

Testament, Book 4

The Gospel According to Saint John

As we have seen in the Introduction to the Gospels, John's Gospel is in a category all its own. Like the three synoptic gospels it tells the basic story of the life and ministry of Jesus, but with its own, singular emphasis. Whereas Matthew and Luke concentrate on the teachings of Jesus, and Mark emphasizes the deeds of Jesus, John emphasizes his divinity. For this reason the validity of John's Gospel is attacked by skeptical, materialist, scholars more than the other three gospels combined. The divinity of Jesus is made clear in the synoptic gospels; in John, however, it is the theme. Repeatedly, in John, we find Jesus declaring Himself to be the pre-existing, eternal Creator, the Christ, the Messiah, the only Redeemer. In fact, in John there are so many declarations of His divinity that, for the sake of brevity, **I cannot even select them all as highlights** in this study guide! Both Matthew and Luke took great care to identify Jesus as the one with legal claim to be the Messiah and King of the Jews; but John took great care to identify Jesus as God--not just King of the Jews, but King of the Cosmos.

John's Unique Position for Writing His Gospel. In an historical sense, John's great book is different from the other three gospel accounts in that John lived longer than the other three gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke (as well as Peter, Paul, James and Jude, the other authors of New Testament books, and the other 9 of the original apostles)¹. Because of this John had lived to see the martyrdom of the others, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the persecution and rapid growth of the Church throughout the Roman world in the 1st Century. He almost certainly lived well past the death of Mary the mother of Jesus, who had lived with him after the crucifixion, for she was about 15 years older than John. There can be no doubt that, during those years before her death, John and Mary spent many hours discussing the life and ministry of her divine Son, for she lived with John, and Jesus was the most important conversation topic possible (then and now)². He wrote from a vantage point unknown (and probably unimaginable) to the others. John was uniquely qualified and positioned to write his unique book, the final gospel.

But John's gospel is also different in its spirituality. Eusebius, Roman historian, writing in the late 3rd and early 4th Centuries, quoting Clement of Alexandria (2nd

¹ This total number of the original apostles (11) does not, of course, include Judas Iscariot, who died by his own hand after betraying Jesus to the chief priests.

² Chapter 19, verses 25-27.

Century) wrote: "...Clement has set down a tradition **which he had received from the elders before him**, (emphasis mine) in regard to the order of the Gospels, to the following effect³. He says that the Gospels containing the genealogies were written first, and that the Gospel according to Mark was composed... inasmuch as he had attended [Peter] from an early period, and remembered what had been said, to write down what had been spoken. On his [Mark's] composing the Gospel, he handed it to those who had made the request to him; which, coming to Peter's knowledge, he neither hindered nor encouraged. But John, the last of all, seeing that that which was corporeal [physical] was set forth in the Gospels [already], on the entreaty of his intimate friends and, inspired by the Spirit, composed a **spiritual Gospel**" (emphasis mine).

Merrill F. Unger has described John's great book as "the deepest and most wonderful book in the New Testament," observing that "in one sense of the word it is simple, direct...yet, in another respect, it is a sublimely profound revelation, fathomed only by the deeply spiritual scholar." Church historian, Philip Schaff, called this gospel "the most important literary production ever composed." I am not qualified to be mentioned in the same paragraph with Unger and Schaff; however, for whatever it may be worth, with the possible exception of Genesis, I consider John's Gospel to be the most important book ever written. In fact, in terms of providing a window into the spiritual realm, from eternity past to eternity future, and the triune nature of God, Chapters 14-17 would probably qualify for this distinction, without the rest of the book.

A. Author. As in the case of the other three gospels, the human author does not identify himself. Unbroken tradition, however, since ancient times, identifies the author as "John the elder," or "John the apostle." He is also referred to as "John the beloved," and his book is sometimes called "the gospel of love." His authorship of his gospel, and the circumstances of his writing it, are also included in the Muratorian Canon (also called the "Muratorian Fragment" because the first part is missing), ca 170 AD, the earliest known listing of New Testament books⁴.

He was the son of Zebedee, and brother of James; he and James were, like their father, prosperous fishermen (they had servants who worked for them), and were partners in fishing with Peter⁵. Like Mark, John seems to give us a not-too-subtle hint at his identity, five times calling himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and "the one who leaned on Jesus' bosom (shoulder/chest)" at the last Passover supper⁶.

³ Note that Clement was quoting still-earlier (1st Century) sources.

⁴ For a refresher on the Muratorian Canon see "The Muratorian Canon (Muratorian Fragment)" in the Introduction to the New Testament.

⁵ See in this regard Mark 1:20; Lk 5:10.

⁶ See in this regard John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20.

It is probable that John was first a disciple of John the Baptist, then one of the first 5 disciples of Jesus (the unnamed "other" disciple with Andrew in 1:35-42). He was apparently a man of some means (Mark 1:20; John 19:27). Jesus gave him and his brother James the title, "sons of thunder"; he must have been a zealous, dynamic believer, as well as a deeply spiritual man.

