to have. They'd rather keep doing what they're doing than experience mental change and put God first. The message was so radical that change was difficult.

The one who hears and understands -- as Jesus put it elsewhere, the one who hears the Torah and does it -- that person experiences spiritual growth. Obviously, it's Jesus' intent that more and more people become fertile ground.

### **Analogy: Good Seed and Darnel**

13:24-30; 36-43

*24 He put another analogy to them, saying, "The kingdom of the heavens is like a person sowing nice seed in his field. But while the people were sleeping, his enemies came up and sowed darnel into the midst of the wheat, and they went away. Now when the blade shot up and made fruit, the darnel plants appeared then also.*

*"Now the slaves of the ruler of the house came to him, saying, 'Lord, didn't you sow nice seed in your field? Then why does it have darnel plants?' Now he said to them, 'An enemy person has done this.'*

*"Now the slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go out and collect them?' But he sounded, 'No, lest as you collect the darnel plants, you should uproot the wheat together with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest. And during the season of the harvest, I will say to the harvesters, "Collect first the darnel plants, and bind them into bundles for their burning, but gather the wheat into my granary.'"*

Here, Jesus is the sower of seed. But in this analogy, there is not only wheat but darnel. Darnel plants look a little like wheat, but they are weeds. Jesus says there's darnel among the wheat in the field; that is, there are good and evil people in creation, and more specifically, throughout the Jewish world. This was not merely talking about the state of Israel, but about Jews everywhere. The good people are the "sons of the kingdom" who do what God wants. The evil people were sowed by the Accuser.

God's servants are instructed to wait until the harvest. Then the difference is obvious. The darnel will be destroyed. The wheat will be stored in the granary.

Jesus has already said that the time for harvesting had come, and here, the harvest time reaches its conclusion at the end of the present age: an age that would end with the destruction of Jerusalem. Indeed, those who heard the message were being forced to choose. The pious Jews were being separated from the impious by the message that God was spreading through his servants. The bad guys would be destroyed, but the ones who accept the message (the wheat) would have eternal life.

*36 Then, leaving the crowds, he went into the house. And his students came to him, saying, "Explain to us fully the analogy of the darnel plants of the field." Now he answered, saying, "The one who sows the nice seed is the Son of Man. Now the field is creation. Now the nice seed, these are the sons of the kingdom, but the darnel plants are the sons of the evil one. Now that enemy who sowed them is the Accuser. Now the harvest is the conclusion of the age, but the harvesters are messengers. Therefore, as the darnel plants are collected and burnt up with fire, in the same way it will be during the conclusion of the age. The Son of Man will send forth his messengers, and they will collect from his kingdom all the stumbling blocks and those who are doing lawlessness. And "they will throw them into the furnace of fire." There, there will be crying and grinding of teeth. Then the just people will shine out like the sun in their Father's kingdom. The one who has ears, let him hear.*

The explanation section says that the evil people are specifically the *"stumbling-blocks and those who are doing lawlessness."* Jesus may have in mind his earlier quotation about those who are following rituals but who do not have the right attitude. For there (ch. 7), he cited the saying *"Get those people away from me who are doing lawlessness."* Their fate is *"the furnace of fire"*-- destruction, a horrible fate. But the true followers *"will shine out like the sun in their Father's kingdom."*

### **Analogy: Mustard Seed**

*31 He put another analogy to them, saying, "The kingdom of the heavens is like a grain of mustard, which someone took and planted in his field. Indeed it is the littlest of all the seeds, but when it has grown, it is the greatest of the herbs, and it becomes a tree, and so "the birds of the sky come and make nests in its branches.""*

The kingdom is like mustard seed. When the message takes root in a person and grows, it becomes powerful. Its relative size, mentioned by Jesus, is the simplicity of the message. It's SO simple, and yet it can be so powerful in someone's life.

There is an often-overlooked quotation here, from Daniel 4:12. That citation references a portion of one of Nebuchadnezzar's visions. Daniel explained then, "The tree that you saw ... in whose branches the birds of the sky had nests -- it is you, oh king." When the message grows within a person, it is the one practicing the message who flourishes because of it.

### **Analogy: Yeast**

33 *He spoke another analogy to them: "The kingdom of the heavens is like yeast. When a woman took it, she concealed it in three sata of meal, until the whole of it was leavened."*

*Jesus spoke these things in analogies to the crowds and spoke nothing to them without an analogy, so that what was declared through the prophet would be fulfilled, saying, "I will open my mouth in analogies; I will utter things hidden from the laying down" of creation.*

The message of the kingdom spreads like yeast, until it is everywhere. It is interesting that Jesus chose this analogy because of the Jews' aversion to yeast during the week of the Passover.

As a bridge to the explanation of the wheat and darnel (already explained above), the author includes the citation from the Psalms (78:2) about speaking through analogies. The author of the psalm emphasized the unfaithfulness of the people, which required that he speak "the glorious deeds of Yahweh" in analogies and "dark sayings." The psalm continues, indicating that God had given the Torah so that people of that generation would not be like the "stubborn and rebellious generation" before them, who had been unfaithful toward God. Yet some people "rebelled against him. They did not observe his decrees, but turned away and were faithless like their ancestors..." (v. 56). This led to God rejecting them. In applying the psalm to his current situation, Jesus saw himself as being in a similar position.

### **Analogy: Treasure in a Field**

44 *"The kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a person finds it, he hides it, and (from his joy) goes up, and sells all that he has, and buys that field."*

The message is worth EVERYTHING!

### **Analogy: A Merchant**

45 *"Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a person, a merchant who seeks beautiful pearls. Now after finding one pearl of much value, he went away and sold all that he had, and he bought it."*

When the kingdom-minded attitude is in a person, he is willing to make it his top priority. Everything else is worth less than truth-seeking. He'll sell all he has to do it.

### **Analogy: A Dragnet**

47 *"Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a dragnet which is cast into the sea and which gathers fish from every species. When it is has been filled, they draw it up on the shore and sit down and collect the good ones into vessels. But they throw the corrupt ones away. It will be this way during the conclusion of the age. The messengers will exit and will separate out the evil ones from the midst of the just ones, and "they will cast them into the lake of fire." There, there will be crying and grinding of teeth. Did you understand all of these things?" They said to him, "Yes."*

The message goes out to everyone, to both good and evil people -- to the receptive and unreceptive. Then it causes a separation between the receptive and unreceptive.

Once again, this process culminates at the destruction of the Temple and elimination of the old covenant, because the ones who did not internalize that principles of the Torah would lose their access to God at that time. Also once again, the Jews who did not really follow the Torah, would perish.

## **Analogy about the Learner**

*52 Now he said to them, "For this reason every scribe who learns the kingdom of the heavens is like a person, a ruler of the house, who casts new and old things from his treasury."*

They had claimed to have understood Jesus' sayings. Therefore, Jesus concluded with a pronouncement about all of the sayings. This is similar in scope to his conclusion of the "sermon" on the mount in chapters 5 through 7. The scribe who learns the teachings of Jesus has a treasury containing both new things (Jesus' teachings/explanations) and old things (the Torah and Prophets). Thus, he has both new and old to give others.

## **Where is Jesus From?**

*53 And when Jesus had completed these analogies, it happened that he departed from there. And after coming into his country, he taught them in their gatherings, and so they were amazed, and they said, "Where do this one, the wisdom, and the powers come from? Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother called Miriam; and aren't his brothers Jacob, and Yosef, and Simon, and Judah; and aren't his sisters all with us? Then from where does this one get all of these things?" And they stumbled in him.*

*But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his country and in his household." And he did not do many powerful things there on account of their distrust.*

Jesus has returned to "his own country," the area surrounding Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. Here, the people were inquisitive. Where does he come from? Where does he get his powers? Some recognized him, saying, "Isn't this the carpenter's son?" They remembered the names of his family members.

The confusion arose because the Anointed One was said to come from out of nowhere, yet they knew who Jesus was. And so, their familiarity with Jesus (his growing up, probably doing all the things that little children do) became a stumbling-block to their accepting the fact that he was the Anointed One. So Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his country and in his household." The account said that he did not work many miracles "on account of their distrust." From this account, we see a different kind of disbelief than we have seen before. These people have a preconceived view not only of the Messiah but also of JESUS. This expectation stemmed from their knowledge of him as a person. Some of them knew his family. Perhaps they had seen him growing up under the tutelage of his father, Yosef the carpenter. How could he be the Anointed One?

By the way, we can also see that Jesus was still healing, and Lukas' account places this in chapter eight.

## **The Fate of John the Baptizer**

**14:1** *During that season, Herod the Tetrarch heard the report of Jesus, and he said to his servant boys, "This is John the Baptizer. He has raised from the dead, and for this reason the powers are being worked out by him."*

*For Herod had John held and bound and put away in jail on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philippos. For John had said to him, "It is illegal for you to have her." And Herod was wanting to kill him, but he feared the crowd, because they held him as a prophet.*

*But when Herod's birthday occurred, Herodias' daughter danced in the midst, and pleased Herod. From this, he agreed with an oath to give her whatever she might ask for. Now since she had been prompted earlier by her mother, "Give me," she voiced, "John the Baptizer's head, here on a platter." And the king was sorrowful on account of the oaths and those who were reclining with him, and he gave word for the head to be given. And he sent someone who beheaded John in jail, and his head was brought on a platter and was given to the little girl, and she brought it to her mother. And when his students came, they took the body and buried it. And after they left, they related it to Jesus.*

Matthaiah gives the account of John's execution because people now think that Jesus might be John resurrected. There is an interesting Elijah/Elisha connection that Markus clarifies, but which Matthaiah ignores. Markus further adds that Herod himself believed that Jesus might have been John, raised from the dead.

Herod the Tetrarch was the son of Herod the Great, who was associated with events surrounding Jesus' infancy. Herod wanted to sleep with his half-brother's wife, Herodias, but John had told him, *"It is illegal for you to have her."* Indeed, incest of this level is against the Torah. Herod wanted to have him killed, but chose instead to imprison him.

Interestingly, the account says that Herod regretted having told Salome she could have anything and regretted ordering the death of the Baptizer. At any rate, that's how he met his demise on account of a vengeful woman.

Markus' account adds that Herod thought John to be a holy man and that he used to enjoy listening to John, although he did not understand. Both accounts place the blame more on Herodias than on Herod Antipas.

## **The Feeding of the Thousands**

**13** *Now when Jesus heard, he withdrew from there in a ship to a desert place by himself. And when the crowds heard, they followed him on foot from the cities. And when Jesus exited, he noticed a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and cured their sick.*

*Now when evening happened, the students came to him, saying, "The place is a desert, and the hour has already gone by. Release the crowds, so that they might go out into the villages and buy provisions for themselves. But Jesus said to them, "They don't have the need to go away. You give them something to eat."*

*But they said to him, "We don't have here but five loaves of bread and two fishes." But he said, "Carry them here to me." And he gave word to the crowds to recline on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up into the sky and blessed them. And after breaking them, he gave the loaves to the students. Now the students gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were well fed, and they took up the abundance of the fragments, twelve baskets full. Now those who ate were about five thousand men, without the women and school children.*

When Jesus learned of John's execution, he was mournful, as you might expect. He went off by himself for a moment of solitude, but the crowds persisted on following him. As he left his place of peace, he saw the crowds and was as compassionate as the Anointed One would be expected to be.

Notice that when the food ran out, Jesus told his students, *"You give them something to eat."* If this is the same account as in Johannes' version, then Jesus deliberately said this to test his students. By now, they should know to trust God. They scrounged up five barley loaves and a couple of small fish, and "the rest is history." Again, there are great parallels to Elijah and Elisha here, but Matthaiah does not make them.

After collecting BASKETS full of fragments, Jesus dismisses the crowds. Then we learn that there were possibly as many as 15,000 people or more at the gathering: 5,000 men, plus women, plus children.

## **Walking on Water**

*22 And immediately he necessitated that the students go down into the ship and go ahead of him to the far side, while he was letting the crowds go away. And after letting the crowds go away, he went up into the mountain by himself to pray. Now since evening had happened, he was there alone.*

*Now the ship was already many stadia away from the land, being tormented by the waves, for the wind was against them. Now during the fourth guard of the night, he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the students noticed him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying that it was an apparition. And they cried out from fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage; it is I. Don't be afraid."*

*But Peter answered him, saying, "Lord, if it is you, give word for me to come to you on the waters." Now he said, "Come," and Peter went down from the ship and walked on the waters and went to Jesus. But when he saw the wind to be strong, he was afraid, and since he was beginning to sink, he called out, "Lord, save me!"*

*Now Jesus immediately stretched out his hand and took him. And he said to him, "You person who scarcely trusts! To what end did you doubt?" And after they went down into the ship, the wind stopped. Now the ones who were in the ship bowed down to him, saying, "Truly you are God's son!"*

*And after going across, they came to the land at Gennesaret. And since the men of that place recognized him, they sent out into the whole of that surrounding country, and they brought to him all those who had a malady. And they were advising him so that they might touch only the tuft of his cloak. And as many as touched it were made sound.*

Jesus still needs time alone, so he goes up on a mountain to pray, alone. Meanwhile, his students had been sailing and were quite a ways from land. A storm hits, and everyone freaks out, thinking that the boat will capsize.

When Jesus walked out to them on the surface of the lake, they still did not realize it was him -- even though they had seen all the miracles so far. After they established his identity, Peter still wasn't truly sure it was him! *"Lord, if it is you, give word for me to come to you on the waters."*

And so, Peter himself walked on the water out toward Jesus. He became afraid of the storm and began to sink, but Peter DID IT! And if he had continued to trust, Jesus said he would not have sunk.

After returning to the boat, the storm calmed, and his students dropped to their knees and acknowledged that he was the Messiah.

And so, Jesus not only demonstrated his identity (again) to his students, but Peter received an important lesson for him in his role as envoy. When God's Anointed One says you can do something, you can do it, no matter how impossible it seems, for the power of God is with you.

Again there was increased trust, and when the crowds started gathering, any who touched his cloak were healed.

## **The True Torah or Tradition?**

15:1-11, 15-20

**15:1** *Then Perushim and scribes from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why are your students wandering from the tradition of the older people? For they don't wash their hands when they eat bread."*

*But he answered, saying to them, "And why do you wander from God's precept on account of your tradition? For God said, "Honor the father and the mother," and, "The one who says a bad thing of father or mother should be completed to death." But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or to his mother, "Whatever might be owed by me is a gift," he will by no means honor his father.' And you are annulling God's statement on account of your tradition. Hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied well about you, saying,*

*"This people honors me with the lips, but their hearts are far away from me. Now they revere me worthlessly, teaching as teachings human precepts."*

*And he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: It is not what enters into the mouth that makes a person common. On the contrary, what goes out of the mouth, this makes a person common."*

Jesus was still in the vicinity of Nazareth, but scribes and Perushim from Jerusalem had made the trip up to grill him. When they saw that Jesus' students were not ritually purifying their hands before they eat, they call Jesus on the carpet for it. He replied, *"And why do you wander from God's precept on account of your tradition?"*

The Jewish people regarded objects in three categories: "ritually clean" (suitable for use in the temple, etc.); "ritually unclean" (unsuitable for most uses); and "common" (suitable for ordinary use but not for any use that is devoted to God).

The passage begins with certain of the religious leaders questioning Jesus about the behavior of his students. After all, if Jesus were truly an honest rabbi, his students ought to keep rabbinical tradition. The "washing" of hands, here, is not about literal hand-washing (for cleanliness) but about a ritual of purification. The Pharisaic schools debated the subject for some time. R. Shammai was a leader in the movement for ritual cleansing; he wound up imposing his viewpoint on the council (the Sanhedrin).

In the Talmud, tractate Shabbath 62b, we read:

*"In a Baraitha it was taught: Three things bring man to poverty. viz., urinating in front of one's bed naked, treating the washing of the hands with disrespect, and being cursed by one's wife in his presence."*

In tractate Sotah 4b, we also read:

*"R. Zerika said in the name of R. Eleazar: Whoever makes light of washing the hands will be uprooted from the world. R. Hiyya b. Ashi said in the name of Rab: With the first washing it is necessary to lift the hands up; with the latter washing it is necessary to lower the hands. There is a similar teaching: Whoever washes his hands must lift them up lest the water pass beyond the joint, flow back and render them unclean. R. Abbahu says: Whoever eats bread without first wiping his hands is as though he eats unclean food; as it is stated: 'And the Lord said: Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their bread unclean.'"*

In Jesus' time, the rabbis had begun to place great emphasis on certain ritual cleansings, including the cleansings before and after eating a meal. Jesus did not address the hand-washing subject directly, instead turning to something that he considered similar: the rabbis' use of a principle of temple sacrifice to override one of the Ten Commandments.

Jesus cites passages from the Torah which indicate that one's parents should be honored. It was normally recognized that a person should take care of his parents when they age. But the common practice was that if something were set aside for temple use, *korban*, then they could treat that money (or property) as though it did not exist. Therefore, they could claim that they

were unable to provide support for their parents--getting around the precept of honoring their parents. So Jesus says, *"You are annulling God's statement on account of your tradition."*

God had told them about a principle: honor and respect. They had interpreted mechanically what this honor entailed, and then found legalistic ways around it. They had created similar Sabbath rules.

Aside: Once I was told that the Bible said women couldn't teach men, so I couldn't go to a women's seminar. But I could buy the tape. If God said it, why try to get around it? But then again, if the Bible is only seen as an EXTERNAL CODE, you're not evading, you're only CLARIFYING. Yeah, that's it!

So the Perushim, sticklers for detail, believed that they were clarifying in what situations different statements applied. But it was their externalization of internal principles that made them miss the point entirely.

Thus, Jesus continues by citing God's statement to Isaiah (Isa 29:13). They had made the Torah useless, and their religion was the problem. This reverence of God in Isaiah is a "tremble in fear" reverence. Rather than tremble in fear of God, they preferred to follow that which was familiar: their own traditional opinions. Jesus is calling for "restoration"--for a look back at what God originally said, and not at the human opinions and interpretations that had created the Jewish paradigm of his time.

In speaking against creating a ritualistic religion out of the internal principles of the Torah, Jesus says, "It is not what enters into the mouth that makes a person common. On the contrary, what goes out of the mouth, this makes a person common."

For them, ritual cleansing made sure that the food that entered the mouth was not "unclean"; therefore, the person wouldn't be defiled. It was a precautionary measure that the Leadership had enacted. They'd been doing it for several generations--perhaps 200 years. Jesus addresses their practice by saying that food doesn't rob someone of their holiness. Yet they looked at defilement from an external standpoint, and Jesus was about to internalize it.

*15 Now Peter answered, saying to him, "Explain that analogy to us." Now he said, "Are you still without understanding too? Aren't you mindful that everything that enters into the mouth is contained in the abdomen and is cast out into a latrine? But the things that go out from the mouth are coming out from the heart, and they make the person common. For out of the heart come evil reasonings, murders, adulteries, thefts, false testimonies, evil speakings. These are the things that make a person common, but to eat with unwashed hands does not make the person common."*

When Peter asked for an explanation, Jesus gave it. Physical food is eventually expelled, but the things that come out from the heart remain in the heart, *"and they make the person common."*

No handwashing is going to help, either, and Jesus explains exactly what sorts of things render someone useless for holy purposes.

## Interlude: IGNORE the Religious Leaders

*12 Then the students came to him, saying to him, "Do you know that the Perushim stumbled when they heard the saying?" But he answered, saying, "Each plant that my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted. Drop them. They are blind guides of blind people. Now if a blind person should guide a blind person, both will fall into a pit."*

When Jesus' students pointed out that he was directly attacking the scribes' teachings, he replied by saying that they weren't really following God. He continued by telling his students to ignore such people. Why? They don't know any more than the people who follow them as they follow their traditions. Such people are merely following someone who followed someone who followed someone.... The "blind" person is the one who's following tradition instead of looking to see what God wants him to do.