After the crucifixion of Jesus John lived in Jerusalem and cared for Mary until her death, the date of which is not known. It is generally believed that, after Mary's death, and probably following the martyrdom of Paul and Peter in Rome, John moved to Ephesus, ca 68-69 AD. He lived and ministered there for the rest of his life (about 30 years), except for about a year of exile on the island of Patmos, late in his life, 95-96 AD.

NOTE: John probably wrote his gospel originally in Hebrew, while living in Jerusalem, with Mary in his home⁷. It is generally believed that he moved to Ephesus after the martyrdom of Paul and Peter (AD 68 or 69), in order to assume the leadership of the churches of Asia Minor. Ephesus was the center of Paul's area of ministry, and was the geographic center of the Church at the time. We know that his move to Ephesus was after 63 AD, for he is not mentioned in Paul's farewell meeting with the elders from Ephesus on the return leg of his 3rd missionary journey; and, in that meeting, Paul speaks with the authority of the overseer⁸. It was there that he wrote the Greek version of his gospel and his three epistles. He wrote Revelation either on Patmos (where he received the revelation), or after his return to Ephesus. His was the voice of the last of the original apostles to be silenced by death; and, during those closing decades of the 1st Century, his was the dominant voice. According to Philip Schaff, "If it were not for the writings of John, the last 30 years of the First Century would be almost an entire blank⁹."

John was clearly one of the "inner circle" of the apostles (along with his brother James, and Peter). These three were chosen by Jesus to accompany Him at the transfiguration; and, during the prayer vigil in Gethsemane, Jesus stationed these three at a position closer to Him than the other eight¹⁰. And, of these three, John seems to have been the closest to Jesus. It was to John that Jesus, from the cross, committed the care of his mother, Mary, who apparently lived out the rest of her life in John's home in Jerusalem. It could be safely said that John was the closest friend Jesus had on Earth; who better, then, to write the final Gospel, the "wrap-

⁷ I cannot imagine a more perfect combination of sources for the wonderful story of the life and ministry of Jesus. Would it not be wonderful to have been a silent listener to their conversations?

⁸ See in this regard Acts 20:17-38.

⁹ Schaff, Philip: "History of the Christian Church," Volume I, p 426.

¹⁰ Mark 14:32-34.

up" of the Biography of the Ages, and in its cosmic context? He spent at least one of the last years of his life in exile on the Greek island, Patmos, during the persecutions of Domitian¹¹. He was released from Patmos upon the death of Domitian (AD 96) and returned to Ephesus where he died during the reign of Emperor Trajan, whose reign began AD 98¹².

Traditions Concerning John's Later Life. Outside of his epistles little is known for sure of John's life after the close of The Acts of the Apostles, except for his exile on Patmos. There are, however, extra-scriptural traditions concerning the rest of his life, of which I will mention only two.

(1) During the persecution under Nero, he is supposed to have been arrested, taken to Rome and thrown into boiling oil. When the boiling oil did him no harm, he was released.

(2) At the very end of his life, at about age 100, when he no longer had the capacity to work or teach--even to walk, and sensing that his death was near, he directed disciples to carry him to an assembly of believers. In a feeble voice he spoke his final message to the Church: "Little children, love one another." I like this one, and am inclined to believe it.

B. Place and Date. The Greek version of John's wonderful book (the version that we now have) was probably written late in his life, ca 80-90 AD. It is likely, however, that he wrote his Gospel much earlier, in Hebrew, while living in Jerusalem, with Mary in his home, and then rewrote it in Greek, many years later. At any rate, this Greek version is the one from which all subsequent manuscripts have descended. It was in Ephesus that he wrote this book, as well as his three epistles. As we shall see when we study Revelation, he probably also wrote that final book of the Bible in Ephesus, after his return from Patmos¹³.

C. Purpose. John's purpose is clearly stated as he summarizes in Chapter 20, verse 31: "But these [things] are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

D. Theme. John's primary theme is the divinity of Jesus the Christ; for this reason John is the most vehemently attacked by those skeptics, heretics and humanists who reject the divinity of Christ.

His secondary theme, woven throughout the primary one, is the love of God (in Greek, *agape*). This word (in both its noun and verb forms) appears almost as many times in John as in all of the other three gospels combined. John was

¹¹ For more on the exile, see the introduction to the study guide to Revelation.

¹² Nerva succeeded Domitian, but ruled less than 2 years before dying of natural causes. Trajan succeeded Nerva.

¹³ For more on John's writing of Revelation see the introductory material to the study guide to Revelation.

definitely "the apostle of love"; and he summarizes the singular significance of this *agape* love of God in one verse of his 1st Epistle (I John 4:8)¹⁴.

E. Highlights. Highlights in the fourth gospel include the following:

1. In the Beginning. (1:1-3)

John's gospel opens just like Genesis, taking us back to Creation and the beginning of the human story. Referring to Jesus as "the Word" which he also does in his first epistle (I John 5:7), John summarizes the Creation and identifies Jesus as the Creator. This is, at best, a bit mind-boggling--an immediate plunge into Holy Mystery, in the setting of the timeless, cosmic past--and we would be wise to keep it as simple as possible. In three abrupt verses, without preamble, we are told four things about Jesus and the Godhead:

- a. that Jesus (the Word) is divine;
- b. that Jesus is eternal (was already present "in **the beginning**");
- c. that the persons of the Trinity are separate and yet one (He "**was God,**" yet He was also "**with God**");
- d. that Jesus was the agent of Creation ("All things were made by Him").

It seems that John was inspired to get these foundational facts established right out of the starting gate; and in the rest of the book he tells us how it all plays out.

NOTE: *The Bible uses two different Greek words for "word"; they are "logos" and "rhema." In this brief passage "logos" is used, and it means the expression of a thought, idea or concept, not the mere name of an object. Thus Jesus, the Christ, as the Word, is the personification and embodiment of the Word of God, all of God's counsel and plan for mankind and the Universe in which we live.*

"Rhema," on the other hand means That which is spoken or uttered in writing in the application of the logos, i.e. the part of Scripture that the Holy Spirit brings to our remembrance in time of need. For an example, and further explanation of the meaning of "rhema" as the Word, see NOTE b. following the treatment of 6:11-17, "The Whole Armor of God," in the study guide to Ephesians.

2. Jesus is Life and Light. (1:4-5)

In verses 4 and 5 John reveals two more facets of the identity of Jesus; He is introduced as "life," and as "light." Here we are told that He **is** life, and the source of life; and, we are told, this life is the light, and the source of light, for mankind. Further, we are told, this light shines in darkness (present tense--eternally), yet the darkness failed (past tense) to comprehend it.

This mixing of tenses can be difficult to understand. It seems that here John is saying that the Light (Jesus) is eternal, with no beginning or ending, therefore

¹⁴ For a refresher on the different Greek words rendered "love" in the English NT see "The Four Loves" in the Introduction to the New Testament.

always in the present tense. At the same time, he is referring to the fact that, during his earthly ministry, the Jewish leaders failed to recognize Him as Messiah and therefore did not lay hold on the redemption He wanted to give to them and to the entire Jewish nation. As we shall see when we study the book of Acts, at the birth of the Church it consisted of only 120 people¹⁵.

NOTES:

a. A key to understanding these verses is the word translated “comprehend.” The Greek word is “katalambano” and it has dual meanings: it means to recognize or understand; it also means to apprehend, seize or take something unto one’s self. In this passage it has both meanings, in that the Jewish nation failed to recognize Jesus as the awaited Messiah, and thereby they failed to take unto themselves the blessing of redemption (this will be stated clearly in v 11). This Greek word is rendered “apprehend” by Paul in Phil 3:12, where he speaks of having seized redemption for himself.

b. Later in this gospel we will find Jesus identifying Himself as light (Jn 8:12) and as life (Jn 14:6).

3. Introducing John the Baptist. (1:6-9)

In the next four verses John the Baptist is introduced as the fore-runner of Jesus, sent from God to prepare the people to receive the ministry of the Messiah. Here John takes care to make it clear that John the Baptist was not the Messiah (“the Light”); rather, he is introduced as the one whom God sent to prepare the way for the Messiah.

*NOTE: In v 9 there is an extremely interesting thing, included almost as if John were saying “Oh, yes, and incidentally...”; it isn’t even a complete sentence. Notice that here John says that “the true Light” (Jesus) lighteth (present tense) **every man** that cometh (present tense) into the world. Could it be that here, in only part of one verse, is the answer to a troubling aspect of Jesus as the only means of redemption (Jn 14:6)? One philosophical problem with the fact of Jesus as the only Redeemer is the matter of “the pigmy behind the rock whom the missionary missed.” If Jesus is the only way, and no one comes to the Father except by Him, will those who never hear of him be doomed? This is an obvious question that troubles many Christians, and one with which unbelievers readily challenge us. Here Jesus is identified as the true Light, who enlightens **every person** who comes into the world. Can this mean that, in one way or another, sooner or later, everyone will have a revelation of Jesus as the unique Redeemer and have at least one*

¹⁵ Acts 1:15.

chance to receive or reject the gift of redemption? It does seem to say that. See also in this regard I Tim 4:10.

4. A Condensed Version of the Gospels. (1:10-14)

In the next five verses of this highly condensed revelation, John summarizes the content of all four Gospels. Here we see that Jesus, the immortal, divine Creator, came from Heaven into the World He had made, and that most of the people populating his creation failed to recognize Him as such. He came to his own Jewish people and was rejected by them as a nation; yet to those individuals who did believe and receive Him, He gave the supernatural gift of becoming children of God. In verse 13 he makes it clear that the miracle of redemption is a supernatural new birth--comparable to, but not the same as, a second physical birth. And, in verse 14, he declares again the divinity of Jesus ("the Word"), and bears witness to the fact that He came in the flesh of full humanity (incarnation), not just in spirit. And, in just the latter half of verse 14, John makes it clear that he and the others who lived and ministered with Him were eyewitnesses to his supernatural glory. He is declaring his qualification (and that of the other eyewitnesses) to write the story. These five super-saturated verses are so rich in content that they must be read very carefully, or we might miss an epoch or two of human history.