## A Reluctant Healing

*21 And after exiting from there, Jesus withdrew into the parts of Ture and Sidon. And look, a Canaanite woman came out from those areas and called out to him, saying, "Have mercy on me, sir, son of David! For my daughter is being badly affected by a spirit being!" Now he did not answer her a word. And his students went to him and begged him, saying, "Make her go away, because she is calling out after us."*

*Now he answered, saying, "I was only sent out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and bowed down to him, saying, "Sir, help me." But he answered, saying, "It is not a nice thing to take the children's bread and to throw it to the dogs." But she said, "Yes, sir. For even the dogs dine on the crumbs that fall from their lord's table." Then Jesus answered, saying to her, "O woman, your trust is great. Let it happen for you as you want." And her daughter was healed from that hour.*

This passage actually displays full force the strictly Jewish nature of Jesus' mission as the Anointed One. While his abolition of legalism would eventually benefit gentiles, he was sent to the Jewish nation only.

A Canaanite (gentile) woman asked for Jesus to heal her daughter, who was affected by spirits. He refuses even to answer. It would have been inappropriate for a rabbi to address such a woman. His students took a harsher view, that Jesus should get rid of her.

He responds by indicating the scope of his mission as the Messiah. She knew his mission, but she asked him for help anyway. At this point, he was certainly testing her trust in the Jews' God.

As she dropped to her knees and asks again for help, he basically insulted her. The Jewish people were Abraham's (and God's) children; gentiles were insulted by being called dogs. Was Jesus verbally abusing her? No. Instead, he deliberately insulted her to test her resolve.

What humility she showed! She accepted the insult and continued to beg for help! And Jesus says this time: *"O woman, your trust is great. Let it happen for you as you want."*

Jesus appears harsh, but he told the truth in that his mission was not for her. Still, if she demonstrated the requisite trust in God, he was naturally willing to help her daughter. Could anyone complain that he had healed her, after she so humbled herself before God's servant?

## **More Thousands Fed**

*29 And when Jesus departed from there, he came by the sea of Galilaiah, and after going up into the mountain, he sat down there. And many crowds came to him, having with them lame people, blind people, maimed people, and many others. And they laid them near his feet, and he cured them. And so, it was that the crowds wondered, seeing deaf people speaking, maimed people made well, lame people walking, and blind people seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.*

*Now Jesus called his students to him, saying, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been continuing with me for three days already, and they don't have anything that they can eat. And I don't want to send them away fasting, lest they should faint on the road."*

*And the students said to him, "Where will we get so many loaves in a desert, so as to well feed so great a crowd?" And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" Now they said, "Seven, and a few fish." And he gave word for the crowd to recline on the ground. Taking the seven loaves and the fish, and giving thanks, he broke them and gave them to the students. Now the students gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were well fed. And the abundance of the fragments was seven large baskets full. Now those who had dined were four thousand men, without the women and school children. And after releasing the crowds, he went up into the ship and came into the coastal regions of Magdala.*

Many sick people went to Jesus believing. So he healed them all, and they praised God. But again they had stayed with him for so long that they had exhausted their food supply. This time, his students didn't question him. Jesus intends to feed them, as he fed the thousands before, and they obliged. Seven loaves and a few fish are turned into a feast for 4,000 men (plus women and children). They ate until they were full, and seven baskets of pieces were collected. Until his approach to Jerusalem (ch. 21), this would be the last time he healed people for the simple purpose of curing them.

## **This Generation (3)**

*16:1 And the Perushim and Zadokites came to him, testing him. They asked him to show them a sign from heaven. But he answered, saying to them, "An evil and adulterous generation is hunting a sign, and a sign will not be given to it except for the sign of Yonah." And he left them and went away.*

*And when the students went to the far side, they had forgotten to take loaves. But Jesus said to them, "Look, and watch out for the yeast of the Perushim and Zadokites." But they were reasoning among themselves, saying that "We have not taken any loaves." But, knowing this, Jesus said, "Oh you who scarcely trust, why are you reasoning among yourselves because you don't have any loaves? Are you not yet mindful, nor do you remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand and how*

*many large baskets you took? How aren't you mindful that I was not speaking to you about loaves of bread? Now watch out for the yeast of the Perushim and Zadokites." Then they understood that he did not say to watch out for yeast of bread loaves, but of the teaching of Perushim and Zadokites.*

At some time (unspecified, but close to the crucifixion), both the Perushim and the Zadokites came to question Jesus, demanding a sign from heaven. Jesus replied, *"An evil and adulterous generation is hunting a sign, and no sign will be given to it except for the sign of Yonah."* The passage says he simply walked off.

Jesus' challenges are somewhat more detailed here. He describes the Jewish people of his own day and age as "evil"--that is, in opposition to what God wants--and "adulterous"--the term traditionally used in the OT for people who are idolatrous. We have already seen where Jesus' charge of idolatry comes from: the system of religious belief and ritual was eight times more idolatrous than what had plagued Israel in the OT (Mt 12). The "sign of Yonah" we have also seen. This is a slap in the face, since he said before that gentiles would enter the kingdom ahead of his own people. It also served as a prediction of his death, burial, and resurrection.

Jesus then instructed his students, *"Look, and watch out for the yeast of the Perushim and Zadokites."* The term "yeast" would have a negative connotation to Jews in the right context. The feast of Unleavened Bread was coming soon. During that feast, a deliberate and ritual effort was made to purge one's household of all yeast. At this time of year, yeast was something to be greatly avoided, for if there were any yeast, then one could not participate in the festival. Yeast was also known for fermenting or permeating an entire block of (previously unleavened) dough. As an expression, this could be either good or bad depending upon the context.

Here, Jesus calls the teachings of the Perushim and Zadokites "yeast," which his students eventually discover (v.12). To prompt their memories about his own teaching, Jesus reminds them about the "bread" miracles, and of course "bread" and "yeast" are related. But the reminder serves to jog their memories about who he is and why the Leaders are opposing him. Their traditional way of thinking-- which they teach--this is "yeast" during a time when it is necessary to be unleavened.

## **Who am I now?**

*13 And after coming into the parts of Caesarea Filippi, Jesus asked his students, saying, "Who do people say the Son of Man to be?" Now they said, "Indeed they say, John the Baptizer. But others say Elijah; now others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say me to be?"*

*Now Simon Peter answered, saying, "You are the Anointed One: the son of the living God." Now Jesus answered, saying to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Yonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal to you, but my Father in the heavens. Now I am also telling you that you are 'Peter,' and on this 'rock' I will construct my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail over it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you might bind on the earth will be a bound thing in the heavens, and whatever you might let go on the earth will be a loosed*

*thing in the heavens. Then he gave a statement to his students, so that they would tell no one that he was the Anointed One.*

By now, Jesus' students have seen more than enough to know for themselves who he is. And so, he tests their trust by asking. The term "Son of Man," here, is taken as a synonym for "God's servant" (i.e., "me"). That term alone, though, is also a term of Messianic identity. Literally, it means "mortal" and is used as such in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., of Ezekiel).

The students answer quickly about what other people are saying. Some think he's John the Baptizer resurrected. Some think he's the Elijah figure who precedes the coming of the Anointed One. Others seem to think he's one of the prophets come back.

*"But who do you say me to be?"* Here, it gets personal. Jesus wants for THEIR answer to be the same as the answer to "Who am I?" He hopes that by this time they are certain of who he is. Peter speaks, famously, identifying Jesus as Messiah. He says this without qualification. He doesn't say, as above, that some people think he's the Anointed One. He doesn't say, "I think you're the Anointed One." He says this with full assurance: "You are...." There is no doubt in Peter's mind, and that's exactly what Jesus was looking for.

Such unwavering assurance at Jesus' Messiahship could have only been given by a leap of trust in God. [After all, there were many who had seen what Peter had seen but who did not accept Jesus as the Anointed.] Peter knew it fully, and God must have provided that "leap of faith."

Next, Jesus uses a word-play based on Peter's name. In Aramaic, both "Peter" and "rock" are the same word: Kefa. At the beginning, the term Kefa was bestowed upon Simon Peter as a term that described elements of his personality which must have been evident (see Jn 1:42). Now, several years later, that depth of character pulled through for Peter, as he made his statement with confidence.

The word game ties Peter himself together with the type of trust in God that he had just displayed, which he labels a "rock". It is the unshaken trust that Jesus is the Anointed One that will be the basis for his assembly.

**Aside:** grammatically, there is nothing preventing us from construing the passage so that Jesus is building the assembly on Peter. However, the rest of the phrase would then be rendered awkward, and we do happen to see that Peter struggled at times with weak faith (such as at the point of his denials). But he never wavered from knowing who Jesus was. This was the kernel of trust; this was the rock-- not Peter himself.

When Jesus said, *"I will construct my assembly,"* he deliberately used a word that is different from the word, "gathering," that the Jews used to describe their way of life. An ἐκκλησία was the Greek word for an assembly. When it appears in the Septuagint, it refers to all of the people collectively. In a Greek assembly, the people discuss matters freely among one another. They serve as a community, interconnected and interlocking. Jesus was going to establish a community, based on the firm trust in his identity as Messiah. These faithful people would be the ones who would truly follow his teachings of the Spiritual Torah.

The "gates of Hades" is an expression meaning "even the grave itself." Nothing can stop an assembly constructed with such unshaken trust in God.

Here, he mentions the "keys of the kingdom" while still addressing Peter. "You" is singular in this passage. It is Peter who was given the "keys to the kingdom" and the "power of binding and loosing." Jesus' return from talking about "it" (the rock and then the assembly) to talking about Peter have added to the confusion over what the "rock" is.

The keys are to be understood in one of the traditional senses: Peter will be the one to "open the door" to Christianity after Jesus leaves. Peter did this first for the Jewish people (Acts 2) and then for the gentiles (Acts 10). He was also called in when Samaria received the message about Jesus and was instrumental in their receiving the gift of holy breath (Acts 8). When Peter's "use of the keys" is mentioned later (Acts 15), the wording makes it seem as though the envoys are looking back to this event--when Peter was given "the keys." This was not an elevation above others (for see Mt 18, 20, 23) but a distinction conveyed on Peter for being the first to unwaveringly announce Jesus identity when they were all questioned.

The "power of binding and loosing" was always intended for the Twelve as a unit, and this is explicitly said in chapter 18. We will discuss this when we reach ch. 18.

At this point, Jesus told his students explicitly to tell no one that he was the Anointed One. It was not yet time for him to make such a bold public statement. Everyone should know who he is anyway.

## **The End is Near**

*21 From then, Jesus began to show his students that it was necessary for him to go away into Jerusalem, and to suffer many things by the older people and high priests and scribes, and to be killed, and to be raised up on the third day. And Peter, receiving him, began to censure him, saying, "Let this be far from you, Lord! By no means will this be to you!" But he turned and said to Peter, "Go behind me, enemy. You are a stumbling block to me, because you are not minding God's things, but the things of human beings."*

*Then Jesus said to his students, "If someone wants to come after me, he should deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever should lose his life on my account will find it. For what does a person profit if he should gain the whole universe but forfeit his life? Or what will a person give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man is about to come in his Father's glory with his messengers, and then "he will give out to each one according to his practice." Indeed I am telling you that there some of those who are standing here who will by no means taste death until they should notice the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

After Peter's statement of trust in God, Matthaiah points out that Jesus referred to his impending death. This indicates two important things. First, and more importantly, Peter had showed that his students genuinely knew who he was. Now at last he could prepare for his death. Although

the death was always on the horizon, now it would gradually move to being something seen as more and more imminent.

Secondly, Jesus' prediction of his death is that he would rise from the dead *during* the third day after his death. All of the statements predicting his death except for the citation about Yonah use this wording. The Yonah citation says "three days and three nights." The expression "three days and three nights," then, is to be taken to mean "a short time" of about three days. All of the other references to his death show that he understood that he was going to be raised "during the third day." Here, Jesus was actually predicting the timing of his resurrection, whereas (we have seen) in chapter twelve he was not.

But Peter, having just made such a strong profession of trust, now said, *"By no means will this be for you!"* Jesus immediately censured him. The phrase "go behind me" had a connotation apparently similar to our "get out of my way." But Jesus is not calling Peter "Satan," as in many translations. Rather, Peter has set himself up as an enemy because of his refusal to allow Jesus to accomplish his mission.

Therefore, Jesus made it clear that anyone who will follow Jesus must be willing to forfeit his own life. Jesus was about to be taken up to be with God and his messengers. Soon would follow the judgment on Israel, during which each will be judged *"according to his practice."* How soon would this come? *"...there are some of those who are standing here who will by no means taste death until they should notice the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

This concluding statement reflects upon the imminence of the entire series of events: the trip; the death; the resurrection; and the judgment on Israel. The "second coming" or "coming in judgment," would follow Jesus' death relatively soon -- before people of that day and age died. And so, Jesus was forecasting the remainder of the Messianic mission, spelling it out for his students.

## **The Transformation**

*17:1 And after six days, Jesus took aside Peter, and Jacob, and his brother Johannes, and he carried them up into a high mountain by themselves. And he was transformed in their presence, and his face shone like the sun, but his garments became white like light. And look, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him. Now Peter answered, saying to Jesus, "Lord, it is a nice thing for use to be here. If you want, I will make three tents here: one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*

*While he was still speaking, look, a cloud of light overshadowed them. And look, a sound from the heavens, saying, , "This is my son, the beloved one, in whom I delight. Hear him." And when the students heard, they fell on their faces and were extremely afraid. And Jesus came to them, and touched them, and, said, "Get up, and don't be afraid." Now when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus alone.*

According to Lukas it was late at night. Jesus took with him his so-called "inner circle": Peter, and Jacob, and Johannes. As night marched on, he was transformed. His face shone like the sun,

which was similar to what had happened to Moses when in the presence of God. Not only was God present, but figures identified as Moses and Elijah were seen with Jesus.

Peter indicated that he still didn't quite "get it," wishing to set up tents for the three of them. Moses represents the Torah, and Elijah is certainly representative of all the prophets. At any rate, Jesus is their successor -- the promised Anointed One. And so, God said, *"This is my son, the beloved one, in whom I delight."* God himself identified Jesus as the Messiah. Here then is God's own testimony, coupled with the testimony of the great ones in Jewish history. Seen only by Jesus' inner circle, we have God's instruction that Jesus is the Anointed One. He has God's blessing and teaching.

To the students, this was already known. As early as Jesus' baptism (ch. 3), God had been testifying to Jesus' identity. But *"the testimony of three witnesses is true,"* and what witnesses! Lukas records that both Moses and Elijah were speaking with Jesus about his death (Lk 9:31), and so this event can also be seen as both a strengthening and a preparation of Jesus before the time of his departure from this world.

Then the two visions disappeared.

## **John was Elijah**

*9 And as they were descending the mountain Jesus gave them a precept, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is raised from among the dead." And the students asked him, saying, "Then why do the scribes say that "It is necessary for Elijah to come first?"'" But he answered, saying, "Indeed "Elijah is coming, and he will restore" all things. But I am telling you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him. But they did as much as they wanted to him. So also, the Son of Man is about to suffer by them." Then the students understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptizer.*

One of them may have been thinking of Elijah on account of what had happened, which may explain why a question arose concerning Elijah. At any rate, they now knew for sure that Jesus was the Messiah, but wasn't Elijah supposed to come before the Anointed One?

Jesus explained that indeed that was true, and that Elijah had already come, but *"they did not recognize him.* At this point, they understood that John the Baptizer was the antitype of Elijah. Some will look back on chapter 11, noting that Jesus has already said that John was Elijah. But there he was alone censuring the crowds, and particularly the Leadership. Here, he was talking to his students, who had been absent earlier.

Jesus has added this time that they destroyed John, and so also they (the Leadership) were about to kill him. Rather than say "will suffer," however, Jesus said, *"is about to suffer."* This expression normally indicates a closeness in time. Jesus' death would come soon, and if they understood *"take up your cross"* (16:21ff.), they might have realized how he was going to die.

## **Distrusting Generation!**

14 And after coming to the crowd, a person came to him, falling to his knees and saying, "Sir, have mercy on my son, because he has been affected by the moon and is suffering badly. For he falls into the fire often and into the water often. And I led him to your students, and they were unable to cure him."

Now Jesus answered, saying, "Oh distrustful and misdirected generation! Until when will I be with you? Until when will I put up with you? Carry him here to me." And Jesus censured it, and the spirit being came out from him, and the boy was cured from that hour.

Then the students came to Jesus by themselves and said, "Why were we unable to cast it out?" Now Jesus said to them, "On account of your scarce trust. For indeed I am telling you, if you should have trust like a grain of mustard, you would say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would be moved. And nothing would be impossible for you."

Just after descending from the mountain, Jesus approached a crowd of people. One person went up to him, dropped to his knees, and asked for assistance for his son. This alone would not have prompted a strong response from Jesus, but the person added that Jesus' students had been unable to help. Since even his own students did not trust God enough to cure the boy, Jesus replied by saying,

"Oh distrustful and misdirected generation! Until when will I be with you? Until when will I put up with you?" Here, it is as though Jesus wished to hasten his death, so as to escape the distrust of his own generation. Then he healed the boy.

The boy had a spirit being which caused him epileptic seizures. Those who experienced seizures were said to be "affected by the moon." Since Jesus' students had been unable to cast it out, they asked about this, and Jesus told them it was "on account of your scarce trust."

Jesus had sent his envoys out with such wondrous powers available to them. They could cure the sick and even raise the dead--if only they would trust God. Eventually, as the book of Actions of the Envoys reports, they would do those sorts of things in Jesus' name, trusting fully in God. At this point, their trust was still weak.

## **The Temple Tax**

22 Now while they were traveling together in Galilaiah, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into sinners' hands, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were exceedingly sorrowful.

Now when they came into Kafar-Nahum, those who take the didrachmas came to Peter and said, "Doesn't your teacher pay the didrachmas?" He said, "Yes." And when they had come into the household, Jesus anticipated him and said, "What do you think, Simon? The kings of the earth, from whom do they take tax or census money? From their sons, or from others?" Now when Peter said, "From the others," Jesus said to him, "Then indeed the sons are free. But so that they would not be caused to stumble, go into the sea, cast a hook, and take up the first fish that comes up, and open its mouth. You will find a stater. Take that and give it for you and me."

Preceding the account of the Temple tax is a brief interlude. Jesus simply predicted again that he would be killed and would rise from the dead "during the third day." This upset the Twelve, and quite naturally so. They were about to lose their mentor and friend.

Here, Jesus was again focused on his impending death, but this time, he said it would be at "sinners' hands." Many interpret this to be referring to the Romans, but in the gospels, the expression "sinners" normally refers to Jews who have left the Torah. Therefore, he probably means the High Priest and his retinue. Not that the Romans weren't sinners; they certainly were.

When Jesus and the students reached Kafar-Nahum, he was questioned about the Temple Tax. To help pay for the rebuilding of the Temple, which had been so long in coming, the Leaders initiated a tax of one half Shekel (or Stater), equal to two drachmas (or two denarii, or a "didrachma"). This tax was collected of all Jewish males. The precedent for this tax was the "census tax" taken in Ex 30:13; 38:26, where the tax was required of all men numbered in the census.

But Jesus was questioned as to whether he and his students would pay the 2 drachma tax. "Yes," was his reply. But then Jesus asked Peter what he thought. This was a peculiar question, and Peter gave the logical answer: *"From the others."* So Jesus said, *"Then indeed the sons are free."*

Many commentators overlook the fact that Jesus seems to be ignoring a precept of the Torah. However, the tax collected then was for a specific work (the tabernacle), the completion of which was authorized by God through Moses. The temple was a different matter entirely. God himself called the construction of the temple to question (See Acts 7:48-50 or Isa 66:1-2). Furthermore, it was through Nehemiah's OWN initiative, not God's, that the temple was rebuilt the first time. Again without God's blessing, the temple was rededicated after being desecrated by Antiochus IV (1 Macc 4:36ff.). And neither was the final reconstruction authorized. Therefore, Jesus likens the current tax for building construction to the actions of the gentile kings. (What does this say about today's sanctuaries?)

But, so that the tax collectors would not be caused to stumble, Jesus had Peter retrieve money from God (through a fish) to pay the tax.