NOTE: *There are two words in v 14 so important that they cannot be over-emphasized: they are "only begotten." As a consequence of being begotten by God, Jesus is of the **same substance and nature** of God, not merely created **in the image** of God, as are the rest of us. There are many heresies concerning Jesus, and one of them is that He was a created, angelic being, and not human. The matter of his being both fully divine and fully human ("very God and very man") is definitely a mystery; but it is also a vital fact; for if He did not become fully human He could not have been "in all points tempted like as we are," and yet without sin¹⁶. Had He not been fully human, He could not have qualified as the sinless Lamb of God, paying the sin debt for all the rest of us, and we would have no Redeemer. John deals with this vital concept more fully in Chapt 3, in the exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus; and it is also made very clear by Matthew and Luke. The fact that Jesus was "conceived by the Holy Ghost" is stated clearly by the original Christians in the Apostles' Creed. And, nearly 300 years later, it was important enough to assemble leaders of the entire Church at Nicea to settle it, and to emphasize in the Creed they produced that He was "begotten, not made."*

¹⁶ Hebrews 4:14-16.

And yet, most modern versions of the New Testament omit “begotten” from v 14, and from 3:16, gutting the vital fact of the divinity of Christ. I would reject those versions of the Bible on this basis alone, even if they were perfect in every other way. Never forget this: if Jesus is not God, then He is just a long-dead Jewish imposter, and you and I are lost and undone, unable to redeem ourselves, and without a Redeemer¹⁷.

5. John the Baptist Makes Some Things Clear. (1:15-18)

Now we see John the Baptist enter the scene, declaring that the one for whom he prepares the way “is preferred before me for He was before me¹⁸.” Now, we already know that John the Baptist is six months older than his cousin, Jesus, so how could Jesus have been “before” John the Baptist? It is because Jesus, as God the Son, has always existed. This is still another of John’s declarations of the divinity of Jesus. And, in verse 27, John will speak of Jesus as one who will come **after** him, speaking of the human identity of Jesus. This duality of the Christ, as both divine and human, is of vital importance, and John the apostle seems to slip it in at every opportunity.

In passing, John speaks in verse 17 of the Old and New Covenants, and in verse 18 he takes another opportunity to emphasize that Jesus is the “only begotten” son of God, expressing clearly the **uniqueness** and the **divinity** of our wonderful Messiah.

6. Religious Leaders Ask Who John Is. (1:19-28)

The Sanhedrin sends priests and Levites (of the Pharisee persuasion) out to find John and ask him who he is and what he is up to. He replies that he is not the Messiah; rather, he says, he is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy about a voice of one crying in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord¹⁹.” They then ask him, if he is not Christ, or Elijah, or “that prophet” (apparently referring to Isaiah), why is he baptizing people? John replies, somewhat cryptically, that he baptizes with water, but there is one person among them, unrecognized, who is preferred before him (more important), whose sandals John is not worthy to untie (apparently a reference to a typical task of a body servant, in untying and removing his master's sandals). This exchange takes place at Bethabara, a ford in the river Jordan, on the east bank of the River where John was baptizing²⁰.

¹⁷ Romans 3:23, 6:23.

¹⁸ See also vv1:27, 30.

¹⁹ Isaiah 40:3; Mal 3:1.

²⁰ Bethabara is Hebrew for "house of [or at] the ford. Its precise location is unknown. Some manuscripts have Bethany (house [or place] of figs) here, rather than Bethabara. But, if that is the name of the place, it cannot be the Bethany of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, where Jesus will spend so much time later, for that village is far removed from the River Jordan, within walking distance of Jerusalem. John was baptizing at the east bank of the Jordan, in the edge of the region called Perea, See Unger, Merrill F.: *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, "Bethabara," p 138.

7. Behold the Lamb of God. (1:29-34)

The next day John is again preaching and baptizing at the Jordan and he sees Jesus approaching. Prophetically, he points to Jesus and proclaims, “Behold, [there is] the [Passover] Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is He of whom I said, ‘after me cometh a man which is preferred before me, for He was before me’.” John gets a great deal said in this declaration, for he goes on to say that Jesus as the One who will baptize, not with (or in) water, but with (or in) the Holy Ghost. Not only that, but John explains how it is that he recognizes Jesus as this person. God the Father, he says, has told John that when he sees a man upon whom the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove, and remains on him, this will be the one who will baptize with (in) the Holy Ghost²¹. And, John declares, this man will be the Son of God.

NOTE: At this point (or just before this declaration by John), Jesus is baptized in the Jordan by John, the Spirit descends in the form of a dove and lights on Jesus, and the voice of the Father comes from Heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased²².” John does not record these words from God, but Matthew, Mark and Luke do. Only John, however, includes the declaration of John the Baptist that Jesus is “the Son of God,” a matter established by the words spoken by God the Father. Matthew, Mark and Luke record the words from Heaven; John records the conclusion. When we put it all together we get the complete picture: this Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Holy Ghost Baptizer, the Son of God.