## **Equality Among Believers (1)**

18:1 *During that hour, the students came to Jesus, saying, "Then who is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens?" And he called a school child to him and stood it in their midst, and he said, "Indeed I am telling you, unless you turn and become like the children, you will by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Therefore, whoever may humble himself like this child, this one is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens. And whoever may receive one such child in my name, he is receiving me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who trust in me to stumble, it would make sense for him that an upper millstone be hung around his neck and for him to be plunged down in the deep waters of the sea."*

Jesus' students were more interested in quarreling about one particular thing. Now beginning to believe that Jesus would be leaving them soon, and that the judgment would soon follow, they wondered, *"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens?"*

Jesus retrieved a child and said, if you keep that attitude--that one can be greater than another--you WON'T EVEN GET IN!

Instead, you have to have the child's attitude. Jesus says what that is. Jesus taught that the small child was humble, realizing that it needed others, depending on others. It had no desire to claim rank or position. Be like them, and don't even cause them to stumble, or man, are you in trouble!

This is the first of Jesus' talks about equality.

## **Don't Stumble or Make Others Stumble**

7 *"Woe to creation, due to the stumbling blocks! For it is a necessity for the stumbling blocks to come; however, woe to the person through whom the stumbling block comes!"*

*"Now if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and cast it from you. It is a nicer thing for you to enter into life maimed or lame than for you to be cast into the eternal fire having two hands or two feet. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is nicer for you to enter into life one-eyed than for you to be cast into the fire of Gehenna having two eyes."*

*"See that you not have a bad attitude about one of these little ones. For I am telling you that through all things their messengers in the heavens see the face of my Father who is in the heavens."*

Jesus blasted those who cause others to stumble. This was followed by a reiteration that if something causes you to stumble (spiritually), for your own soul's sake, GET RID OF IT.

Don't cause others to stumble, and be careful not to stumble. As for the small children, what a compliment he paid them! This is a statement about closeness to God. Their spirits (alternatively, "guardian angels") see God's face! Now THAT'S close to God! Many people who dispute the need for infant salvation quote this passage and its praise for the innocence of small children.

## **Leaving the Ninety-Nine**

12 *"What do you think? If a certain person should happen to own one hundred sheep, and if one should go astray from among them, won't he leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go seek the one who went astray? In the same way, it is not what is wanted in the presence of your Father in the heavens that one of these little ones be lost. Now if your brother should sin [against you], go up and reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained back your brother. But if he doesn't hear, take him aside with you and one or two others besides, so that "at the mouth of two or three witnesses every declaration would stand." But if he should*

*disregard them, tell the assembly. But if he should disregard the assembly also, he will be to you just like the gentile and the tribute taker.*

After mentioning that his students should not have bad attitudes towards small children, he then extended this to all of his people, citing the analogy of the sheep.

If someone owned 100 sheep, and if one wandered off, he would leave the 99 in search of the lost one. God's children are important to him, so Jesus added and extended his remarks:

*"If your brother should sin [against you]...."*

Notice that Jesus put forth the situation as though the OTHER person were at fault. It's too easy to say, "It's his problem, not mine. I'll talk when he apologizes." But Jesus said that if it is the other person's fault, you need to talk to that person. [Of course, if it's YOUR fault, you need to repent.] So either way, whatever the problem is, there needs to be communication.

*"...reprove him between you and him alone."*

This so-called first step is to gently mention to the person what (s)he has done wrong. Talk to him. Offer to help him. The purpose for this is to reinstate the relationship. Now, both sides will continue together, loving one another.

*"But if he doesn't hear, take him aside with you and one or two others besides..."*

If the person knowingly continues to do what even he recognizes is wrong, what can you do? Jesus said take witnesses. These are not meddlers but witnesses. Their purpose is to listen to the exchange and verify that the other person is in the wrong. Ideally, impartial witnesses would also be able to tell YOU where you might stand improvement on the issue.

*"But if he should disregard them, tell the assembly."*

If the person continues to knowingly do wrong, even though others have advised him that they all recognize the conflict as ungodly, tell ALL the Christians. This doesn't mean "tell specific Christians"; tell the whole group. If his relationship with these people is strong, perhaps they will be able to turn him away from the path of error that he has chosen.

*"...he will be to you just like the gentile and the tribute taker."*

If every godly person he knows has tried to convince him to give up his life of sin, but if he embraces the sin, treat him like a gentile--an outsider--and like a tribute taker--someone to be avoided.

Jesus was not talking about someone weak, nor was he talking about honest disagreements. He was talking about situations in which all parties involved recognize that "you" are being wronged. Maybe he's ripping you off. Maybe he's seducing your spouse. At any rate, the situation becomes heinous. If the person decides he doesn't CARE--he's gonna do what he wants,

no matter what God says, even if he hurts you, and he'll disregard the whole assembly, then your relationship has soured to the point where you have no basis for communication, because your common foundation of God has been lost. But these are drastic steps, not to be taken lightly.

The words were spoken only to the Twelve, but the principle of conflict resolution certainly appears to be universal.

## **Binding and Loosing**

18 *"Indeed I am telling you, as many things as you should bind on the earth will be bound things in heaven, and as many things as you should let go on the earth will be loosed things in heaven.*

*"Again indeed, I am telling you that if two from among you should agree together on the earth, about any matter they should ask about, it will be done for them by my Father who is in the heavens. For when there are two or three who are gathered for my name, I am there in their midst."*

The envoys had and would continue to have God's divine guidance. They would know right and wrong in unambiguous, absolute, ways. Therefore, whatever person's sins they consider unrepented, they should be assured that God too considers them unrepented. If they (with their guidance) consider that the person has repented (i.e., their sins should be let go), then they are to be assured that God has indeed forgiven that person. They can make judgments confidently, knowing that they have the spirit of God. This saying was first said to Peter (ch. 16) and then extended to all the Twelve.

Jesus also provided an added assurance of guidance from God: that if they agree together in asking something from God, God will do it, just as if Jesus had been there asking along with them! Great is the guidance of prophets.

## **490 Sins, and the Evil Slave**

21 *Then Peter came to him, saying to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I will forgive him? Until seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I am not telling you, 'until seven times;' on the contrary, until the seventy times seven. On account of this the kingdom of the heavens is like a person, a king, who wanted to settle an account with his slaves. Now when he began to settle, they brought him one person who owed ten thousand talents. But since he did not have the ability to repay, the lord gave word for him to be sold, with his wife and children and all things, as much as he had, and for payment to be made. Therefore, the slave fell down and bowed to him, saying, 'Be longsuffering toward me, and I will repay you.'*

*"Now the slave's lord was compassionate and freed him, and forgave the debt. But when that slave exited, he found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii. And he took hold of him and choked him, saying, 'Repay whatever you owe!' Therefore, his fellow slave fell down and called him aside, saying, 'Be longsuffering toward me, and I will repay you.'*

*"But he did not want to do so. On the contrary, after going away, he threw him in jail, until he repaid what he was owing. Therefore, when his fellow slaves noticed what had happened, they were exceedingly sorrowful, and they went and fully explained to their lord all that had happened.*

*"Then their lord called him and said to him, 'You evil slave! I forgave you all of that debt since you called me aside. Wasn't it necessary for you also to have mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And his lord was angered, and he had him delivered over to the torturers, until he repaid all that he owed. In the same way also, my heavenly Father will do to you, unless each one of you forgives his brother, from your hearts."*

Peter then asked how longsuffering he needed to be. What if someone keeps wronging me? Should I forgive him "seven times"? Jesus said, *"On the contrary, until seventy times seven."* Jesus' enumeration of 490 times was not a numerical stopping point. On the contrary, the use of "70" was an indicator among Jews of something complete. Jesus' answer meant, "However many times he wrongs you." Peter was obviously thinking about the things Jesus had just said (vv.15-17) and was wondering whether such a process would ever end. But the Jesus who said, "Turn the other cheek" and "Love your enemies" had only forgiveness in mind, and it is probable that Peter knew the answer before he asked.

Still, Jesus adds an analogy. A slave owes **10,000 talents** (about 15 years wages) to a king. This is a debt no one could ever pay. If justice prevailed, the slave would be imprisoned for life! But he begs for mercy and obtains it, because the lord was so compassionate. But then the lord learns that the same slave is exacting vengeance against someone who owes him 100 denarii (four months wages)--a relatively small and payable amount. So the lord had the evil slave imprisoned and tortured until he repaid his full debt.

And the moral? God is so willing to forgive us, but it is necessary for us to forgive our fellow Christians. This may be a higher standard to which the inspired prophet-envoys were held, but either way, it's scary. This is the natural consequence of *"Forgive us as we forgive our debtors."* Do we really want God to be as merciful toward us as we are toward others? Only if we ourselves are merciful! And the mercy must come "from your hearts." Saying "I forgive" is not forgiveness. You must mentally let something go in order to forgive.

## **Tough Teachings About Commitment**

*19:1 And when Jesus completed these saying, it happened that he departed from Galilaiah and went within the borders of Judea, beyond the Jordan. And many crowds followed him, and he cured them there.*

*And Perushim came to him to test him, and they said, "Is it legal for a person to let his wife go according to every reason?" But he answered, saying, "Haven't you read that the Creator from the beginning 'made them male and female'? And he said, 'On account of this a man will abandon his father and mother and will unite with his wife, and the two will be one in flesh.'" And so, they are not still two; on the contrary, they are one flesh. Therefore, what God joined together, no human being may separate."*

*They said to him, "Therefore, why did Moses give a precept to give a scroll of separation, and to let her go away?" He said to them, "For your hard-heartedness, Moses allowed you to let your wives go away. But from the beginning it did not happen this way. Now I am telling you that whoever should let his wife go away [except for sexual sin] and should marry another is committing adultery."*

*His students said to him, "If the case of a person with his wife is this way, it does not make sense to marry!" But he said to them, "Not all people may contain this saying, but the ones to whom it is given. For there are some who were born eunuchs this way from the mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs who were made eunuchs by people; and there are some eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs on account of the kingdom of the heavens. The one who is able to contain this, let him contain it."*

Jesus headed into Judea. As he arrived, Perushim came *"to test him."* Their question was based on a topic of debate between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. The Hillelites took the view that a man could divorce his wife if ANYTHING about her displeased him. The school of Shammai, however, believed the teachings on divorce to be limited to situations of marital unfaithfulness.

These were both interpretations of Dt 24:1-4, where Moses authorizes divorce/separation.

*"When a man takes a wife and becomes her lord, if she loses favor in his eyes because he has found something indecent in her, and if he writes her a certificate of separation and puts it in her hand...." [then if she becomes another man's wife, then the former may not take her back, if she separates from him or he dies.] He "may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before Yahweh."* (Once she has had sex with another man, the first husband cannot take her back.)

The matter of what constituted "something indecent" caused Rabbi Akiba to write that it was enough if the husband found another woman more attractive (Gittin 9:10, according to Einspruch). Therefore, the Perushim were questioning Jesus about his opinions on the divorce issue. Jesus replied by citing the Genesis accounts of creation (1:27; 2:24). When a man and woman unite, they become one. Paul takes this view as well, citing it in Eph. 5 and in 1 Cor 6.

Jesus appears to take a still stronger view--that once a couple has had sexual intercourse, they are together for life. If we understand Dt 24:1-4 to be referring to an indecency discovered after the couple have made commitments to one another but before they have had sex (a period which may have been as long as a year), then once the second man has slept with her, the first cannot take her back. Jesus says this is not only because she was considered "indecent" by the first man but also because she and the second man are one and cannot be separated. Of course, this applies within the context of God's covenanted people. Paul refers to a different sort of situation (1 Cor 6-7) if one of the partners is an unbeliever.

The Perushim asked Jesus why there is a separation statute. Jesus replied by saying that this was not God's will. His use of "Moses allowed you" seems to underscore this. The wording is almost as though divorce (rather than death by stoning) was Moses' idea. But the issue that Jesus is

addressing now is that of "remarriage," and not divorce. The underlying issue was that of men sending their wives away because they wanted someone else. Jesus says, "No way." Moses allowed them to send their wives away (rather than killing them), but their modern practice is not what Moses envisioned at all. Moses laid down an act of mercy, for if the husband brought up charges against the woman publically (Dt 22:13-21), he could have her publically stoned. The people were taking it as a blanket excuse to dump their wives for other women.

The phrase "except for sexual sin" does not appear in all manuscripts. The parallel in Markus' account reads, *"Whoever should let his wife go away and should marry another is committing adultery upon her. And if she should let her husband go away and should marry another, she is committing adultery."* (Mk 10:1-12)

In essence then, when a fiancé(e) has been sexually active, it is permissible to dismiss her (but not to take her back). But to violate the commitment by sleeping with another person -- or desiring it (Mt 6) is still adultery.

The divorce and remarriage issue is a sticky one among Protestant denominations because it appears to take so many twists and turns. Friends have told me that they were questioned as to their opinions on this issue before they would be accepted as "members" in one city.

It was a hot, divisive, issue even then. Jesus' students proclaimed, *"If the case of a person with his wife is this way, it does not make sense to marry!"* If you have to keep your commitment to a fellow-Jew (Christian) no matter what, why get married? In some sense, Jesus agreed that to remain single is the better way, for he said:

There's one really good reason for remaining single, and that is *"on account of the kingdom."* Other reasons are more or less incidental. If you can be celibate for God, then do it. But the flip side is that not everyone is capable of doing it.

In other words, both ways are difficult. If you remain celibate, do it for God's sake, but this is a tough path. If you marry, work through your marital problems (apparently even unfaithfulness) rather than being quick to separate from one another, and be content to remain with one person for the rest of your life!

## **Children and Jesus**

*13 Then they brought school children to him, so that he might place his hands on them and pray, but the students censured them. But Jesus said, "Allow the school children to come to me, and don't hinder them, for the kingdom of the heavens belongs to such people." And after placing his hands on them, he went from there.*

In this interlude, Jesus' students tried to prevent some school children from having Jesus lay hands on them and pray. This may be a reminder of 18:1f. The attitudes of children make Jesus accessible to every one of them.

## **A Rich Young Man**

16 And look, one person came to him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do, so that I would have eternal life?" Now he said to him, "Why are you asking me about the good thing? One person is good. But if you want to enter into the life, keep the precepts."

He said to him, "Which ones?" Now Jesus said, ""You will not kill. You will not commit adultery. You will not steal. You will not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother." And "You will love your neighbor as yourself.""

The young man said to him, "I have guarded all of these things. What do I still lack?" Jesus told him, "If you want to be complete, go up and sell your goods, and give to the poor, and you will have a treasure in the heavens. Also, come follow me." But when he heard the saying, the young man went away sorrowful, for he was someone who had many possessions.

Now Jesus said to his students, "Indeed I am telling you that it is with difficulty that a wealthy person will enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Again I am telling you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a wealthy person to enter into God's kingdom."

Now when his students heard, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, "After this, who is able to be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "For people, this is impossible, but for God all things are possible." Then Peter answered, saying to him, "Look, we left all things and followed you. So what will there be for us?" But Jesus said, "Indeed I assure you that during the regeneration when the Son of Man sits on his throne of glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And each one who has left households, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or fields on account of my name will obtain a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Someone approached Jesus, asking a deep question. His focus was still on the externals, but Jesus was about to make it 100% personal: "Keep the precepts."  
"Which ones?"

Jesus cited various references from the Torah, and the man replied that he had done those things. Hmm.... One of the precepts that Jesus had NOT quoted was, "You will not have any other gods besides me." And so, Jesus told him to give away that which he valued the most.

The account does not tell us what happened to the young man afterward, but Jesus' statements had created a conflict of priorities in the man, because he valued his possessions. This provides a specific application of Jesus' earlier teachings about priorities (chapter 6). Jesus already had told his throng of followers that since "you cannot serve God and Mammon," it is best to serve God and to let him worry about your needs. Jesus added to this by pointing out what a stumbling block possessions can be.

Whether certain small city entrances were called "needles' eyes," or whether Jesus meant a literal needle is irrelevant. He was illustrating the virtual impossibility of wealthy people making God their top priority. They have been so accustomed to depending upon what they possess or can buy! Depending on God, then, is more difficult for them.

His students began to wonder who could be saved, if it was indeed that hard. He reassured the Twelve, and anyone else who was planning to give up everything else to put God first.

*"But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."*

The wealthy may discover themselves "poor" in the afterlife, but the ones who are poor (see the beatitudes) will become wealthy (spiritually) in the afterlife.

## **The Last Become First -- Illustration Analogy of the Vineyard**

20:1 "For the kingdom of the heavens is like a person, a householder, who went out to hire workers for his vineyard. Now after agreeing with the workers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into the vineyard.

"And he went out at about the third hour and noticed others standing in the marketplace, idle. And he said to those people, 'You too, go up into the vineyard, and I will give you whatever should be just.' Now they went away.

"Now again he went out at around the sixth, and at the ninth hour, doing similarly. But when he went out at about the eleventh hour, he found others standing, and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle for the whole day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You too, go up into the vineyard.'

"Now when evening happened, the lord of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the workers and give out to them the wage, beginning from the last ones to the first ones.' And the ones who were hired at about the eleventh hour came, and each one received a denarius. And when the first ones came, they thought that they should obtain more, and each one of them too received a denarius. But after they received it, they grumbled against the ruler of the house, saying, 'These last ones did work for one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden all day, and the scorching heat.'

"But he answered one of them, saying, 'Comrade, I am not doing you injustice. Didn't you agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours, and go on. But I want to give to this last one as I also gave to you. Or isn't it legal for me to do what I want with my things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' In the same way, the last ones will be first, and the first will be last."

There is a lot in this set of encounters concerning people who have status, wealth, or position. In this analogy, God is the householder who operates the vineyard. The people who are called at various times have agreed to a certain fair wage -- i.e., those who come to know God are given eternal life. Some complain because the ones who "just converted" receive an equal eternal life; they believe they've earned more. But God says it's up to him to do as he wants, and he wants to be just as generous to those who just convert. Some people, though, believe (for one reason or another, perhaps on account of their wealth in this life) that they deserve a better station in the afterlife. "The first will be last" again -- these people will be disappointed. It is not useful to seek status or positions in this life.

## Another Prediction of Death

*17 And when Jesus was going up into Jerusalem, he took aside the Twelve with himself and said to them on the road, "Look, we are ascending into Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the high priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and they will deliver him over to the gentiles for mocking and whipping and crucifixion, and he will rise on the third day."*

Here, Jesus added one thing: that his impending death would take place during the trip to Jerusalem. Like many Jews, Jesus and his students were going to the area for the feasts. A later account (c.65 CE) estimates that over 1,000,000 people were gathered in Jerusalem during that time of year. But Jesus told his students that this trip would be his last.

This time, too, the details of the final day are sketched out more clearly. The Jewish leaders would become ultimately responsible, including even some of the high priests. The Romans, too, were going to play a role, mocking and beating and crucifying Jesus. But once again, the prediction ended with a prophecy about the resurrection "during the third day."

## Equality (2)

*20 Then the mother of Zebediah's sons came to him with her sons, bowing down to him and asking something from him. Now he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say it, so that these, my two sons, might sit (one at your right and one at your left) in your kingdom." But Jesus answered, saying, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right and at my left, this is not mine to give, but to the ones for whom it has been prepared by my Father."*

*And when the Ten heard, they were indignant about the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the nations are lords over them, and the great exercise authority over them. It will not be this way among you. On the contrary, whoever among you wants to become great, he will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you, he will be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many people."*

The earlier teachings about status, rank, position, and authority in this life play out here in detail. The mother of both Jacob and Johannes approached Jesus, perhaps on their behalf, asking that her sons be given special positions in the afterlife -- or in this world, if she understood "the kingdom" in earthly terms.

Jesus asked them, "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" Markus' account adds, "...or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am being baptized? (10:38)" Both of these analogies mean the same thing: suffering. Great suffering. "Are you prepared to suffer also?" They agreed that they could do it, and indeed they probably could.

By this time, they were probably making that statement confidently. They were aware that there would be suffering attached to being close to Jesus, and they claimed that they were able to handle it. So Jesus said that they would suffer, alright, but Jesus could not grant them positions.

The others became enraged. Given Jesus' reply, their anger probably arose over the two going behind their back to make a secret deal with Jesus for positions. Perhaps some of them wished they had thought of it first! Even up to the last day (see Lk 22), the Twelve were still considering holding positions over one another.

Jesus' reply directly related to their current attitude of being 'greater' or 'of higher rank.' Let's examine his teaching in detail.

*"You know that the rulers of the nations are lords over them, and the great exercise authority over them."*

This reference is to "gentile" authority. Later (ch. 23), a parallel reference would be made to the positions held by Jews. Jesus attributes two sorts of functions to these gentile leaders.

The former of these is that they "are lords". All it means to "be lord" is to "occupy a superior position." Anyone who was viewed as holding a superior position of any kind was lord of his station, even if all that meant was being a shopkeeper or husband, in their society. This should not be misconstrued to imply that it is acceptable to occupy a superior position, so long as one's authority is not "abused." It is the holding of such a position that Jesus attacked.

The latter attribute is that of "exercising authority." The verb here has to do with decision-making. To exercise authority over another person is to make decisions for that person. If someone makes decisions for you (such as who may speak, who may teach, who may pray, when we will meet, how much money you should donate to the corporation, etc.), then they have authority over you in the sense that Jesus was addressing here.

*"It will not be this way among you."*

That simple statement says it all, and Jesus needed no further clarification, although he gave it. Gentile leaders occupy superior positions and make decisions for others; my people will not do this. End of discussion...for now. The reason has already been given in ch. 18 and will be alluded to some here. But Jesus will later spell out in detail the nature of the equality that is to exist among Christians.

*"On the contrary, whoever among you wants to become great, he will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you, he will be your slave--"*

This does NOT say, "If you want a position, you have to serve."

This **does** say, "Instead of seeking a position, you need to seek servitude." Whoever tries to hold a position will be humbled. This is the same as "the first shall be last."

*"--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many people."*

Jesus pointed to his own example. "I didn't assume a position. I came to serve." That's it. He doesn't claim anything for himself other than the role of the "suffering servant" of Isaiah 52-53. That's his role; that's the role of anyone who truly follows him: serving others until you die.

## **Two Blind People Healed**

*29 And as they went out from Jericho a great crowd followed him. And look, two blind people were sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was going by. They called out, saying, "Have mercy on us, sir, son of David!" But the crowd censured them, so that they would be silent. But they called out louder, saying, "Have mercy on us, sir, son of David!" And Jesus stopped and sounded to them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" They said to him, "Sir, we want that our eyes be opened." Now Jesus had compassion, and he touched their eyelids, and immediately they could see again, and they followed him.*

The crowds here played the role that Jesus' students played earlier -- they wanted to get rid of those guys who were screaming. According to Lukas' account, they were beggars. By this time, Jesus' students did not call for the blind men to be sent away (ch. 15); at this point, we suppose that they have learned more completely about Jesus.

Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do," and they said they wanted to see. With compassion, he healed them, "and they followed him." So simply, they realized that God had sent Jesus.

## **The Triumphant Entry**

*21:1 And when they neared Jerusalem and had come into Bethfagge at the Mountain of the Olive Trees, then Jesus sent away two students, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey that has been bound, and a foal with her. Untie them and lead them to me. And if someone should say anything to you, say that the Lord has need of them. Now he will sent them out immediately."*

*Now this happened so that what was declared through the prophet would be fulfilled, saying, "Say to Zion's daughter, 'Look, your king is coming to you, meek, and riding on a donkey, even on the foal, a son of a beast of burden.'"*

*Now the students went and did just as Jesus had arranged for them. They led the donkey and the foal, and they put their cloaks on them, and they had him sit on them. Now the majority of the crowd spread out their cloaks in the road, but others cut branches from the trees and spread them out in the road. Now those crowds that went ahead of him and those who were following him called out, saying, "Hosanna to the son of David! "Praised is the one who comes in Yahweh's name! Hosanna in the highest places!""*

*And as he entered into Jerusalem, all the city was shaken, saying, "Who is this?" But the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth of Galilaiah."*

Before entering Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of his students into town and bring Jesus' steed to him: a donkey. From the wording, this had been arranged by Jesus via messenger some time earlier.

The author points out that Jesus' riding on a donkey fulfilled a saying from Zech 9:9, which continues:

*"I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow will be cut off, and he will command peace to the nations; his dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the land."*

Israel's enemies have been eliminated, and now the Messianic king rides in, declaring peace. He is both triumphant and humble. Peace with the nations will come (Acts 10) under Jesus.

As Jesus entered the city, people spread out branches in front of his steed, as they would do for a king, and they shouted praises. The crowds were fully acknowledging that he was the Anointed One. "Hosanna" was originally a call for God to save. It became a cry of extreme joy. Jesus was the promised descendant of David; he had come to his people in God's name.

When they reached the city, everyone was abuzz, asking who this person might be. The crowds proclaimed him a prophet. Johannes reports that most of the crowd was so enthusiastic because they had recently witnessed the raising of Lazarus (Jn 12:18).

21:12-13

## **Jesus Cleanses the Temple**

*12 And Jesus entered into the temple courts and cast out all those who were selling and buying in the temple court, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling the doves. And he said to them, "It was written, "My house will be called a house of prayer," but you are making it a "den of robbers.""*

This is actually the SECOND temple cleansing, for Johannes reports that he did so the first time near the beginning of his work. Both times, the details were similar:

Jesus noticed that people had booths set up in the temple courts. It had become the custom for people to place themselves at the temple, selling things that might be useful during various temple ceremonies (such as animals for sacrifice). This was naturally a manner of convenience. If someone had been traveling, who was not carrying any animals with him, he might purchase one in the temple courts. In the event that he was not carrying local currency, money changers were also present. The common purpose of all of these people was not to provide some sort of service but to make money.

Jesus overturned their tables and prevented them from buying and selling. He was much nicer in this cleansing than in his earlier one, when Johannes reports that he made a whip and drove them out! Here, the second time, he merely created a scene. This scene not only stopped the people from making money; it also attracted attention, so that Jesus could teach.

First, he quoted Isa 56:7, saying that the purpose of the place was prayer. Then he cited an expression from Jer 7:11 -- the place was now a "*den of robbers*" because of the people trafficking merchandise. His attitude may have soured in three years, for Jesus' original complaint (Jn 2) was that they'd made it a supermarket. Now he said it was filled with thieves!

## **The Commotion**

*14 And blind and lame people came to him in the temple court, and he cured them. But when the high priests and the scribes noticed the curings that he was doing and the school children that were crying out in the temple court and saying, "Hosanna to the son of David," they were indignant. And they said to him, "Do you hear what these people are saying?" But Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read that, "from the mouths of babies and nursing children you have instated praise?"*"

Some people approached Jesus to be healed, and he obliged. The leaders, though, were upset with the crowds, and they questioned Jesus about the crowds' praise. As a slap in the face to them, Jesus cited Psa 8:2 -- "*from the mouths of babes and nursing children you have instated praise.*" This was a contrast to the leadership who, though supposedly more knowledgeable than the masses, refused to praise God for sending Jesus. Lukas reports that Jesus continued to teach in the temple courts that week. The crowds were continuing to openly proclaim Jesus as the Anointed One.

## **The Fig Tree**

*17 And after leaving them behind, he went outside of the city into Bethany, and he spent the night there. Now in the morning he was going back up into the city, and he was hungry. And when he noticed one fig tree at the roadside, he went up to it, and he found nothing on it except leaves alone. And he said to it, "May fruit occur from you no longer, for the age." And instantly, the fig tree withered.*

*And when the students noticed, they wondered, saying, "How instantly the fig tree was withered!" Jesus answered, saying to them, "Indeed I am telling you, if you have trust and do not doubt, not only will you do this thing of the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and cast into the sea,' it will be done. And all things, as much as you should ask in prayer trusting, you will obtain."*

Jesus was hungry. He spotted a barren fig tree and used it as an example to his students -- an example which he did not explain. Markus adds his report that it was not the season for figs, so it was unlikely he would have found fruit, but the analogy goes roughly this way:

The people are hungry for food from God, but the religion of Israel has been judged to be fruitless. Therefore, God will cause their system to wither, just as Jesus withered the tree. Jesus' students were expected to understand its meaning -- that the people involved in their religion did not trust in God.

They had been focused on the power that Jesus displayed from God, rather than on what it meant. His reply is an explanation, though not a transparent one. The Twelve would not be "withered" if they trusted in God. In fact, they would be able to work wonders like Jesus was working, and greater ones than this one, if only they trust in God. The message of the fig tree, then, was one of trust. Trust vs. religion.

## Jesus Explains Everything (21:23-25:46 )

During his time teaching and speaking in the temple courts, for the short period preceding the first day of Unleavened Bread, Jesus was questioned by the various schools of thought about a number of issues. He used their questioning as an occasion to sum up his teachings. Therefore, the structure of Matthaiah's version has an introductory explanation earlier in the work (Mt 5-7) and a summary near the end (Mt 21-25). He will again establish his identity and his relationship to God. He will sum up and internalize the Torah, and he will explain once more how things will be among his students (compared to how they are among Jews of his day). Finally, he will give his most lengthy prediction of the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans.

### Jesus' Authority

*23 And after he came into the temple court, teaching, the high priests and the older ones of the people came to him, saying, "By what authority are you doing these things? And who give you this authority?" Now Jesus answered, saying to them, "And I will ask you one statement, which, if you tell me, then I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism, where was it from? From heaven or from people?"*

*Now they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we should say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Therefore, why didn't you trust him?' But if we should say, 'From people,' we are afraid of the crowd, for all hold John as a prophet." And they answered Jesus, saying, "We don't know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."*

Since Jesus was both healing and teaching in the temple courts, some members of the priestly class questioned him. After all, they believed themselves to have the only authority in the temple. Did the High Priest give Jesus the authority to do what he was doing? No, and they knew it. So they asked about his authority. Which rabbinical school was he following? Or what priestly school? They all disagreed with him on major issues, so presumably, they believed he would claim that he was acting on his own. Instead, he turned their question back on them, asking about John the Baptizer.

Had they realized that John's ministry was from God, they should also recognize the Anointed One, and they would listen to both John and Jesus. Then they would know where his authority came from for sure. But how could the leaders acknowledge this? Jesus would have asked, "Why didn't you trust him?"

On the other hand, if they denied that God had sent John, they feared that the crowd would rise up against them, for the crowd (the "babes" of earlier in the chapter) knew that he had been a prophet.

So they replied, *"We don't know,"* an answer that made them appear stupid, but at least Jesus couldn't trap them ... the way they had TRIED to trap him. So Jesus said, *"Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."* His refusal to answer showed the crowds that if the religious leaders could not understand John's authority, they would not understand his authority either. His explanation of himself continues:

### **Priests Analogy 1: The Two Children**

28 *"But what do you think of this? A person had two children. And he came to the first one, saying, 'Child, go up today and work in the vineyard.' But he answered, saying, 'I don't want to,' but afterward he regretted this and went out.*

*"Now he went to the other one and said the same thing. Now he answered saying, 'I will, sir,' and he did not go out. Which of the two did what the father wanted?" They said, "The first one." Jesus said to them, "Indeed I am telling you that the tribute takers and the prostitutes are going ahead of you into God's kingdom. For John came to you in the way of right, and you didn't trust him. But the tribute takers and prostitutes trusted him. But when you noticed, neither did you regret it afterwards and trust him.*

Who is it that is doing what God wants? The people who perform the various rituals -- like the priests to whom Jesus was speaking? Or the ordinary laity who simply turn themselves over to God?

Jesus had just been questioned about authority, and in a backhanded way, he answered the question. When asked about his authority, in effect he replied, "God says you're not doing what he wants you to do," claiming authority from God without actually saying it. His first analogy about how God feels about a father. Which child was more concerned about what his father wanted?

"The first one," they replied correctly. In the story, the first child represents the "sinners," the Jews who had fallen away but who were now accepting their Messiah. The second child represents the Jewish leadership, who claimed righteousness but who were too busy practising their religion to worship God.

Jesus censured them strongly for their reply. Why? Jesus' implication is that their answer to his earlier question was a lie: they knew John was a prophet but wouldn't acknowledge him. So, they knowingly were not following God.

### **Priests Analogy 2: Kill the Messengers**

33 *"Hear another analogy: There was a person, a ruler of a house, who planted a vineyard, and placed a hedge around it, and carved out a wine press in it, and he constructed a tower, and he gave it out to gardeners and traveled abroad. Now when the fruit season neared, he sent his slaves to the gardeners to take his fruits. And the gardeners took his slaves, indeed they whipped one, but one they killed, and one they stoned.*

*"Again he sent out other slaves, greater than the first ones, and they did the same things to them. But afterwards he sent out his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the gardeners noticed the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and grab his inheritance.' And they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and they killed him.*

*"Therefore, when the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those gardeners?" They said to him, "He will destroy those bad people in a bad way, and he will give out the vineyard to other gardeners, who will return the fruits to him in their seasons."*

The ruler is God; the vineyard is Israel. The class of leaders, and in particular the priestly class, are the gardeners. God sent various prophets, and the leaders did not listen, murdering the prophets. God sent Jesus, and they were about to kill him too, thinking that this would somehow save Israel. (In fact, Johannes reports it this way.)

What will God do? He will destroy the entire system! The new spiritual Israel will be under the care of "other gardeners"-- what we call Christians -- those who are following God from the heart.

## **The Rejected Stone**

*42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the writings: 'a stone that was rejected by the builders, this one has become the cornerstone. This has been done by Yahweh, and it is a wonderment in our eyes'? On account of this I am telling you that God's kingdom will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will make its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be bruised, but the one on whom it may fall, it will pulverize him."*

*And when the high priests and the Perushim heard his analogies, they knew that he was talking about them. And though seeking to take hold of him, they were afraid of the crowds, since they held him to be a prophet.*

Psalm 118:22-23 was regarded by many as being a sign of the coming of the "suffering servant," whom Christians take to be the Anointed One. Jesus cited that passage in reference to himself, adding a conclusion about the end of both the political state of Israel and the destruction of priestly "authority."

The author continues by saying that the high priests and Perushim *"knew that he was talking about them."* Well, he was being quite transparent at this point, wasn't he?

The builders, the leadership, have rejected Jesus, a foundation stone, but that stone has become the cornerstone--the stone around which the entire structure (the new covenant) will be built. Therefore, those who rejected him will lose their place. Spiritual Israel will be given to others, who will produce the "fruits of the kingdom." These are the same fruits as the "fruit worthy of mental change" that both John and Jesus were talking about. Stumbling over Jesus' teachings is likened to a bruise, but rejecting his teachings (the stone falling on them) will cause the Jewish leadership to be pulverized -- reduced to powder.

Yes, and by this time, they were actively plotting to kill him.

## **Who Belongs in the Kingdom: the Marriage Feast**

*22:1 And Jesus answered, talking again to them with analogies, saying, "The kingdom of the heavens is like a person, a king, who made a marriage feast for his son. And he sent out his slaves to call into the marriage festivities those who had been invited, and they did not want to come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been called, "Look, I have prepared my meal, my bulls and fattened animals have been slaughtered, and all things are ready. Come into the wedding festivities.'"*

*"But they went away, neglecting the call, one indeed to his own field, but one to his merchandise. But the remaining ones took hold of his slaves, and reproached and killed them. Now the king was angered, and he sent his soldiers, and he destroyed those murderers and burned their city.*

*"Then he said to his slaves, 'Indeed, the wedding feast is ready, but the ones who were invited were unworthy. Therefore, go to the thruways of the roads and call into the festivities whomever you find.' And those slaves went out into the roads and gathered all that they found, evil people and good people, and the marriage feast was filled with people reclining.*

*"Now when the king entered to observe those who were reclining, he noticed a person there who was not wearing wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Comrade, how did you enter here without having wedding clothes?' But he muzzled himself. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind his feet and hands and throw him out into the outer darkness!' There, there will be crying and grinding of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen."*

The analogy of the marriage feast is surprisingly transparent. At this time in his life, Jesus was concealing very little. The transparent nature of his sayings angered the leadership more and more.

In this analogy, God has been sending prophets to Israel, inviting them to be part of the new covenant. Some of these prophets were merely rejected by the leaders and their closed-minded system; others were literally murdered.

What was going to happen? God was about to destroy the system and have the Romans sack Jerusalem!

God has also turned to the common people, even to those who were rejecting points of the Torah -- not living upright lives. He offers them all the splendor of the new covenant if they will turn to him.

But no one can enter of their own accord (by their merit or deeds). If anyone tries to do so, he will be rejected. *"For many are called, but few are chosen,"* and the entrance is by God's generosity -- not from deeds.

## **Tribute to Caesar**

*15 Then when the Perushim had gone, they took counsel, so that they might trap him in speech. And they sent out their students, with the Herodians, to him, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true, and that you are teaching God's way in truth, and that there is no concern to you regarding anyone, for you are not looking at human faces. Therefore, tell us what you think: Is it legal to give tribute to Caesar or not?"*

*But Jesus knew their evil, and he said, "Why are you testing me, hypocrites?! Show me the tribute coin." Now they brought him a denarius, and he said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." Then he told them, "Therefore, give back Caesar's things to Caesar, and give back God's things to God." And when they heard, they wondered, and they left him and went away.*

The Perushim took off and met together, deciding to send their students and the Herodians to question Jesus -- trying to trap him, of course. The question was deliberately divisive. If he came out in support of paying tribute to Caesar, the Perushim would have been pleased, because they saw no problem living under Roman rule, as long as they had some autonomy. The Zadokites and especially the Zealots, however, would have loathed him. The Zealots in particular appear to have regarded the tribute collection as a demeaning act. They were Jews and should be subject to no one but God. On the other hand, if Jesus rejected the tribute collection, the Perushim could get him into hot water with the Roman government, saying he was a rabble rouser.

The question about legality concerned whether it was acceptable under the Torah or not. Jesus asked to see a denarius, the basic silver monetary unit, emblazoned with the image of Tiberius Caesar. Matthaiah's account says that they "showed" him a denarius, probably to indicate that he did not actually touch the coin. This would make the Zealots happy. They were in favor of their own coinage and did not care for the use of Roman currency with so-called god-emperors on it, and deities on the reverse. Jesus asked:

*"Whose image and inscription is this?"*

*"Caesar's." Naturally, it was Tiberius Caesar whose portrait appeared on the current denarius. His answer pleased both factions. In saying that it belonged to Caesar -- so let him keep it, he could be viewed as supporting the Zealots and their rejection of Roman rule. But he DID say to give the money to Caesar, which supported the idea of paying tribute to him.*

Jesus added the final statement, to focus things back on God. Sure, give Caesar his property, but pay God his due!

### **Another Divisive Question: The Afterlife**

*23 On that day, Zadokites came to him, saying that there is no resurrection, and they asked him, saying, "Teacher, Moses said, "If someone should die without having children, his brother will add his wife in marriage and raise up seed for his brother."*

*"Now there were seven brothers with us. And after the first one married, he was completed. And since he had had no seed, he left his wife to his brother. It was also likewise for the second, and*

*the third, up to the seventh. Now last of all, the woman died. Therefore, during the resurrection, whose wife, of the seven, will she be? For they all had her."*

*But Jesus answered, saying to them, "You are going astray. You neither know the writings nor God's power. For during the resurrection they neither marry nor are they given in marriage. On the contrary, they are as messengers in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead, haven't you read what was declared to you by God, saying, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" He is not a god of dead people, but of living." And when the crowds heard, they were amazed at his instruction.*

After he passed a test from one set of opponents, the Zadokites approached him. They adhered more strongly to the teachings of the Torah. No afterlife is explicitly mentioned there, although it is alluded to in a few places. The Zadokites believed that "life after death" was symbolic of one's memory living on through one's descendants. They did not believe in any afterlife or "resurrection of the dead" as the Perushim believed.

They provided Jesus with a reminder of a precept from the Hebrew Bible: *"If someone should die without having children, his brother will add his wife in marriage and raise up seed for his brother."*

Then they gave him a situation to unravel. What if this happened seven times? Whose wife would the woman be in the so-called afterlife? The Zadokites' reasoning was that this passage showed that the notion of an afterlife was ridiculous.