8. The First Three Disciples. (1:35-42)

The following day Jesus again comes to the place where John is baptizing and, again, John declares, “Behold the Lamb of God!” Two disciples of John the Baptist are there. Jesus speaks there (presumably to his cousin John, but perhaps to all who are there); and, as Jesus leaves, John’s two disciples are attracted to this unusual man and they follow; John is apparently willing for them to go. When Jesus sees them following, He asks them whom they are seeking. In a rather strange response, they call Him rabbi (master/teacher) and ask where He lives; they are probably thinking, “We would like to hear more from this man,” and are asking where they can find him. His response is a rather veiled invitation to join Him: “Come and see.” They go with Jesus and stay with Him; it was about the 10th hour (4:00 PM), and they become the first two of the disciples of Jesus. One of

²¹ Isaiah 11:2.

²² In Mark and Luke the statement from the Father is in the second person, addressed to Jesus (“Thou art my beloved son...”). In John’s account, the Father speaks in the third person (“This is my beloved son...”). The words were spoken for our enlightenment, and for the reassurance of Jesus.

the two is Andrew, Simon Peter's brother²³. Andrew goes to Simon, tells him that they have found the Messiah, and they take him to Jesus. Jesus immediately gives Simon a new name, Cephas; and Jesus now has his first three disciples²⁴.

NOTE: Here we can see that Jesus was able to judge a man's character at first sight--perhaps a supernatural revelation. Judging from the wording of v 42, all He has been told is Simon's name (and, perhaps not even that). Immediately He gives Simon a new name, meaning a rock. As Finis Dake observed (The Dake Annotated Reference Bible), Jesus could see, without enquiry, that Peter was a man "strong in soul, and hard and unyielding in purpose." Perhaps Jesus saw in Peter what he would become; he was impulsive--a man of action; but he would be unstable and short-sighted until after Pentecost.

9. The Calling of Philip and Nathanael. (1:43-51)

The day after calling the first three disciples, Jesus decides to travel to Galilee, and He calls Philip to follow Him. Philip, a native of Bethsaida, home of Peter and Andrew, goes to find his friend Nathanael²⁵. Andrew tells Nathanael that he has found the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, but Nathanael is skeptical. He expresses what seems to have been a generally held, low opinion of Nazareth. Nevertheless, Philip takes Nathanael to meet Jesus²⁶. Upon meeting Him, the supernatural knowledge of Jesus convinces Nathanael, and he declares, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, the King of Israel." Jesus replies, in effect, "You haven't seen anything yet." Then, still speaking to Nathanael about amazing things to come, Jesus makes a strange prediction. He says that Nathaniel will see Heaven open, and "angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Jesus now has five disciples.

NOTES:

a. One of the things I love about God is the way He delights in choosing unremarkable people, those whom the natural world would never choose, to do remarkable things. It seems here that He even chose an unremarkable village, one looked down upon by its neighbors, as the place where the Messiah Redeemer would grow to manhood, and would forever be identified as "Jesus of Nazareth," or "the Nazarene."

²³ The second disciple is never identified by name, but is probably John the Apostle. John never identifies himself by name in his Gospel, and this un-named disciple is never identified otherwise.

²⁴ Cephas is Aramaic for "a stone"; the Greek equivalent is *petros*, from which we derive the English word, Peter.

²⁵ Bethsaida was a fishing village on the west bank of the Sea of Galilee, probably an extension, or suburb, of Capernaum.

²⁶ It is interesting that when Nathaniel expressed doubt that the Messiah could come from Nazareth, Andrew responded with the exact same words that Jesus had spoken to him the day before, when he had asked Jesus where He lived: "Come and see."

b. Many commentators make no attempt to explain this puzzling statement of Jesus about angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Some cross-reference it to Jacob's dream of the ladder to Heaven with angels ascending and descending upon it. This interpretation seems to fit, with Jesus as the ladder, for He was (and is still) the only connection between Heaven and Earth. Whatever the meaning of this statement, Jesus seems to be, in an oblique way, declaring his divinity here. This statement of Jesus is not recorded in any of the other gospels, but is appropriate here, for the divinity of Jesus is John's theme.

c. Nathaniel is not named as one of the twelve in the other three gospels; in fact the name appears only in John's gospel. It is almost certain that Nathaniel is the apostle also called Bartholomew, a name that does not appear anywhere in John's gospel, but does appear, as one of the apostles, in the other three. Thus, Bartholomew ("son of Thalmai") would be the surname of Nathaniel, just as Simon Peter is called Barjona ("son of Jona")²⁷.

10. Water Into Wine. (2:1-11)

The following day there is a wedding in Cana, Nathanael's hometown. Jesus is there with his first five disciples, as are his mother, his half-brothers and half-sisters; it seems to be a family affair (verse 12). A crisis arises when the wine runs out, and Mary reports this to Jesus, as if asking Him to solve the problem. His response to her seems, on its face, to be disrespectful: "Woman what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come²⁸." Mary does not answer the question; rather, as if she considers the matter already settled, she says to the waiting servants, "Whatever He saith unto you, do it²⁹." There are six stone water containers there, a supply of water for the ceremonial washing of the guests (presumably the washing of feet and hands) each holding about 20-30 gallons³⁰. Jesus, without another word, tells the servants to fill them, completely, with water; and they do. He then tells them to dip from the pots and take the sample of the water to the governor of the feast (we might call him the master of ceremonies);

²⁷ In Hebrew, "bar" means "son of." For the reasoning concerning the identity of Nathaniel of John's gospel as the Bartholomew of the other three gospels, see *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, "Nathaniel," p 778, and Lockyer's *All the men of the Bible*, "Nathaniel," p 253. For a full listing in the gospels and Acts see "The Twelve Original Apostles" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

²⁸ For an interesting interpretation of this response to Mary see "woman" in W.E. Vine, "An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words." He sees the exchange as one of confidential endearment; at this point only Mary and Jesus know his true identity and what lies ahead on his path to Calvary. See also Jn 4:21 and 19:26; in both places Jesus speaks the word lovingly.