The purpose of the precept, though, was not to grant one man his brother's wife. The purpose was to ensure that the man's lineage continued after his untimely death. The man's brother would "raise up seed for his brother," so that his lineage would not end. Therefore Jesus insulted the Zadokites: *"You neither know the writings nor God's power."*

His solution to the problem was that people *"neither marry nor are they given in marriage"* in the afterlife. Instead, *"they are as messengers."*

On this issue, unlike many others, Jesus took a direct stand, clearly in support of an afterlife. He added a famous citation from Ex 3:6 -- *"the god of Abraham...of Isaac...of Jacob."* If he is still Abraham's god when speaking to Moses, then Abraham must still be alive (in the afterlife). The people understood his logic and were amazed.

## **Summing Up the Torah: The Whole Duty of Humanity**

*34 Now when the Perushim heard that he had muzzled the Zadokites, they gathered at the same place. And one of them, a lawyer, asked, testing him, "Teacher, what precept in the Torah is greatest?" Now he said to them, "'You will love Yahweh your God with the whole of your heart, and with the whole of your soul, and with the whole of your mind.' This is the greatest and foremost precept. Now the second is similar: 'You will love your neighbor as yourself.' The whole Torah and the Prophets are hung by these two precepts."*

In chapters 5-7, Jesus attempted to explain by using detailed examples that the Torah was not meant to be taken as a series of regulations but as descriptives of various internal principles. In this "summary" portion, the author presents us Jesus' own summation of the entire Torah: all of the precepts, which many modern Jews believe number six hundred thirteen.

When the Perushim heard that the Zadokites had been "muzzled," they gathered with Jesus and a lawyer asked a trick question. It was a trick in that nearly anything he answered would cause debate. They could use such a question to see what teachings Jesus might be emphasizing to the exclusion of others.

Jesus answered directly, citing two sections of the Torah. The first citation is from Dt 6:5 (the passage which begins, "*Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God. Yahweh is one.*") This section is known simply as the "Shema Yisrael" (hear, O Israel), and holds a major place of importance among the rabbis and historically. The second quote comes from Lv 19:18, which deliberately prevents people from taking a self-centered mindset.

So much can be said here, because Jesus has replaced the regulatory view of the Torah with one internal principle: love. This "love" is commitment-based. It is not an emotion, as we understand emotions. One may love someone in this sense, and often feel things that "feel nothing like love." This "love" is a commitment to the other person's well-being, a desire to make that person's needs a priority--even a higher priority than one's own!

If you love God, you will revere him; you will not profane him. If you love your neighbor, you won't steal from him, kill him, or sleep with his spouse. Thus, the whole Torah flows from love.

The parallels indicate that Jesus was asked "*Who is my neighbor?*" and responded with what we call the analogy of the "good Samaritan." He was also commended for having answered the question infallibly. "*Very well, teacher.*" (Mk 12:32)

## **The Anointed One Identified -- Again**

*41 Now while the Perushim were gathered, Jesus asked them, saying, "What do you think about the Anointed One? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "David's." He said to them, "Then how does David, with the breath, call him Lord? He says, "Yahweh said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right side until I place your enemies as a footstool for your feet.'" Therefore, if David calls him Lord, how is he his descendent?" And no one was able to answer him with a statement, nor did anyone dare to ask him anything from that day forward.*

After going through an inquisition, Jesus turned a question around to the Perushim, asking them "whose descendant is the Anointed One?" Here, Jesus was secretly about to point out to them that not only was he the Anointed One, but also, God had given the Anointed One a greater authority than even David had. In Matthaiah's account, this completes a set of important sayings, which started when Jesus' authority was questioned. Having established his own authority as the Anointed, Jesus would then talk about human authority (23:1-12).

Of course, the Perushim had an answer to Jesus' question: "*David's.*" Jesus replied by asking that if he is David's descendant, why does David call him "lord" (Psa 110:1 -- "Yahweh said to my Lord....")? The ancestor was revered over his descendants, and in particular, David was such a great figure in Jewish history. Without being able to acknowledge that the Anointed One had greater authority (from God), the leaders were unable to answer Jesus' question, and the account says that this was the last time they tried to match wits with him. Instead, they would begin making specific plans to have him murdered.

### **Equality (3) -- Summation**

*23:1 Then Jesus called the crowds and his students, saying, "The scribes and the Perushim sit at Moses' seat. Therefore, do and keep all things, as many as they should tell you. But do not do according to their deeds. For they say, and they don't do. Now they bind heavy and oppressive burdens and place them on people's shoulders. But they don't want to move them with their finger. But they do all their deeds to be observed by people. For they widen their phylacteries and enlarge the tufts.*

After having dealt with his opposition, Jesus continued to summarize the things that he had been teaching, providing more detail than previously. His statement about the Perushim almost appears on the surface as one of support.

The Shem-Tob Hebrew text of Matthaiah conveys the meaning at least, for it reads, "do and keep all things that he [Moses] should tell you." This is the significance here as well. When the leadership is reading the words of Moses from the Torah, the Torah (central to God's teaching) is to be followed, no matter who's reading from it. Don't ignore them just because of who they are.

But the example set by the so-called "leaders" is atrocious! Don't follow their example of reading the Torah and ignoring what it says.

"They bind heavy and oppressive burdens..." refers to the enjoinder of human precepts along with the Torah. Being held to the Torah as "law" is a burden enough, but the leaders hold the people to their interpretations of it, including all the oral and written tradition of the rabbis. They had added a religion to God's principles for life. Ignore the religion.

The latter statement is an implication that the rabbis themselves found legalistic ways around the precepts that they taught and also an implication that they wouldn't help another person.

They like the positions they hold, which put them in the public eye. Jesus doesn't pull any punches here. He simply says that their religion serves for their own aggrandizement.

*"Now they are affectionate of the foremost couch at the feasts, and the foremost seats in the gatherings, and the greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by people 'Rabbi.'"*

Jesus focused the attention on how much they coveted their positions of leadership, and all of the trappings that went along with those positions. They even liked the respect and admiration given a Rabbi. What causes this problem? How can we deal with it? He is about to tell us.

In his explanation, Jesus made three statements. Most important to understanding his statements are the **reasons** he gives for those declarations.

*"But you will not be called Rabbi. For one person is your teacher, but all of you are brothers."*

Jesus' followers are not to assume titles for themselves. Why not? What's the problem with that? The problem is that we're all of EQUAL "rank". Our only teacher (Rabbi) is Jesus -- he's the only one who holds a position. What about us? "All of you are brothers" -- we're equals.

*"And you will not call anyone on earth your father. For one is your Father, the heavenly one."*

"Father" was not a title like "Rabbi," but it was a term of respect, often conveyed on those who were older and regarded as wise. Again, it is not the term itself that upsets Jesus, but the fact that (rather than simply respecting the knowledge itself) people are tempted to put other people over them (i.e., spiritually).

The wording here is REVERSED. He's already said that it's bad to assume any sort of position. Here, it's just as bad to give anyone ELSE a position. Why? Because God is our superior; we are equals.

*"Nor will you be called leaders, because one person is your leader, the Anointed One."*

The term "leader" is used here positionally, although it does not have to have that connotation. But "leader" (or "guide") was not an actual position among Jews. The three terms -- Rabbi, father, leader-- begin with an actual position and move gradually to a term that merely implies the CONCEPT of position. You will assume no positions or ranks whatsoever? Why not? Because we only have one human leader: the Anointed One. We're equals.

Positional leadership under any name is wrong among God's people. Whether you call that person "Rabbi" or "Elder" or "Pastor" or "Minister" is irrelevant. Such positions should not exist among Jews/Christians. We have already seen what this entails. Chiefly, (ch. 20) Jesus was talking about the decision making process, but he's also talking about the mindset of being "in charge." God is in charge, and he placed Jesus as our ONLY leader.

*"But whoever elevates himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be elevated."*

This is a more precise version of "the last will be first." Anyone who tries to take a position of leadership in this life will be regarded as low in the afterlife. Anyone who lowers himself in this life will be regarded as great in the kingdom of the heavens. This does not mean they'd hold positions in the kingdom, but that their attitude is looked upon favorably by God (see the beatitudes, ch. 5).

In a summary of his teachings about his assembly, Jesus has said that we're all of equal rank, having no authority whatsoever, except over ourselves. We are not to make decisions for others (ch. 20), we are not to occupy positions of leadership (ch. 20, here), and the very idea that we might possibly hold a position of leadership endangers the Christian's walk with God (ch. 18).

## **Woes upon the Leaders**

13 *"But woe to you, scribes and Perushim! Hypocrites! Because you shut up the kingdom of the heavens in the presence of people. For neither will you enter, nor will you allow those who ARE entering to enter.*

*"Woe to you, scribes and Perushim! Hypocrites! Because you go around the sea and dry land to make one convert. And when he becomes one, you make him twice the sons of Gehenna as yourselves.*

*"Woe to you, you blind guides who say, 'Whoever should swear by the temple, it is nothing. But whoever should swear by the temple's gold, he is bound.' Fools and blind people! For which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold holy?*

*"And 'Whoever should swear by the altar, it is nothing. But whoever should swear by the gift that is up there, he is bound.' Blind people! For which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift holy?*

*"Therefore, the one who swears by the altar is swearing by it and by all the things that are on top of it. And the one who swears by the temple is swearing by it and by the one who dwelt in it. And the one who swears by heaven is swearing by God's throne and by the one who sits on top of it.*

*"Woe to you, scribes and Perushim! Hypocrites! Because you give a tenth from the mint, and the dill, and the cumin, but you let go the Torah's heavier things: judgment, and mercy, and trust. But it is necessary to do these things without letting the former things go. You are blind guides who filter out a gnat but swallow a camel!*

*"Woe to you, scribes and Perushim! Hypocrites! Because you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and lack of control. Blind Perush: first cleanse the inside of the cup, so that its outside might also become clean.*

*"Woe to you, scribes and Perushim! Hypocrites! Because you are analogous to whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful from outside, but inside they are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. In the same way also, you indeed appear as just to people from outside, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

*"Woe to you, scribes and Perushim! Hypocrites! Because you construct the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the just people, and you say, 'If we had been in the days in our ancestors, we would not have been their partners in the blood of the prophets.' And you fill the measure of your ancestors. Serpents! Broods of vipers! How will you flee from the judgment of Gehenna?!*

In concluding, and preparing also to forecast the details of Jerusalem's coming siege by the Romans, Jesus provides direct evidence that condemns the very concept of ritual religion. The woes fall upon the adherents of religion, especially those (the leaders) who devoted more of their lives to it. Specifically,

1. Their hypocrisy causes others to reject God.
2. They love converting people, but what they convert them to is progressively worse. *"You make him twice the sons of Gehenna as yourselves."* This says a lot about the evangelistic mindset within religious systems.
3. Their practice of taking oaths (mentioned earlier in the Sermon on the Mount) was blind hypocrisy.
4. Their hypocrisy had them "majoring in the minors" -- nit picking about legalistic details (tithes) while overlooking what's important (judgment, mercy, trust). They needed to emphasize what's important, foremost. Their practice was likened to eating a meal and, *"filtering out a gnat but swallowing a camel!"*
5. They made themselves LOOK spiritual to others, but they needed to deal with the inside rather than the outside. [See ch. 7 further.]
6. The previous fault is so extreme that he accuses their religion of making them appear pious while indeed they were lawless -- they had rejected the Torah.
7. They made the pretense of following in the footsteps of the prophets, but they would have done just as their ancestors did when they murdered the prophets. Their religion closed them off to the truth.

## **Mourning for the People**

*"Look! On account of this I am sending prophets and wise people and scribes to you. You will kill and crucify some of them, and you will whip some of them in your gatherings and persecute them from city to city, so that all just blood that has been shed on the land may come upon you, from the blood of Abel the just to the blood of Zachariah, son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Indeed I am telling you, all these things will come upon this generation."*

*"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who were sent to you! How much I have wanted to gather your children, in the way in which a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you did not want it. Look, your house is left to you deserted. For I am telling you, by no means will you see me from this moment until you should say, 'Praised is the one who comes in Yahweh's name.'"*

This portion is a bridge between the summary of Jesus' teachings and his forecasting of the sacking of Jerusalem.

The "...prophets and wise people and scribes..." are the first century Christian prophets, notably the envoys, and especially the Twelve.

The way that the Jewish leaders persecuted Christians between the time of Jesus' death (c.30 CE) and the First Revolt is reasonably well-documented in the Actions of the Envoys (c.63 CE) and

in some of the letters, including Hebrews. Even the extreme comment about crucifixion would come to be true; several traditions exist of crucifixion by the Romans, at the request of Jewish leaders.

But the Jews' persecution of Jesus' people would only serve to fill up God's anger. All of the innocent murder victims in the Bible will be avenged by God during the revolt, from Abel (the first listed in the Torah and Prophets -- Gen 4:8) to Zechariah the prophet (son of Berachiah), who -- according to the Targum of Yonathan (representing a Jewish tradition at least as far back as Jesus) -- was murdered as Jesus described. Zechariah was then the last murder victim listed in the Torah and Prophets.

God's wrath would be poured out soon, upon the people of that generation -- the same people Jesus has blasted several times when predicting the destruction of the temple.

The next saying, Jesus' mourning for Jerusalem, appears to be borrowed from 2 Esdras, in the Apocrypha. But the time of writing of the lament in 2 Esdras is uncertain, and most scholars believe that it was borrowed from Jesus' saying, and not the other way around. At any rate, Jesus indicated that God's favor had left Judaism: "*Your house is left to you deserted,*" for God's Anointed One would soon be leaving, and it would be necessary for the leaders to acknowledge him or not be accepted by God.

Everything in the sections on chapters 24 and 25 is taken directly from my detailed book, [\*\*It's ALL Over.\*\*](#)

Matthew 24 and 25 contain Jesus' own predictions about the "end times". These end times or "last days" are often thought to be referring to some distant future date when the earth will be destroyed. Contextually, though, the full description relates to those same events that are described in Revelation: the First Revolt of 66-73 CE. We will see this as the situation unfolds

*. 24:1 And after Jesus was exiting, when he was going away from the temple, his students came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered, saying to them, "Don't look at all these things. Indeed I am telling you, by no means will there be a stone left here on top of another stone that will not be thrown down." Now as he was sitting on the Mountain of Olive Trees, the students came to him by themselves, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of the presence and of the conclusion of the age?" And Jesus answered, saying to them, "Watch out, so that no one deceive you. For many will come with my name, saying, 'I am the Anointed One,' and they will deceive many people. But you are about to hear about wars and reports of wars. See to it that you are not alarmed, for it is necessary to happen. But the end is not yet."*

As the conversation begins, it is plain to see what is the topic of discussion. Looking at the temple, Jesus indicates its certain destruction. Jesus is then asked, "When will these things be?" That is, when will the temple be thrown down? The confusion over the meaning arises because of the second question: "And what will be the sign of the presence and of the conclusion of the age?" The "presence" or parousia, usually translated "coming," is the so-called second coming. And on account of this, many people identify the conclusion of the age with the end of the world.

However, this is not what they are asking about.

Let's look to Markus's and Lukas's parallels for help. Markus has: *"Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be concluded?"* It is clear, then, from the wording in Markus that Matthew's "completion of the age" is when "all these things are about to be concluded." Furthermore, Lukas's account of the question reads: *"Teacher, how then will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to happen?"* The end of the world is not the subject for discussion, or at least it has not been mentioned in the students' questions. The end of the pre-Messianic age was seen as coinciding with the destruction of the temple. Thus, asking about its desolation was the same as asking about the end of the pre-Messianic age.

Jesus indicated that many human beings would come along claiming to be the Anointed One. But Jesus' students knew that he was the genuine article: the son of God.

## The First Revolt

*"For nation will rise up upon nation, and kingdom upon kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes at places. But all these things are the beginning of painful things.*

*"Then they will deliver you over for affliction, and they will kill you, and you will be hated by all the nations on account of my name. And then many will stumble, and will deliver one another over, and will hate one another. And many false prophets will rise up, and they will deceive many people. And on account of the fullness of lawlessness, the love of the majority will be cooled, but the one who endures to the end, this one will be saved. And this good message of the kingdom will be heralded in the whole empire, for a witness to all the nations. And then the end will come."*

This is Jesus' explanation as to what has to happen before the temple will be destroyed--before the conclusion of the age. The famines and earthquakes are the same kind of apocalyptic talk as found in Revelation. The image of the war, however, is vivid. "They" will hand Jesus students over to be persecuted. They, who? So far, Jesus has not said, but in the context of Jesus' work on earth, he means the Jewish leaders. In all of this horrid war, "the one who endures to the end...will be saved." This is essentially the same message of endurance as found in Revelation. Jesus ends his description on a positive note: *"This good message of the kingdom will be heralded in the whole Empire, for a witness to all the nations. And then the end will come."* By the time of Paulus' letter to the Colossaeans, he was already capable of saying that the good message had been proclaimed to every creature under heaven (1:23); the message was everywhere. What Jesus had in mind would start in Acts 2, when Peter announced the message to Jews from *"every nation under heaven"* (Ac 2:5) and would continue throughout the years between his resurrection and the fall of the temple.

Markus's account adds the description: *"They will deliver you over to councils and to gatherings. You will be beaten, and you will stand before governors and kings on my account for a testimony to them."* The words used here, councils and gatherings, indicate that until the time of the war, the Jewish leaders would form the largest resistance to the Christian message. "Councils" indicates the Sanhedrin, and "gatherings" is the English translation of the word usually transliterated as "synagogues." Because of these people, the students would "stand before governors and kings," merely because they were testifying about Jesus. In the case of Peter and Paulus, this was definitely the case. Tradition holds, too, that almost every one of the ones who

heard Jesus say this wound up being martyred--killed for Jesus' sake. Markus's account also mentions the betrayal as being "brother against brother," an indication that few would stand up for the envoys during the affliction. All of this proved to be true.

## **Destruction of the Temple: Fall of Israel**

*"Therefore, when you see 'the desolating detestable thing,' that was declared through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place--the one who reads, let him think--then those who are in Judea should flee to the mountains, the one on the roof should not descend to take the things from his house, and the one who is in the field should not turn back to take his cloak. Woe to the ones who have babies in their bellies and those who are nursing in those days!*

*"But pray, so that your flight would not happen in winter or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great affliction, the likes of which has not happened from the beginning of creation until the present, neither should it by any means happen. And if those days were not cut short, no flesh would be saved. But on account of the chosen ones, those days will be cut short."*

The original "desolating detestable thing" is found in Daniel 11:31 and in the following chapter. There, the expression indicates the presence of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the temple, where he sacrificed swine -- thus profaning the temple. Here, the expression indicates the presence of the Romans in the temple, led by Titus (son of Emperor Vespasian, who would later become Emperor himself). Suetonius' ancient account may allude to the possibility that Titus died regretting having invaded the temple.

Basically, then, Jesus told his students that when the Romans entered the temple, the desolation of the city was coming soon. Therefore, Jesus' followers should "flee to the mountains."

Fortunately, the siege of the city would be relatively short. In total, the attack on Jerusalem lasted from April of 70 CE until September -- only five months. By late Spring of 73, the fortress at Masada had been taken and the war was over.

Lukas has Jesus wording it as follows:

*"Now when you notice Jerusalem surrounded by encampments, then you should know that its desolation has come near. Then those who are in Judea should flee...."* There, Jesus urges his followers not to go back into Jerusalem. And so, it is clear that he is still talking about the destruction of the temple and desolation of Jerusalem.