²⁹ These are the Bible's last recorded words of Mary; they are excellent advice for all of us, for all of life. What a different world this would be if everyone obeyed these words!

³⁰ A firkin is a Middle English unit of measure equaling 9 or 10 gallons. For simplicity's sake let's use 10. Thus "two or three" of these would mean approximately 20-30 gallons per jar. Six jars would contain a total of 120-180 gallons of wine. That is a lot of wine, and it suggests a very large crowd of wedding guests.

they do, and the water has become wine. The governor of the feast, not realizing that the wine is miraculous (although the servants know this--they saw it happen), tastes it to see if it is good enough for the guests. He is amazed! He says, correctly, that most hosts will serve good wine at first, but later, after the guests have consumed quite a bit, he serves cheaper wine, for the guests won't notice. But, he says to the bridegroom (host) as a compliment, that he is serving the best wine toward the end of the feast. This is the first of the recorded miracles performed by Jesus, and his five new disciples are even more certain that they have made the right decision.

NOTES:

a. Cana was probably what is today the Christian village of Kenna, north of Nazareth. There are springs with ample water there, and many fig trees (Jesus had seen Nathaniel there the day before, sitting under a fig tree). It has been identified as the ancient Cana since before the Crusades (which began in the 11th Century). Cana is identified as Nathaniel's home town in 21:5, where he appears as one of the five apostles fishing unsuccessfully until visited by the resurrected Jesus.

b. It appears that Joseph was not present at the wedding. The half-siblings of Jesus are not mentioned here; but the following verse (v 12) tells us that they were present, for the next day Mary, the half-siblings, Jesus and his disciples, travel to Capernaum and stay there a few days. There is no mention of Joseph. Another indication that Joseph is not present at the wedding is that, when the wine crisis arises, it is Mary who acts. This leadership role would normally be assumed by the father--not the mother. Joseph may have remained in Nazareth to work at his trade, or to take care of the home and the animals. Most commentators interpret this to mean that by this time Joseph has died. The wording of Jn 6:42, however, suggests that Joseph was still alive after the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus' walk across the Sea of Galilee. We shall consider this possibility in the study of Chapt 6.

c. I love the fact that the Bible is so earthy and true to life. In my pre-Christian life, I knew a man who, at the beginning of a party would serve expensive whiskey to his guests. He also kept on hand a supply of cheap Club Special whiskey, and empty Jack Daniels, black label bottles. Later in the party, when the guests had consumed quite a bit, he would serve cheap Club Special in Jack Daniels, black label bottles; and no one ever noticed. People don't change, then or now, until changed by the Holy Spirit.

11. Down to Capernaum. (2:12)

After the wedding Jesus, his mother, his half-siblings and his first five disciples make the relatively short trip to the Sea of Galilee and the city of Capernaum.

Capernaum will become the de facto base of operations of the earthly ministry of Jesus, and will be the locale of many of his miracles. Bethsaida, hometown of a number of his disciples is nearby; it was a fishing village, and probably a “suburb” on the south side of Capernaum. They stayed there “not many days.” Since we are not told the purpose of the visit, and since they all went together, it seems to have been a social occasion, probably a continuation of the wedding feast at Cana.

NOTES:

a. They went “down to Capernaum.” It was not a trip in a southerly direction; rather they went “down” in the sense that the seashore is 700 feet lower in elevation than the area around Cana. If we wonder why they spoke of traveling “up to Jerusalem” and “down to Capernaum,” we must remember that they traveled almost exclusively on foot. Thus they were very much aware of the difference between hills to climb and descents to make.

b. This little one-verse paragraph fascinates me. It seems unnecessary, an uneventful few days between the wedding with its miraculous wine, and Jesus’ trip to Jerusalem and the first cleansing of the Temple. It seems that John, the gospel writer with the deepest sense of the divinity of Jesus, is making an important point about the human side of his dual nature. He wants to remind us that Jesus was not a strange, un-approachable, “holy man”; rather, He was an entirely human, sociable man who grew up in a large and loving family, with many friends and relatives whom He enjoyed.