## **False Prophets**

*"Then if someone says to you, 'Look, here is the Anointed One,' or, 'He is here,' do not believe. For false Anointed Ones and false prophets will rise up, and they will give great signs and wonders, and so they will deceive, if possible, even the chosen ones. Look, I have told you in advance. Therefore, if they should say to you, 'Look, he is in the desert,' don't go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the private places,' do not believe. For just as the lightning comes out from the east and is apparent as far as the west, the presence of the Son of Man will be this way. Wherever a corpse may be, the vultures will be gathered there. "*

Jesus again indicated that people would show up on the scene before and during the war claiming to be prophets and the Anointed One. Indeed, the coming of the false prophets began immediately after Jesus died. Some are recorded in the New Testament. Some of the Jewish

Christians began claiming that Jesus was not really the Anointed One; these are the one whom Johannes calls "the ones who oppose the Anointed One," throughout his first letter. Because of the transliteration "antichristos," many people believe that this is referring to a person to be called the Antichrist. Although Revelation never uses the term, people identify that figure with the wild animal (Beast) of Revelation. While Nero (the wild animal) was certainly opposed to God's people, Johannes makes clear the identity of the "antichrists":

*Beloved, do not trust every breathing, but examine the breathings to see if they are from God. Because many false prophets have gone out into creation. In this way we know God's breath: every breathing that acknowledges Anointed Jesus to have come in the flesh is from God, and no breathing that does not acknowledge Jesus is from God. And this is the one who opposes the Anointed One whom you have heard is coming. And now he is already in creation. (1J 4:1ff.)*

There, Johannes urges his readers not to believe people who claimed to be prophets. One way to tell is simple: if someone claims that Jesus was not the Anointed One, he is a false prophet. "And this is the one who opposes the Anointed One (antichrist) whom you have heard is coming." Johannes is referring back to the sayings of Jesus (such as here in Mt 24) that predicted the coming of false prophets and false Messiahs. Who is the so-called antichrist? Anyone who claims that Jesus is not the Anointed One. Want to see it again?

*Young children, it is the last hour. And just as you heard that one who opposes the Anointed One is coming, even now many who oppose the Anointed One have arisen. By this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from among us, but they did not belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But they left so that it would become apparent that not all of them belong to us. (1J 2:18ff.)*

Johannes says that MANY who oppose the Anointed One were already there! MANY "antichrists." He then goes on to remind the readers that they have an "anointing" (deliberate play on words) that tells them the truth about such things. Then he adds, "Who is the liar, if not the one who denies, 'The Anointed One is not Jesus?' This person is the one who opposes the Anointed One, the one who denies the Father and the son. No one who denies the son has the Father either; the one who acknowledges the son has the Father also." Anyone who denies that Jesus was the Messiah is an "antichrist." So when Jesus predicted that such persons would come, many such people did come--before the fall of the temple.

Returning to Matthaiah's account, Jesus adds to his mention of false prophets that the true presence (or second coming) would be obvious. Hmm.... Let's keep reading.

## **The Coming in Judgment (1)**

*"Now immediately after the affliction of those days, 'The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens' will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will be in the sky, and then all the tribes of the land will lament, and they will see 'the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky' with power and much glory. And he will send his messengers with great trumpets, and they will gather his chosen ones from the four winds--from the extreme points of the heavens to their other extremes."*

This is a description of the Second Coming. The second coming is the coming in judgment, already mentioned in our discussion of Rev 19-20. The description of the heavenly portents, taken from Isaiah 13 (or Ezekiel 32, Amos 8), is the usual indication that God is coming in judgment. Then "all the tribes of the land will lament"--over the judgment. The people will see "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky"--borrowed from Daniel, the 'coming on the clouds' also indicates judgment. The "gathering of the chosen ones" is what Johannes terms the "first resurrection" in Revelation. This statement of Jesus' is directed at the faithful, and so it focuses on the outcome of the war for those who remain loyal to God and Jesus.

Lukas's account words it this way:

*"And there will be signs with sun and moon and stars, and on the land anguish of nations in confusion; of the sea, a roar and tossing. There will be a fainting away of people from fear and an expectation of the things that are coming to the Empire. For 'the powers of the heavens' will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and much brilliance. But when these things are beginning to happen, straighten yourselves up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is nearing!" (Lk 21:25-8)*

Once again, Jesus is staying within the context of the First Revolt (66-73 CE). These things are coming to "the Empire." When Jesus comes, the redemption of the faithful is nearing. This redemption will become the state of affairs during the Messianic Age--the age that begins as the war ends in 73 CE.

## **Analogy of the Fig Tree**

32 *"Now learn from the analogy of the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and it puts out its leaves, you know that the summer is near. In the same way also, when you notice all these things, know that he is near, at the doors. Indeed I am telling you that by no means will this generation pass away until all these things happen. The sky and the land will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away."*

Jesus gives an analogy (or parable) to indicate that his listeners should watch carefully for these things. What things? The advent of false prophets. The surrounding of Jerusalem by Roman armies. So, "when you notice all these things, know that he (Jesus) is near, at the doors." In case there is doubt as to how soon the temple would be destroyed and the age would end, he adds, "by no means will this generation pass away until all these things happen."

Markus's account has essentially the same thing, and Lukas's has: *"In the same way also, when you notice these things happening, know that God's kingdom is near. Indeed I am telling you that this generation will by no means pass away until even all things have happened."* This occurrence is also called the coming of God's kingdom.

Markus's record has already foretold this: *"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my sayings among this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy messengers."* And he said to them, *"Indeed I am telling you that there are some of those who are standing here who will by no means taste death until they see God's kingdom when it has come with power."* (Mk 8:38-9:1)

Matthaiah's account often speaks of "this generation":  
(11:16) "Now to what will I liken this generation?"

(12:41) "Ninevite men will stand up during the judgment with this generation, and they will condemn it." There, Jesus also indicates that the Southern Queen would condemn them.

(23:36) "Indeed I am telling you, all these things will come upon this generation."

In every case, Jesus is talking about the people who were alive in his day.

Jesus' final phrase, "my words will by no means pass away," is talking about his prophetic statements about the destruction of Jerusalem. They should not be extended further than that.

## **Analogy of the Days of Noah**

*36 "But about that day and hour no one knows: neither the messengers of the heavens nor the son, no one except the Father alone. For just as in the days of Noah, the presence of the Son of Man will be that way. For as in those days before the flood, they were dining and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark--and they did not know it until the flood came and took everything away--the presence of the Son of Man will also be this way. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken along, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding in the mill; one will be taken along, and one will be left."*

Jesus will not fix a date for them. His students would have to be watchful and look for the signs that he has mentioned. Only God knew the exact timing anyway! In saying this, Jesus prepares to give several analogies.

Just before the flood, there were many people, he says, who weren't watching for a flood. They didn't know the flood was coming and were slain. That's how it would be when the war and the end of the age came.

The parallel (male/female) analogies about "one being taken" and "one being left" are only meant to indicate the seeming suddenness of the events as they unfold. It'll be like you were walking along with your friend, and all of a sudden he disappeared!

Lukas's account adds this advice to the faithful:

*"But pay attention to yourselves, lest your hearts be burdened with gluttony, and drunkenness, and life's anxieties, and that day should come upon you suddenly. For it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the land like a snare. But keep watch in every season, begging so that you might prevail to flee out of these things that are about to happen and to stand in the presence of the Son of Man."*

Notice that Jesus did not say that the faithful would be caught unawares. He has only said, thusfar, that those who are not looking for the war to happen would be blindsided when it came. When the Zealots siezed Masada and Jerusalem in 66 CE, this was not predictable except to those who followed the political situation involving the Zealot faction.

## **The Thief, and the Trustworthy Slave**

*"Therefore, watch out, because you don't know on what day your Lord is coming. But you know this: that if the ruler of the house knew on what guard the thief were coming, he would watch out and would not allow him to dig into his house. On account of this, you too should become prepared, because you don't know at what hour the Son of Man is coming."*

*"Consequently, who is the trustworthy and mindful slave, whom the lord has set over his*

*household, to give them food in season? Blessed is that slave whom his lord finds doing this when he comes. Indeed I am telling you that he will set him over all his possessions. But if that bad slave should say in his heart, 'My lord is taking his time,' and if he should begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with those who get drunk, that slave's lord will come in during a day when he is not expecting and at an hour that he doesn't know, and he will cut him in half and will place his portion with the hypocrites. There, there will be crying and grinding of teeth."*

The events could happen at any time, Jesus warns! Therefore, it will be necessary to be watchful. Another analogy--you know the "thief" is coming, but you don't know precisely when. So you must watch out, rather than being caught unprepared.

The trustworthy slave analogy shows what attitude it will be necessary to have when God brings down the judgments on Israel and Rome. Each person should be doing what God wants him to do. Otherwise, God will cut the unfaithful one in half--he will destroy him. Ouch! For the first time, Jesus mentions the fate of the ones who die unfaithfully.

### **Analogy of the Ten Virgins**

*25:1 "Then, the kingdom of the heavens will be like ten virgins, who, after taking lamps, went out to a meeting with the bridegroom. Now five of them were foolish, and five were mindful. For the foolish ones took their lamps but did not take oil with them. Now the mindful ones took oil in the vessels with their lamps.*

*"Now while the bridegroom was taking longer time, they all nodded off and fell asleep. But in the middle of the night, a cry happened: 'Look, the bridegroom! Go out to his meeting.' Then all those virgins got up and adorned their lamps. But the foolish ones said to the mindful ones, 'Give us of your oil, because our lamps are being extinguished.' But the mindful ones answered, saying, 'Lest there by no means should be enough for us and you, go to those who sell, rather, and buy from them.'*

*"Now while they were going away to buy, the bridegroom came, and the prepared ones came with him for the wedding festivities, and the door was shut. But afterward, the rest of the virgins came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open for us!' But he answered, saying, 'Indeed I am telling you, I don't know you.' Therefore, watch out, because you know neither the day nor the hour."*

This longer analogy again shows that vigilance and diligence (in doing God's will) would be rewarded. The people who continue to do God's will (from the present until the siege) will be rewarded. The people who stop doing God's will (and therefore cease to be prepared) will be turned away by God.

### **Analogy of the Talents**

*14 "For it will be just like a person traveling abroad, who called his own slaves and delivered over his possessions to them. And to one indeed he gave five talents, but to one he gave two, and to one he gave one, to each according to his own power. And he traveled abroad. The one who had received the five talents went immediately, traded with them, and gained another five.*

*Similarly, the one with the two gains another two. But the one who had received one, retired and carved out ground, and he hid his lord's silver.*

*"Now after a long time, the lord of those slaves came and settled the account with them. And the*

*one who had received five talents went to him and brought the five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you gave five talents over to me. Look, I have gained five other talents.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave. You were trustworthy with a few things; I will place you over many. Enter into your lord's joy.'*

*"Now also, the one who had the two talents went to him, saying, 'Lord, you gave two talents over to me. Look, I have gained two other talents.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave. You were trustworthy with a few things; I will place you over many. Enter into your lord's joy.'*

*"Now also, the one who had the one talent went to him, saying, 'Lord, knowing that you are a violent person, reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you did not scatter, and being afraid, I went out and hid your talent in the ground. Look, you have what is yours.' But his lord answered, saying to him, 'You evil and slow slave! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered. Therefore, it was necessary for you to cast my silver to the bankers, and when I came I would have been paid what was mine with interest. Therefore, take the talent away from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For all will be given to and will be abundant for the one who has, but for the one who does not have even what he has will be taken away from him. And cast the useless slave into the outer darkness. There, there will be crying and grinding of teeth.'"*

Many things can be said about the analogy of the talents. Simply, this analogy fleshes out the details of the earlier analogies. God does not expect everyone to do the same things or to do them in the same way. But he does want each person to work for God according to his/her abilities. The person who does nothing good with his skills, the "evil and slow slave," will have everything taken away. He will be destroyed, cast into the "outer darkness" away from God's presence! This piecemeal expansion on the fate of the wicked almost comes across as though Jesus is cautioning them gently. His assumption for the faithful is that they will remain faithful. But there is an alternative, if they cease to live for God.

## **The Sheep and the Goats**

31 *"Now when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the messengers with him, then he will sit on his throne of glory, and all the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them out from one another, just as the shepherd separates out the sheep from the goats. And he will indeed station the sheep at his right side and the goats at the left.*

*"Then the king will say to those at his right side, 'Come, you who are praised by my Father: inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the laying down of creation. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink. I was a stranger, and you gathered me in; naked, and you wrapped something around me; weak, and you visited me. I was in jail, and you came to me.'*

*"Then the just ones will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you to drink? When did we see you as a stranger and gather you in? Or naked and wrap something around you? When did we see you weak or in jail and come to you?' And the king will answer, saying to them, 'Indeed I assure you, as often as you did them for one of these of the least of my brothers, you did them for me.'*

41 *"Then also he will say to the ones at the left side, 'Cursed ones! Go from me into the eternal fire that was prepared for the accuser and his messengers. For I was hungry, and you did not give me to eat. I was thirsty, and you did not give me to drink. I was a stranger, and you did not gather me in; naked, and you did not wrap anything around me; weak and in jail, and you did not visit me.'*

*"Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or weak, or in jail, and did not serve you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Indeed I am telling you, as often as you did not do these things for one of these of the least, neither did you do them for me.' And these will be released into eternal severance, but the just ones will be released into eternal life."*

Finally, a fully detailed description of the judgment of those who die in the First Revolt--the dead in Revelation 19 and 20. Each person will be judged by his deeds. The ones who have done good things on earth will "be released into eternal life." This is God's gift (Rm 6:23), a reward for having lived for God. The ones who resisted God will be "released into eternal severance": their souls will be destroyed. The analogy is plain. He tells them that whatever they would do for him, in his presence, they should do for others as well. For it is just the same as if they were doing those things for Jesus.

As the reader should be able to discern, none of the things mentioned thusfar were forecast to take place after the First Revolt and subsequent downfall of the Caesars. This is also the case with the book of Revelation, which is also detailed in "It's ALL Over."

After entering Jerusalem, Jesus has summarized all of his teachings about the Torah, reinforced those things that are most important, detailed how he wants his students to treat one another, and has given a detailed prediction of the end of the pre-Messianic age (the First Revolt). Now it is time to focus on his coming death and resurrection, for the Feast of Unleavened Bread is near!

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## **Jesus' Death Nears**

26:1 *And when Jesus had completed all these words, it happened that he said to his students, "You know that the Passover is happening in two days, and the Son of Man is being delivered up to be crucified."*

*Then the high priests and the older ones of the people came together in the court of that high priest who is called Kaiaphas. And they conspired, so that they might grab hold of Jesus with deceit and kill him. But they said, "Not during the feast, so that no riot would happen among the people."*

Just as Jesus completed his statements predicting the end of the age (the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem), Matthaiah's account indicates that Jesus also predicted his own death once again, referring this time not only to his death but to his betrayal by one of his own students. This is followed by commentary that the religious leaders were attempting to bring about that very thing -- a conspiracy to execute Jesus.

## The Conspiracy Expands

*6 Now when Jesus happened in Bethany, in Simon the leper's house, a woman came to him who had an alabaster box of very valuable balsam, and she poured it over his head as he reclined. But when the students noticed, they were indignant, saying, "Why is there this loss? For she was able to have done great business with this and to have given to the poor." But Jesus, knowing, said to them, "Why are you bringing trouble for this woman? For she has worked a good deed for me. For you always have the poor with you, but me you do not always have. For in casting this balsam on my body, she has done it to embalm me. Indeed I am telling you, whenever this good message is heralded in the whole creation, what she did will also be spoken of for her remembrance."*

*Then one of the twelve, Judah Iscariot, went to the high priests and said, "What do you want to give me, so that I will deliver him over to you?" Now they paid him thirty silver pieces, and from then he was seeking a good season, so that he might deliver him over.*

The account of Jesus' anointing for burial at the house of Simon the Leper is important for several reasons. In Matthaiah's account, it stands in a series of events that prepare the reader for the crucifixion. Everything from here on points forward to that hour.

Although Matthaiah does not point this out, Johannes (who appears to be reporting the same event) indicates that it was Judah Iscariot who held the money for the group. This is interesting, since Matthaiah himself was accustomed to dealing with money. No reason is given for Judah's handling of the finances.

Johannes also says that it was Judah who objected to the use of the balsam (spikenard) for the anointing. The placement of the betrayal immediately afterward (and Markus says "immediately") cannot be accidental. This is a pivotal point in Judah's life.

People often ask, "Why didn't they realize it was Judah?" After all, if he'd been kind of sleazy all along, everyone should have said, "Well, if Jesus is going to be betrayed, we know who it will be!" But they didn't realize it. One possible explanation is this:

Judah may have been expecting a military Messiah. He wanted Jesus to seize control and establish an earthly kingdom. By this time, Jesus had begun to speak more frequently about his death. On this occasion, he was clearly speaking like his life was about to end. Suppose Judah decided to force Jesus' hand. If he were arrested, Jesus would have to take control of the situation, wouldn't he? Or perhaps Judah was totally frustrated about what kind of leader Jesus was turning out to be.

At any rate, he went to the high priests and asked for a token payment. They offered him 30 silver pieces -- probably worth 120 shekels (four months wages for the average worker), and he left wondering how to turn Jesus over to them.

## Preparing the Meal

*17 Now at the start of the days of Unleavened Bread, the students went to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?" Now he said, "Go up into the city to a specific person and say to him, 'The teacher says, 'My season is near. By you I will do the Passover with my students.' And the students did as Jesus had arranged with them, and they prepared the Passover.*

As the sun began to set, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was approaching. Although strictly speaking, only the second day of the seven-day feast was THE Passover, colloquially, people celebrated the feast at any time during the week. In fact, the entire week was known as the "Passover" (Lk 22:1), even though the proper name was the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

However, it was inappropriate to eat the meal until after dusk. Between evening and dusk was the time for preparation. Thus, Jesus directed his students to go and prepare the passover meal with him.

Here, it is plain that Jesus had made some pre-arrangements, for Jesus informs his students to find a specific person and tell him who they were. Lukas' account says that the signal for finding this person was that he'd be carrying a pitcher of water. This would have been normal only for women and servants. Consequently, if he were male and not a servant, he would have been easy enough to locate--unless 1000 other feastgoers were using the same signal!

## **The Passover Seder**

*20 Now when evening happened, he reclined with the Twelve, and as they were dining, he said, "Indeed I am telling you that one from among you will deliver me over." And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each one began to say to him, "Is it I, Lord?" But he answered, saying, "The one who dips his hand with me in the bowl, this one will deliver me over. Indeed, the Son of Man is going up, just as it was written about him. But woe to that person through whom the Son of Man is delivered up. It would be nice for him if that person had not been born!" Now Judah, the one who delivered him up, answered, saying, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said it."*

*Now as they were dining, Jesus took bread, and he blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the students, saying, "This is my body." And taking the cup and giving thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "All of you drink from it. For this is my blood of the covenant, which is being poured out concerning many people for the forgiveness of sins. Now I am telling you, from now on I will by no means drink from this product of the vine until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." And after singing the hymn, they went out to the Mountain of Olive Trees.*

The traditional Passover Seder (meal) involves more ritual today than it did in the time of Jesus. Still, by the time of this particular meal, we observe several elements:

- the *matzoh*, or unleavened bread. This represents the haste with which the Israelites had to leave the desert. They couldn't even wait for bread to rise! In modern days, there is a

search for yeast which is part of the preparation of the meal. No yeast may be found in the house, or the meal is not 'kosher for Passover.'

- the wine. Four cups of wine were normally drunk with the meal, with the rabbi or family father leading the four 'toasts.' At first, the wine was full strength, but the Rabbis report that people were getting drunk at the feast, and so the wine was reduced to quarter-strength.
- the roasted lamb. This element is conspicuously absent from the accounts of the meal that Jesus and his students ate. The lamb (in Ex 12) was the sign to the destroying messenger to spare the household of the people who had spread the lamb's blood on the door frame. The lamb was the symbol of freedom from God's anger. The lamb is not mentioned in the meal because Jesus represents the true Passover lamb.
- singing. The Hallel comprises Psalms 113-118. This was normally sung in two portions during the Passover meal, although people were known to sing only part of the Hallel.

Not mentioned in the accounts of Jesus' life is the bitter herb sauce, and it is thought that this tradition had not yet arisen. The lamb is normally dipped in the herb sauce and eaten. The herbs signify the bitter taste that the Israelites had in their mouths when they left Egypt.

As Jesus was dining with the Twelve, they were reclining (as opposed to sitting), which was normal during such a meal. Some people ask why it was possible for one person and not others to hear what was being said. The way that they were positioned, with such a large crowd, if a person spoke softly only the ones closest to him could hear.