12. Up to Jerusalem. (2:13-25)

It is Spring, the time for Passover is approaching, and Jesus goes up to Jerusalem, accompanied by his disciples. This is the beginning of his ministry in Judea³¹. Entering the Temple He is greatly offended by the presence of the moneychangers and livestock for sale. He makes a scourge, and gets very physical³². He drives the livestock out of the Temple, drives the livestock dealers out with their animals, drives the money changers out, overturns their tables, and dumps their money on the floor. This is definitely not “gentle Jesus, meek and mild.” His disciples, probably wide-eyed in amazement, are reminded of a passage from Psalm 69: “...the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up...” He confronts the dove dealers and orders them to get out also, saying, “Don’t make my Father’s house a marketplace!” The priests, Levites and other officials in the Temple must be shocked into inaction by his outburst, because they don’t call for

³¹ This ministry in Judaea at the beginning of his earthly ministry, and the first cleansing of the Temple, are not recorded in the other three gospels.

³² A scourge is a whip with a wooden handle and several thongs of rawhide or rope. The thongs are usually knotted, with bits of iron or stone in the knots. It is a whip that was used in lawful punishment under the Romans or for torture--a very serious whip, designed to tear the skin and underlying soft tissue.

the Temple police or Roman soldiers to come and put down this one-man riot. Instead, they merely ask Him what authority He has to do these things. His answer is cryptic, leaving them even more confused: He says "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." They are understandably confused, thinking about the 46 years it took to build the Temple; but Jesus is speaking of his death and resurrection three years hence. He doesn't bother to explain, but when that time comes his disciples will remember what he had said and will understand³³.

Jesus performs many miracles during his Passover visit to Jerusalem, and many become believers; but He is careful not to declare himself to the multitudes for he understands human nature, and they are not ready to hear that He is the Messiah. The time for that will not come for three more years.

NOTES:

a. Many commentators believe that there was just one occasion in which Jesus cleansed the Temple. However, here the cleansing takes place at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, and there are doves, sheep and cattle for sale in the Temple. In the accounts in Matthew (Matt 21:12-13), Mark' (Mk 11:15-19), and Luke (Lk 19:45-48) the cleansing takes place at the end of the ministry of Jesus. By the time of the second cleansing, in the three intervening years, the corruption has eased back into the Temple, and there are moneychangers and dove dealers there (according to Matthew and Mark); but sheep and cattle have not been moved back in.

b. Actually the Second Temple, built by Zerubbabel after the return from the Babylonian-Persian captivity, was not entirely torn down and replaced by Herod. His massive enlargement of it, however, which took place over a period of 46 years, was so vast as to be almost a replacement. Thus it is often referred to as "Herod's Temple." Although some erroneously refer to it as a third temple, Herod himself said that it was only an enlargement, and further beautification, of that built by Zerubbabel. In fact, some further additions were added to it after Herod's death, by his successors. The Bible tells us very little about the Second Temple, and Herod's vast enlargement of it; our principal sources are Josephus and the Talmud. We do know that the Holy of Holies was empty, with only a stone where the Ark of the Covenant had once sat, and where the High Priest performed his duties once annually on the Day of Atonement. For more on this see Unger's Bible Dictionary, "Temple," pp 1079-1080.

13. Ye Must Be Born Again. (3:1-21)

There must have been intense discussions concerning Jesus among the religious leaders by this time for one of them, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, comes to see

³³ Luke 24:6-8.

Jesus at night. His arrival time suggests that he is anxious to get some answers, but does not want to be seen talking with Jesus; he has probably parked his chariot a block or two down the street. Is he spiritually hungry, and somehow attracted to Jesus? Or has he been sent over by the High Priest as a spy? The facts that he has come at night, and seems receptive rather than argumentative, suggest the former. As usual with the religious aristocracy, Nicodemus opens the exchange with lavish flattery. Such flattery by the hostile is intended to catch Jesus off guard; in this case, however, Nicodemus is probably just being polite--in the language of the American South, he was just "minding his manners." Ignoring this, and without preamble or explanation, Jesus tells him that unless a man is born again he cannot see and experience the Kingdom of God; it will be unapproachable and closed to him. Nicodemus, undoubtedly wondering how they had gotten to this point in the conversation, and having no idea what Jesus is talking about, asks Him to explain how a man can re-enter his mother's womb and be born a second time³⁴. Jesus, again omitting preliminaries and going to the conclusion, tells him that unless a man is born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God³⁵. Continuing, Jesus begins to explain: He makes it clear that the second birth of which He speaks is a spiritual birth--not a physical one. Using the imperative ("ye **must** be born again") Jesus continues, making it clear that this new birth is essential and that it is spiritual--not something one can see. Like the wind, He says, we can see the results of it, but cannot see it or know from whence it comes.

At this point Nicodemus, apparently trying to understand, asks Jesus to explain. In response Jesus chides him for failing to see the truth; and then He unloads on Nicodemus a condensed declaration of His own divine identity, his having come from Heaven, God's plan of salvation for lost mankind, his uniqueness as Redeemer, the evil nature of man, and the prediction that most will reject Him and his gift of redemption. At this point Nicodemus' head must be swimming; but, whatever his response to this barrage of cosmic revelation, it is not recorded.