Matthaiah omits much of the discussion, but proceeds right to the events that advance the plot--the progress toward the crucifixion. Jesus said, *"Indeed I am telling you that one from among you will deliver me over."* This must have come as a shock. Jesus would not only be captured but betrayed, and betrayed by one of his closest friends. Jesus has intimated this before, but such a blunt statement-- so close to the time of the event--prompts worry and discussion. Everyone seemed to be hoping that it wouldn't be THEM. *"Is it I, Lord?"*

Jesus gave a secret sign--that the one who dipped a little piece of bread in the bowl with Jesus would be the betrayer. Of course, this was probably a bowl of spices (or the bitter herb sauce, if that tradition was in place) in which all would dip their pieces of lamb and bread. Those who heard him say this probably tried hard NOT to dip into the bowl at the same time as Jesus. Therefore, it might be said that they were more interested in what THEY were doing than in what Judah or the others were doing.

Judah Iscariot was the one who dipped his hand into the bowl with Jesus (see Johannes), and Jesus apparently handed him a piece of bread and lamb. The others were unaware that this had happened, but Judah asked quietly, "Is it I, Rabbi." "You have said it." At this point, the other accounts point out that Judah left the meeting, with the others thinking that Jesus had instructed him to go purchase something.

Jesus took a piece of matzoh, thanked God for it, broke it, and gave it to his students, saying, "This is my body." Jesus took one of the emblems of the Passover and made it reflect forward onto what was about to happen to him. His body would be broken for them.

Jesus took one of the cups of wine, thanked God for it, and poured some into their (smaller) cups, saying, *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is being poured out concerning many people for the forgiveness of sins."* Another wording has *"this is the new covenant in my blood"* (1 Cor 11). Jesus took another of the emblems of the Passover meal and made it reflect not only on his coming crucifixion but also on the fact that his crucifixion would inaugurate the new covenant that was proclaimed by Jeremiah (31:31f.).

It is also interesting that Matthaiah does not report the line that only Lukas' account contains, "Do this for my remembrance." This is a sure indicator that Jesus was not starting a ritual during the dinner. Instead, the accounts indicate that he was trying to focus them on their relationships with one another. See my notes on Lukas for more.

Indicating that he would not be back, Jesus initiated the singing of the Hallel, and the group went out to the Mountain of Olive Trees.

Interestingly, Matthaiah deliberately omits things that are not central to his focus. Although Lukas reports that the group had a conversation similar to what is found in Mt 20 and Mt 23 -- about equality, the focus in Matthaiah now is the crucifixion. The washing of the feet (Jn 13), talk about equality (Lk 22), and discussion about what will happen after Jesus leaves (Jn 14-6) are less important to the author at this point. He must bring us to the crucifixion.

## **Prediction of Peter's Denial**

*31 Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will stumble over me during this night, for it was written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." But after my rising, I will go ahead of you into Galilaiah." Now Peter answered, saying to him, "Even if everyone stumbles over you, I will never stumble!" Jesus said to him, "Indeed I am telling you that during this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even if it is necessary for me to be destroyed together with you, I will by no means deny you!" And all of the students said likewise.*

As they reached the Mountain of Olive Trees, Jesus delivered a prophecy. This prophecy was very specific about two things that would happen. The latter of these involves the resurrection, which has not received much attention thusfar. Jesus was going to be raised and meet the Twelve up north in Galilaiah.

The former prophecy cites Zech 13:7, part of a Messianic passage. That passage continues, *"In the whole land," says Yahweh, 'two thirds will be cut off and perish, and one third will be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire and refine them as one refines silver and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them.'* The passage concludes with the traditional New Covenant saying, that God would say *"They are my people,"* and the people will proclaim, *"Yahweh is my God."*

The passage in Zechariah starts with the suffering of the Anointed One and continues through the events of the first century, culminating in the slaughter of Jews (who defended Jerusalem and Masada) by the Romans. The faithful ones would be "refined" as in fire. In applying this passage

to himself, Jesus clearly identified himself as the Messiah, although by this time such identification is unnecessary.

All of Jesus' students then denied that they would "be scattered" or desert Jesus. Peter was particularly vocal, in his usual style, but Jesus predicted: *"During this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."*

Naturally, Peter was confident. With his reply, Peter indicated that indeed he understood what was about to happen to Jesus, even if he did not know the details. Were they all going to be scattered? The reader must see for himself.

Something should be said about the "rooster crow." Normally, there would have been no roosters (male chickens) in Jerusalem. Some say that the rarity of a rooster crowing is what Jesus was pointing to. However, others say that the trumpets which sounded the nightly watches, separated by four hours each, were called the "rooster crowing."

## **In the Garden**

*36 Then Jesus came with them into the country that is called Gethsemane, and he said to his students, "Sit down in it, while I go away there to pray." And he took along Peter and the two sons of Zebediah, and he began to be sorrowful and in anguish. Then he said to them, ""My soul is surrounded with sorrow" to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me."*

*And he went ahead a short distance and fell on his face, praying and saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup bypass me. However, let it not be as I want but as you want." And he went to the students and, finding them asleep, he then said to Peter, "Weren't you strong enough to watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray, so that you would not enter into trial. Indeed, the spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak."*

*Again, for a second time, he went away and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is impossible for this to bypass (unless I drink it), let what you want happen." And he went again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were burdened.*

*And he left them, again going away. He prayed, again saying the same statement for a third time. Then he went to the students and said to them, "Have you been sitting for the rest of the time and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is being delivered up into the hands of sinners. Get up, let's go. Look, the one who is delivering me up is near."*

When Jesus and his students reached the garden, he took his three dearest friends with him to a quiet place to pray. These were the same three, Peter and the sons of Zebediah, who had observed the transfiguration -- and who had been with him since the beginning, enjoying a close relationship with the Master. Lukas reports that it was Jesus' custom to go to this location, which explains how Judah and the band of soldiers knew where he was.

This time, the mood was a grim one. Jesus began by quoting a portion of Psa 42:6 -- *"My soul is surrounded with sorrow,"* adding *"to the point of death."* That psalm is a cry of someone longing for God's presence, the call of someone who feels forgotten but yet knows that God is near.

Jesus began to pray. His prayers appeared as calls for help, long and painful, lasting an hour in all. The content was summarized by the statement, *"If it is possible, let this cup bypass me."* Jesus knew the full extent of what was about to happen, and he longed not to endure it. But, being who he was, he subjected himself meekly to God's greater knowledge and plan, uttering the famous words, *"However, let it not be as I want but as you want."*

By this time, it was probably after 10PM, and Jesus' three students were asleep. Waking them, he urged them to be vigilant. For probably another hour, Jesus continued to pray, asking that he be allowed not to be crucified unless it is impossible. The students fell asleep this time too.

He went a third time, possibly for a third hour, and continued to pray similar things. Through his prayers, he found the strength to do what he knew God required of him. Both Markus and Lukas say the same things. There is an addition to Lukas (not part of the original text) that has Jesus sweating drops of blood. The account of Johannes skips straight to the arrest...perhaps because that author was asleep!

After the third prayer session, Jesus returned to the three and to the Eleven, noting that his betrayer was near. At this time, recall, the Eleven were still unaware that Judah Iscariot was part of the plot to arrest Jesus.

## **Jesus Busted**

*47 And while he was still speaking, look, Judah, one of the Twelve, came, and a great crowd came with him from the high priests and older ones of the people, with swords and clubs. Now the one who delivered him over had given them a sign, saying, "Whoever I kiss is the one. Take hold of him." And immediately he went to Jesus, said, "Hello, Rabbi," and passionately kissed him. Now Jesus said to him, "Comrade, for what reason are you present?" Then they came to him, laid hands on Jesus, and took hold of him.*

*And look, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand, drew his sword, and struck the high priest's slave, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Return your sword to its place. For all of those who take the sword will be destroyed with a sword. Or don't you know that I am able to call my Father aside, and he will station around me now more than twelve legions of messengers? Then how would the writings be fulfilled that say it is necessary to happen this way?"*

Again, the author is rushing us toward the crucifixion. Judah is immediately presented to us, as soon as Jesus has finished speaking. Judah had arranged a signal for the Jewish leadership, so that they would know whom to arrest -- remember that it was the middle of the night. *"Whoever I kiss is the one. Take hold of him."*

Having said that, he walked into the group, approached Jesus, and greeted him with a passionate kiss. [The stronger of the two words for 'kiss' appears here.] Jesus asked why Judah had come, but Jesus knew ... and the band of soldiers approached. These soldiers were part of a manipule (100 men or more) who were attached to the temple. With permission from the Roman government, they were allowed to act as temple guards or police.

Jesus had told his students to carry swords, but he never intended violence. When Peter (named in Johannes' account) cut off the ear of the high priest's slave, Jesus stopped the impending battle and healed the slave (in Johannes' account), whose name was Malchus, saying, *"All of those who take the sword will be destroyed with a sword."*

He assured his friends that he could call *"more than twelve legions of messengers"* (12,000-72,000) to his assistance if need be, but this was his cup to drink. He went away peacefully because it was necessary to fulfill the writings *"that say it is necessary to happen this way."* Even as he was being arrested, Jesus pointed out his Messianic fate.

## **Words to the Crowds**

*55 At that hour, Jesus said to the crowds, "You have come with swords and clubs to take me like a robber. By day, I sat in the temple court, teaching, and you did not take hold of me. But this whole thing has happened so that the writings of the prophets would be fulfilled." Then the students all left him, fleeing.*

Apparently, not only the Leadership but also many local residents knew that something was brewing and had followed the soldiers to the garden. Johannes records more of Jesus' address to the people (including *"My kingdom is not of creation"*); Matthaiah only mentions the part which indicates that the actions of the people were fulfilling prophecy: "You have come with swords and clubs to take me like a robber. By day, I sat in the temple court, teaching, and you did not take hold of me." Lukas adds that this time was their hour -- the authority of darkness.

Notice, though, that the faithfulness of his students already has come into question. Matthaiah points out unflatteringly that all of them fled the scene, leaving Jesus in the hands of the religious leaders and the Romans.

## **Jesus Before Kaiaphas**

*57 Now the ones who took hold of Jesus led him away to Kaiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the older people were gathered. But Peter followed him from a large distance up to the court of the high priest. And after entering inside, he sat with the officers to see the end result.*

*Now the high priests and the whole Sanhedrin was seeking false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put him to death. And they did not find any, though many false witnesses had come to them. But afterwards, two people came to them, saying, "This one said, 'I am able to knock down God's temple and to construct it in three days.'" And the high priest stood up and said to him, "Are you answering nothing to what these people are testifying against you?" But Jesus was*

*silent. And the high priest said to him, "I bind you by oath, according to the living God, so that you would tell us if you are the Anointed One, God's son."*

*Jesus said to him, "You have said it. However, I am telling you, from the present you will see the "Son of Man" seated at the right side of the power and "coming on the clouds of the sky."" Then the high priest ripped his cloak, saying, "He is speaking evil! Why do we still have any need of witnesses?! Look, now, you have heard his evil speaking! What do you think?" Now they answered, saying, "He is liable to death."*

*Then they spit in his face and punched him, and they slapped him, saying, "Divine for us, Anointed One: who is it that is striking you?"*

Although the high priest had no power to condemn Jesus to die, he had the authority to test whether Jesus had said or done anything worthy of death. After that, he could have Jesus taken to the Romans for punishment--if he found it necessary. Kaiaphas (Kaifa) had involved himself very little in the affair thusfar, although he was working behind the scenes, for he had predicted earlier that Jesus would die on behalf of the Jewish nation (Jn 11:49-52).

Violating the precept against bearing false testimony, and violating the precept that they should not carry on business during a festival, the whole Sanhedrin convened, seeking to find people who would lie to get Jesus convicted. They had trouble finding anyone who could say anything reasonable, but two approached.

The first witness appears confused. Jesus had predicted the destruction of the temple, but not in that context. What appears here is true, but Jesus had been speaking about his own body. To the Jewish leadership, this was a threat to the temple. The other person agreed, providing them with the "testimony of two witnesses" necessary to convict.

Jesus was entitled to defend himself, and he certainly had an explanation, but he said nothing. Kaiaphas asked him whether he was going to answer the charges; still he said nothing. This aggravated Kaiaphas, and he demanded an oath from Jesus.

Jesus' comment, "You have said it," may be taken as agreement with Kaiaphas, or it may simply mean, "That is your opinion." At his reference to Psalm 110, *"the high priest ripped his cloak"* in anger, which the Torah forbade him from doing (Lv 21:10). Consequently, at this point, Kaifa had defiled himself. At that point, he accused Jesus of speaking evil, a crime worthy of death (Lv 24:16) under the Torah. Therefore, those in attendance judged that the Torah condemned him.

Then they spit in his face, punched him, and slapped him. Having blindfolded him, they asked whether he could tell who had struck him -- a mockery of his status as a prophet.

## **Peter's Threefold Denial**

*69 Now Peter was seated outside in the court. And one servant girl came to him, saying, "You too were with Jesus the Galilaian." But he denied it the presence of all, saying, "I don't know what you're saying."*

*Now he went out into the portico, and another one noticed him and said to those who were there, "This one was also with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied, with an oath, "I don't know the person."*

*Now after a little time, the ones who were standing by came up and said to Peter, "Truly, you too are among them, for also your speech makes you known." Then he began to curse and swear, "I don't know the person!" And immediately a rooster crew.*

*And Peter remembered Jesus' declaration, which declared that, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went outside and cried bitterly.*

Johannes was known to the high priest, and his account reveals that he was allowed to enter the room where the trial was held, but Peter stood outside, warming himself by a fire. He was in a position where he could see what was going on, and as he watched, a servant girl said she had witnessed seen him with Jesus. Peter denied it.

Another second witness provided corroboration. He took a false oath and denied it again.

As the group of servants noticed that he spoke with a Galilaian accent, he started cursing and swearing that he didn't know Jesus. He had been there for several hours, and a watch trumpet sounded. Peter recalled what Jesus had said, looked at Jesus, and ran off to cry. He would never deny Jesus again.

## **Interlude: Jesus Transferred**

*27:1 Now after morning happened, all the high priests and the older ones of the people took counsel against Jesus, so that they might put him to death. And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilatus the governor.* When morning came, this was the morning of the first day of the feast -- the day when paschal lambs were normally slaughtered, in preparation for the Passover proper, which would begin that evening. Jesus spent that morning being led from Kaifa to Pontius Pilatus, the Roman Governor of the region. Only by transferring Jesus to Roman authority could the religious leaders have Jesus crucified as a criminal.

## **Judah's Fate**

3

Then when Judah (the one who had delivered him up) noticed that they were condemning Jesus, he regretted it and returned the thirty silver pieces to the high priests and older ones, saying, "I have sinned, delivering up innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? You yourself will see to that." And, tossing the silver pieces into the temple court, he withdrew and went away, and he was choked.

Now the high priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is illegal to cast them into the korban fund, since it is the price of blood." But after taking counsel, they bought with them the potter's field, in which to bury strangers. So, that field is called "Field of Blood" until today. Then what

was declared through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "And, I took the thirty silver pieces" from the sons of Israel, the price at which they valued the valuable one, and I gave them for the "potter's field", "just as Yahweh arranged for me."

Judah greatly regretted his part in locating Jesus for the ones who arrested him. Consequently, he returned the 30 silver pieces to the high priest and old people. He realized that "*I have sinned....*" But they didn't care about his concerns, and so he tossed the money into the temple court.

Realizing that they could not put the money into the korban ("gift") fund, they followed their statutes legalistically and bought a plot of land in Judah's name -- a field where he was eventually buried. Matthaiah recognized this as a necessity.

There's more than one quote from the Hebrew Bible here:

"And I took the 30 SP" comes from Zechariah 11:13.

"The price at which they valued the valuable one" is a paraphrase from Zechariah.

"And I gave them for the [potter's] field" comes from Jeremiah 32. "Just as Yahweh arranged" appears to come from the Septuagint of Ex 9.

When small sections are cited (such as "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?"), the reader is supposed to examine the context of the quote. Although Jeremiah is used sparsely, the usage appears to stem from God's having told Jeremiah (Jer 32:6) that he would be buying a field for someone. After he follows God's instructions and seals up a permanent copy of the deed, Jeremiah waxes long about the future of Judah (beginning in 32:16). Thus, the purchase of the field (in Matthew) forecasts the elements of Jeremiah 32:16ff: "See, the siege-ramps have been cast up against the city to take it, and the city, faced with sword, famine, and pestilence, has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it."

After blasting the kingdom of Judah for its continued idolatry, Jeremiah predicts the siege of Jerusalem. Matthew sees a parallel in the upcoming siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. Thus, when God tells Jeremiah, "This city has aroused my anger and rage, from the day it was built until this day, so that I will remove it from my sight because of all the evil of the people of Israel and of the people of Judah...", the original context concerns the Babylonian Exile. However, Matthew applies the similar context to his own time. Babylon becomes Rome.

The buying of fields is a theme that recurs in Jer 32 and is re-interpreted. In v. 25, Jeremiah wonders why he should buy a field if the city is going to be destroyed soon. But God promises eventual restoration, for "fields will be bought" (v.43) after the desolation. Thus, the purchase of a field becomes the sign of the restoration of the kingdom (v. 44).

The restoration theme was often applied to the period between Acts 2 and Acts 10. It was also applied to the period after the destruction of the temple. Some interpreters apply the theme to the end of time. Zech 11, quoted as part of the amalgamated citation, also fits the same context. The 30 silver pieces (v. 13) precedes the breaking of the staff (v. 14), signifying division. This is followed by the sending of a shepherd (v. 16) to ravage the flock... leaders who result in the kingdom's ruin. The oracle that follows (Zech 12-13) predicts both the sending of the Messiah

and the desolation of Jerusalem. Again, the context is a Messianic one, and Matthew is right to apply it in midrash.

In fact, if Zech 13 is taken together with the field quote, Matthew may have recognized that Iscariot's betrayal came within the context of the crucifixion of Jesus (13:7). Exodus 9 talks about the upcoming (original) Passover, indicating that God had chosen the time when it would happen -- both when desolation would come and when the people would be delivered from bondage. Again this fits the context of Matthew's application.

The problem in interpreting Matthew arises from the false assumption that he was saying that one prophet (or several) said something specific about Judas. That's not what he was saying. Instead, Matthew reinterprets events of the past that apply in a similar context as the purchase of the field for Judah.

But what of Judah? All Matthaiah's account tells is that *"he withdrew and went away, and he was choked."* Lukas' research (in Acts 1) suggests something bizarre: *"after falling head-downward, he burst in the middle, and each of his internal organs was poured out."*

Clarke's Commentary makes a good point, and I accept his analysis. They cite several cases of dysentery, a few of which are reported Bibically, and which involve the symptoms of choking and (in its final stages) of bursting from the bowels. Clarke suggests that Judah's remorse might have caused him to suffer thus.

## Appearance Before Pilatus

11 Now Jesus was standing in the presence of the Governor, and the one who was governing asked him, saying, "Are you the King of the Jews?" But Jesus said, "You are saying that." And he replied nothing among his being accused by the high priests and older people. Then Pilatus said to him, "Do you hear how many things they are testifying against you?" And he did not answer him, not even one declaration, and so the Governor wondered greatly.

Pontius Pilatus was Governor of the Judean area for a short time, and it is rumored that he received the post because he was not a good politician. The term "governor" used in the NT is correct, for the title "Procurator" was not used until after Pilatus.

In all four accounts, Pontius is portrayed as a man whose life was ruled by the masses. He had power, but feared those over him as well as fearing the populus. Toward Jesus, he displays curiosity and even compassion, but the accounts show him to be more concerned about what others would do to him than about murdering a man who could be a deity. Jesus always gives Pilatus quizzical answers, if he replies at all.

*"Are you the King of the Jews?" "You are saying that."* Then he kept silent, so that Pilatus asked him to defend himself. No reply, prompting the governor to wonder about him.

If you were in Pilatus' place, you might wonder too. Who is this guy? Why do they want to kill him so badly? Why doesn't he speak up for himself? He doesn't seem to have done anything wrong...Does he really claim to be a king?

## **The Pressures on Pilatus**

*15 Now at the feast, the one who was governing was accustomed to release to the crowd one prisoner that they wanted. Now they had then a noteworthy prisoner called Bar-Abbas. Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilatus told them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Bar-Abbas, or Jesus who is called Anointed?" For he knew that they had delivered him over through envy.*

*But while he was seated on the tribunal, his wife sent a message out to him, saying, "Let there be nothing between you and this just person. For I have been suffering much today by dreams on account of him."*

*Now the high priests and the older people persuaded the crowds, so that they would ask for Bar-Abbas, but to destroy Jesus. Now the one who was governing answered, saying to them, "Which one of the two do you want me to release to you?" But they said, "Bar-Abbas." Pilatus said to them, "Therefore, what should I do to Jesus, who is called Anointed?" They all said, "Crucify him!" But he said, "For what bad thing that he has done?" But they were abundantly calling out, saying, "Crucify him!"*

*Now when Pilatus noticed that he this was profiting nothing, but rather a riot was happening, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this one's blood. You will see to it!" And all the people answered, saying, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" Then he released Bar-Abbas to them, but after having Jesus whipped, he delivered him up to be crucified.*

Pilatus apparently looked forward to releasing Jesus during the feast, when there was a custom to free one prisoner. Therefore, he gave the leaders the option: release a rebellious robbing murderer called Bar-Abbas (or Jesus Bar-Abbas, as some manuscripts have) or release the silent Jesus, who is called Anointed. The people would have to choose between letting a murderer be released in their midst or to let Jesus go. Matthaiah says that Pilatus gave them this choice because *"he knew that they had delivered him over through envy."* He wanted them to be forced to choose to set Jesus free.

Meanwhile, Pilatus' wife had had a prophetic dream, urging her husband to set Jesus free. In her message to Pontius, she referred to Jesus as *"this just person"* -- she knew that he'd done nothing wrong.

But the religious leadership *"persuaded the crowds"* to ask for Bar-Abbas instead of Jesus, so when Pilatus asked them, they said they wanted Bar-Abbas released, and Jesus crucified.

"For what bad thing that he has done?" Again, Pilatus found nothing wrong with Jesus. Johannes' account tells more of Jesus' encounter with the Roman, stating bluntly that from a certain point

on, Pilatus sought to free Jesus. The crowd again indicated that they wanted Jesus crucified, and the leadership stirred up the people into a riot. The governor's question of what to do with Jesus was apparently met with a surprise answer. The general tone of the event in all four accounts is that Pilatus expected them to want Jesus to go free as well, but the people had been stirred to near uproar.

With that, Pilatus called for a bowl of water, ceremonially cleansed his hands, and transferred responsibility to the people, who replied, *"Let his blood be on us and on our children!"* Pilatus released Bar-Abbas and gave Jesus to them to be crucified. All of this was necessary due to the fact that the Jewish leadership had no authority to have anyone crucified.

Again, though, Matthaiah has deliberately shortened his account of the events of the morning, so that the crucifixion scene would come quickly.

## **The Crucifixion of the Anointed One**

*27 Then the Governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, and the whole manipule gathered together with him. And they clothed him, putting around him a scarlet military cloak, and they braided a crown of acanthus and placed it on his head, and they placed a reed in his right hand. And they bent their knees in his presence and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spit on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the military cloak and clothed him with his own garments, and they led him out to be crucified.*

*Now when they went out, they found a Kurenian person named Simon. They forced him, so that he would bear Jesus' cross. And they went to a place called Golgotha, which is called Skull Place, and gave him wine mixed with gall to drink. And when he tasted it, he didn't want to drink it.*

*Now after crucifying him, "they divided his garments, casting lots." And they sat down and kept him there. And they placed over his head the reason in writing: "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews."*

After sentencing, Pilatus' soldiers mocked Jesus, placing a scarlet military cloak over him (pretending it was a royal robe) and putting a reed in his right hand (as a scepter). They braided a crown of acanthus (as though it were laurel) and put it on his head. The acanthus plant has stickers, but the expression "crown of thorns" is inaccurate. The stickers on the acanthus plant are not long (as in some portraits), nor were they meant to cause pain. The acanthus plant was a common plant, and its purpose on Jesus' head was a mockery. During this mocking, they also spit on Jesus and struck him with the reed. Then they stripped him naked and led him out to be crucified.

**NOTE:** None of the four accounts says that Jesus dropped the crossbar to the cross which he was supposed to carry. Catholic tradition holds that he dropped it three times before Simon the Kurenian was picked from the crowd and forced to carry the crossbar.

They brought Jesus to "Skull Place," where they nailed him to the cross. The nails would have gone through his ankles and wrists (not through the palms of his hands). In some cases, people were tied with rope as well, to prevent their arms from falling down. One foot is often depicted on a prop. If Jesus was crucified this way, the prop allowed the crucified person to push his torso up into a position that made breathing easier, for once the person lost energy to breathe, he would suffocate. Being able to breathe, the crucifixion would last longer. When the thieves' legs were broken (later), this prevented them from propping themselves up to breathe, and so they'd die faster.

They offered Jesus a bitter drink, which he refused.

The soldiers sat down and cast lots for one of his garments, which was seamlessly woven.

Pilatus also had ordered an accusation placed over Jesus' head, in several languages. In one form or another, it read, *"This is Jesus (of Nazareth), King of the Jews."* In its Latin form, the expression is abbreviated: I.N.R.I., which is what you will find on crucifixes that are sold in stores. Johannes reports that the Jewish leaders were upset that Pilatus had written, "King of the Jews." They wanted him to write that Jesus CLAIMED to be King of the Jews. Pilatus replied, *"What I have written, I have written,"* an indication from Johannes that even Pilatus knew who Jesus was (in whatever capacity he could understand).

## **The Thieves**

*38 There were then two robbers being crucified with him, one at the right and one at the left. Now those who went by were speaking evil of him, "shaking their heads" and saying, "The one who would knock down the temple and construct it in three days: save yourself, if you are God's son, and descend from the cross." Likewise also, the high priests were mocking, with the scribes and the older people. They were saying, "He saved others. Isn't he able to save himself? Is he the King of Israel? Let him descend now from the cross, and we will trust in him. "He was persuaded by God, let him rescue him now, if he wants him," for he said that, 'I am God's son.'"*

*Also, the robbers who were being crucified with him reproached him through it.*

Two thieves were crucified with Jesus. These were probably Bar-Abbas' cohorts, who had been part of sacking and looting during a rebellion. Both mocked Jesus, telling him to save himself--and THEM--if he was really the Anointed One. The high priests, standing below, added to the mocking.

Matthaiah omits one of the thieves relenting. Later on, one of the thieves reproaches the other and asks Jesus to remember him *"when you come into your kingdom."* Jesus says that *"Today, you will be with me in Paradise."* This word of forgiveness was meant as assurance to the thief that he would find bliss that day. But the fate of the thief is unimportant to Matthaiah; his focus is Jesus.

## **The Climax**

45 *From the sixth hour, darkness happened on all the land until the ninth hour. But at about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "'Eli, Eli! Lema sabachthani?'" That is, "'O my God, O my God! Why have you abandoned me?'" But some of those who were standing there, when they heard, said, "He is sounding to Elijah!" And immediately, one of them ran, and took a sponge, filled it with vinegar, and put it on reed, and gave it to him to drink. But the rest said, "Leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah will come and save him." But Jesus again called out with a loud voice, and he let go of the breath.*

*And look, the curtain of the temple was divided in two from top to bottom! And the earth was shaken, and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened, and many bodies of those holy ones who had been asleep were raised. And after coming out from the tombs, they went out after his rising into the holy city and appeared to many people.*

*Now the centurion and those with him who were keeping Jesus -- when they noticed the earthquake and the things that were happening, they were extremely afraid, saying, "Truly, this was a god's son."*

This darkness was symbolic of the darkness that reigned in Israel, perpetuating and necessitating Jesus' murder. The darkness lasted for three hours, from noon until 3PM. Matthaiah, Johannes, and Lukas all place Jesus on the cross at about the sixth hour. Markus seems to have him put up at about the third hour, but it is generally thought that a digamma (looks like F) was mistaken for a gamma (looks like Γ) in Greek--the letter digamma had the numerical value of 6, and the letter gamma had the value of 3. Digamma was a letter that was seldom used at the time and would eventually not be used at all. It does not exist in modern Greek.

At 3PM, Jesus shouted in Aramaic, and some heard "Eli" (God) and thought that he was calling Elijah. The account reports that he took a drink then, but many people were still mocking him, to see if Elijah would come. The reason for Jesus' citation of Psalm 22:1 ("Oh my God...") was both as a shout of human emotion and as a final sign, pointing out to any pious Jews present that David's prophecy (in Psalm 22) was coming true before their eyes.

Verse 1 contains Jesus' shout.

Verses 6-8 talk of the mocking he received, including the phrase, "*skaking their heads*," which is applied to the two thieves.

Verse 8 in particular is the same as what the Jewish leaders say of him: "*He was persuaded by God, let him rescue him now, if he wants him.*" Verses 12-13 describe the Jewish leaders--his enemies

Verses 14-15 describe the crucifixion itself: bones out of joint, heart feeling melted, strength wasted, tongue dry.

Verse 16 adds, "*They have pierced my hands and feet.*"

Verse 18 refers to the soldiers taking his clothes and casting lots for his robe.

Verses 19 and following refer to the fact that although the author FELT forsaken, he realized that God would never abandon his beloved one. "*He has not dispised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted one; and he has not hid his face from him, but he has heard, when he cried to him.*"

After pointing these things out, Jesus spoke again and then died--at the time during the afternoon when the Passover lambs were normally sacrificed, for the meal that evening.

At that, *"the curtain of the temple was divided in two from top to bottom,"* standing as a symbol that the Jewish system was in the process of being destroyed and possibly representing that temples and rituals were not necessary for true worship. Jesus had shown people the way into the true "holy place" (see Hebrews 9).

As soon as that happened, there was a metaphorical earthquake. The honest, truth-seeking Jews who had been waiting for the Anointed One but who were "dead" in their religion were "raised." Three days later, after the resurrection, the same people who had once needed to raise from the dead started telling people about Jesus. These formerly "dead" people appeared to other Jews in the city as a sign that Jesus was the Anointed One.

When the centurion in charge of the triple crucifixion -- they would have kept people away from the bodies and prevented general mayhem -- when he noticed the things that were happening, he and those with him proclaimed, *"Truly, this was a god's son."* Not knowing the Hebrew God but knowing the charges against Jesus, even these impious Gentiles realized that whatever it was Jesus claimed for himself, he WAS that person. Observe that the Jewish leaders, who were also standing right there, said nothing of the sort.

27:55-61

## **The Burial**

*55 Now many women who had followed Jesus from Galilaiah, serving him, were there, watching from a large distance. Among them were Miriam the Magdalene and Miriam the mother of Jacob and Yosef, and the mother of the sons of Zebediah.*

*Now when evening happened, a wealthy man from Arimathaea came, Yosef by name, who had also been made a student to Jesus. This one went to Pilatus and asked for Jesus' body. Then Pilatus gave word for it to be given out. And after taking the body, Yosef wrapped it in clean linen, and he placed it in his new tomb, which he had had cut into the rock. And after rolling a great stone over the tomb's doorway, he left. But Miriam the Magdalene and the other Miriam were there, sitting opposite the sepulcher.*

The other accounts indicate that Jesus' body was taken off the cross before sundown, so that there would not be a crucifixion during the Passover Day -- remember that the reckoning of the start of a "day" (in both Roman and Jewish time) began at sundown.

Matthaiah reports that although the male students (save Johannes) had fled the scene, many of Jesus' female students were at the foot of the cross when he was crucified. These women sought to have the body of Jesus placed in a fitting grave.

Yosef of Arimathea, a wealthy student of Jesus (who conducted his affairs secretly) got permission from Pilatus to have Jesus' body taken and placed in a tomb that had been hewn out

of rock for Yosef himself. And so, Jesus was "with the wealthy in his death" (Isa 53). The body was placed into the sepulcher, and a large boulder was rolled over the entrance. Two of the women witnessed this (although legally, women could not be witnesses).

## **Graveyard Detail**

*62 Now on the next day, which was after the Preparation, the high priests and the Perushim gathered before Pilatus, saying, "Sir, we remember that the deceiver said while alive, 'After three days, I will arise.' Therefore, give word to secure the sepulcher until the third day, lest his students should come and steal him, and tell the people he has risen from the dead. And the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilatus said to them, "You have a guard. Go and secure as you know how." Now they went and secured the sepulcher with the guard, after sealing the stone.*

On the day of the Passover, "*after the preparation,*" the high priests and Perushim went before Pilatus to demand that guards be placed in front of the sepulcher until the second day of the week, so that Jesus' prophecy about resurrecting would not be fulfilled by people attempting to STEAL the body and PRETEND that he had risen. Pilatus obliged, giving word that they use their own Temple Guard to secure the sepulcher. With that, the guards sealed the stone into place and took turns guarding the tomb.

## **Timeline**

There has been much confusion raised about the timeline of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. A few individuals have taken the phrase from Job, "three days and three nights," which Jesus referenced once, as literal. However, each time Jesus spoke about the timing of his resurrection, he mentioned it as "during the third day."

Jesus died on the afternoon of the first day of the feast. From that time until sundown was regarded as the "first day" in the tomb, using their usual reckoning--since the day ended at sundown.

From sundown that evening until the next sundown was the "second day". This was Passover, which Johannes indicates fell on the Sabbath (for the Sabbath was a great one).

From sundown on the evening after Passover until the following sundown would be the third day. This is also mentioned as the "first day of the week," which coincides with the fact that the Sabbath was the intervening day. The exact time of Jesus' actual resurrection is not mentioned in any of the four accounts. It could have been any time from sundown Saturday night until shortly before dawn on Sunday morning. At any rate, this places Jesus' death on the cross sometime shortly after 3PM on Friday, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. More information may be found in my paper on the timing of Jesus' death and resurrection during Passover week.

## **The Empty Tomb**

28:1 *Now after the evening of the Sabbath, at the dawning into the first of the week, Miriam the Magdalene and the other Miriam went to observe the sepulcher. And look, a great earthquake happened. For Yahweh's messenger descended from heaven and came to the stone, rolling it away, and he sat on top of it. Now his visible form was as lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. Now the keepers shook from fear of him, and they became as dead people.*

*But the messenger answered, saying to the women, "Don't be afraid, for I know that you are seeking Jesus, the one who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, just as he said. Come see the place where he was laid. And quickly go tell his students that he has risen from the dead. And look, he is going ahead of you into Galilaiah; you will see him there. Look, I have told you."*

*And quickly coming away from the tomb, with fear and great joy they ran and announced the message to his students. And look, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" Now when they came to him, they laid hold of his feet, and bowed down to him. Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Go up and announce the message to my brothers, so that they might go away into Galilaiah, and they will see me there."*

At around dawn on the first day of the week, several of the women (including Miriam of Magdala and Jesus' mother) went to the sepulcher to anoint him with spices. Assistance from the guards would have been necessary to accomplish this, since there was no way for them to roll the heavy stone away from the entrance to the tomb.

Matthaiah, however, does not mention their reason for going to the tomb; all he says is that they were there. Markus and Lukas conflict as to when the spices were purchased -- before or after the Sabbath. Nevertheless, they were there, and they had aromatic spices with them.

Yahweh's messenger caused an earthquake and rolled the stone away, causing the guards to become faint. This messenger told the women that they need not fear, because Jesus had risen from the dead, just as he said. Then he showed them the empty tomb, although, again, women were not legally witnesses to anything. Still, the messenger pointed out that Jesus would meet them all in Galilaiah.

Matthaiah wrote nothing about the appearance of Jesus to Miriam the Magdalene. He wrote nothing about her fetching the male students, Johannes and Peter. He wrote nothing about what they saw. These things are not his concern for several reasons. They do not prove Jesus was the Anointed One. They do not include any important teachings about the Torah. They do not advance his notion of "the plot." The plot culminated in Jesus' summary of his teachings, followed by the crucifixion. Now, Matthaiah's account is almost minimalist, displaying enough proof of Jesus' resurrection for the reader, so that the prophecy will be proven fulfilled.

## **Another Conspiracy**

11 *Now after they went, look, some of the guard went into the city and announced to the high priests all the things that had happened. And after gathering together with the older ones and taking counsel, they gave a considerable number of silver pieces to the soldiers, saying, "Say that 'His students came at night and stole him while we were sleeping.' And if this should be*

*reported to the Governor, we will persuade him and make you without concern." Now after they took the silver pieces, they did as they had been instructed. And this saying is spread around among Jews until today's date.*

Later on, some of the guards went into Jerusalem and told the Leadership about the messenger and the earthquake. The leaders conspired to circulate the story that (although the tomb was guarded) somehow Jesus' students had managed to steal his body, so that they could falsify claims that he was resurrected. The guards were bribed to keep silent, and *"this saying is spread around among Jews until today's date."* Remember again, though, that "Jews" probably refers only to the religious leadership. Although the author has always distinguished between the common Jewish people (most of whom had no hand in Jesus' death) and certain of the rabbis and priests (who crucified their Messiah), this element is not always clear in translation alone.

## **A Reminder For the Eleven**

*16 Now the Eleven students went into Galilaiah to the mountain where Jesus had put them in order. And when they noticed him, they bowed down to him, but they hesitated. And Jesus went to them, speaking to them, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make students of all the nations, baptizing them into [my] name, teaching them to keep all of whatever precepts I gave you. And look, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age."*

As Yahweh's messenger had promised, Jesus met the Eleven in Galilaiah, at the same place where Jesus had originally sent them from. When he appeared, he gave them a reminder of their own "mission." In Lukas, the reminder appears to take place in Jerusalem, but there is necessarily a break after Jesus eats the fish (seek Lk 24). Lukas has:

*"These are my sayings that I spoke to you while I was still with you: that it is necessary for all the things that are written in Moses' Torah and in the Prophets and in the Psalms about me to be fulfilled." (Lk 24:44)*

At this point, he *"opened their minds"* so that they could understand all of the Messianic writings.

*"Thus it was written for the Anointed One to suffer and to be resurrected from among the dead on the third day, and for mental change to the point of forgiveness of sins to be heralded in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Lk 24:46-7)*

Here, Jesus recapped several things. He established that he was the Messiah. He recalled the fact that Priestly Israel is coming to an end soon, in pointing to the heralding of mental change. He mentioned the sending of the Twelve (from Mt 10) to Jews everywhere-- that they would speak in the name of the Messiah, starting at Jerusalem. In Lukas' account, he indicated that the Twelve were to be witnesses of the things that they saw and heard from Jesus, and that they should wait in Jerusalem until they are *"clothed with power from on high"*. In retrospect, we now know Jesus was referring to what would happen 50 days after the crucifixion, during the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) -- the events of Acts 2.

Matthaiah records the conclusion as follows:

*"All authority in heaven on earth has been given to me."*

This is a summary statement that Jesus was and is God's Anointed.

*"Therefore, go and make students of all the nations, baptizing them into [my] name, teaching them to keep all of whatever precepts I gave you."*

As in Lukas, this is a reminder of Jesus' instructions to the Twelve. They should continue doing as he had instructed them (Mt 10), teaching Jews everywhere that Jesus was Messiah and about his key precepts (found in the sermon on the mount and summarized and detailed in Mt 21-25). The threefold baptismal formula appears to be later, for Eusebius cites the passage several times as "into my name," and his quotation is earlier than any manuscript we possess of chapter 28.

*"And look, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age."*

As in Lukas, this is a summary reminder that the end of the age -- and with it, the destruction of Jerusalem -- is coming. Having said these things, the final focus for the reader is on events to come. For the Twelve, they were about to spread the message; for the reader, there is one last reminder of the coming destruction of the temple.

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## Conclusions

Jesus' core teachings as Matthaiah saw them can be summarized as follows:

1. Jesus was the promised Anointed One: a kingly priest who was also the "suffering servant" of Isaiah. Jesus fulfilled all of the Messianic prophecies, but not in the way that the Leaders were expecting. He also provided numerous signs, establishing his identity.
2. Jesus taught that the Torah was meant to be a series of internal core principles, focusing on Trust and Love, rather than a set of external rules.
3. The hierarchical priestly system of the Jews, along with all the rituals of Judaism, was going to be removed (as far as God's people were concerned).
4. The hierarchy would be replaced with equality. The religion would be replaced with relationship.

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