The words of Jesus were not lost on Nicodemus, however, for we will see him later, advising caution to the Sanhedrin about condemning Jesus without a hearing, and, with Joseph of Arimathaea, recovering the body of Jesus, preparing the body

³⁴ When I read this exchange, the questioning reply of Nicodemus seems sincere; it reminds me of the questioning reply of Mary to Gabriel when he told her that she would conceive a child--not doubting, rather just sincerely trying to understand a thing that makes no sense to him.

³⁵ Some commentators believe that when Jesus says "born of water" He is speaking of water baptism. Others believe that, since the context of the statement is obviously of natural childbirth, He is referring to amniotic fluid, the fluid in which the baby floats within the womb before it is born--the "water" which breaks just before birth and lubricates the birth canal.

with expensive spices, and burying Him. It seems extremely likely that we will see both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea in Heaven.

NOTES:

*a. It is not insignificant that, in this summary of foundational absolute truth, it is made clear that Jesus is the “only **begotten**” Son of God. This is a proclamation of a vital matter, one apparently lost on the translators and editors of most modern Bible versions, for they omit “begotten,” and substitute such vapid terms as “one and only son,” and “only son.” God has tens of millions of sons (and daughters), born into the family of God through that new birth that Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus; but He has **only one “begotten”** Son--there has never been another, and there will never be another. To dilute or down-play this vital distinction is to dilute or down-play the case for the **divinity** of that only begotten Son; and that, dear ones, is dangerous blasphemy.*

This point is so vitally important that the entire Church, World-wide, gathered to settle it in a series of councils at Nicaea, beginning in 325 AD, summarizing the point in a creed, with added emphasis, declaring Christ Jesus to be, “the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds...begotten, not made....” The Church Fathers thought the point so important that they used the word, “begotten” three times in the statement!

b. The use of the present tense (“is”) in v 13 seems strange, for it appears that Jesus is saying that He is, at this moment, in Heaven; yet He is clearly in a house in the Jerusalem area, receiving Nicodemus as a visitor. There are two possible explanations: (1) it may mean that the true home of Jesus was at that moment, always has been, and forever will be, in Heaven; or (2) it may be that the conversation with Nicodemus ends with v 12, and that the words concerning Jesus in vv 13-21 were added by John, as an inspired revelation, quoting words spoken to him by Jesus and placed in this context in his Gospel account. Thus it is possible that, in “red letter” editions of the Bible, vv 13-21 should not be in red.

14. He Must Increase but I Must Decrease. (3:22-36)

After this visit from Nicodemus Jesus and his disciples travel through the Judean countryside, and growing numbers of people come to Him to be baptized. John the Baptist is in the same area, preaching and baptizing, west of the Jordan River, “because there [is] much water there,” in the vicinity of Aenon and Salim³⁶. The Jewish religious leaders are there, and some of John's disciples are discussing ceremonial cleansing with them. John's disciples are aware that Jesus and his disciples are in the vicinity, also baptizing people, and that many more people are

³⁶ The exact location is uncertain. The name “Salim” means “peaceful”; it must have been a pleasant place, with abundant water for baptizing.

coming to Him than are coming to to John. They report this to John, seemingly troubled by it. In response John prophesies, saying that this is God's plan, that Jesus is the Messiah sent from God, and that he, John, is only there to prepare the way for Him. He says that Jesus speaks the very words of God, for God has given Him the fullness (a limitless supply) of the Holy Spirit. John's joy, therefore, is to see the growing ministry and success of Jesus, in the same way that a friend of a bridegroom rejoices at the happiness of the bridegroom. It is now time for the ministry of John to fade away, having completed the work of preparing the way for Jesus. He sums up this concept by saying "He must increase, but I must decrease."

In summary (v 36) John declares the unique position of Jesus as divine Redeemer, having come from Heaven, using words very similar to those spoken in v 18.

NOTE: It is seems to be clear that John the Baptist (and the disciples of Jesus) baptized by immersion, for the Greek verb invariably rendered "baptize" (baptizing, baptized) is a form of the verb "baptizo", meaning to plunge under (as in plunging material into a vat of dye), to dip, or to overwhelm. The Greek historian and biographer, Plutarch, used the word as in dipping a cup of wine from a vat; Plato used it, metaphorically, to express being overwhelmed with questions. The Greek verb, "baptizo," is derived from the noun "baptisma," a process of submersion and emergence. Interpretation of these words, of course, has great significance in choosing modes of baptism. Some scholars, who reject immersion and prefer sprinkling or pouring, interpret the words as forms of "being in close contact." The context here, however, seems clearly to imply immersion, for otherwise there would be no need for, or significance of, a place with "much water" (v 23).

Also to be considered here is the fact that in both Matthew's and Mark's accounts of the baptism of Jesus by John, Jesus came "up out of the water" (Matt 3:16; Mk 1:10)³⁷. And, in Acts 8:39 we see Philip and the newly redeemed Ethiopian eunuch, after the eunuch's baptism, coming "up out of the water." These accounts seem to say that the baptism of Jesus, and that of the eunuch, were by immersion. However, the phrase, "up out of the water" could mean wading to the bank and climbing out of the river. In the case of the eunuch we don't know what the body of water was, except that it was of sufficient depth that he and Philip "went down into the water" for the baptizing. More evidence is found in Romans 6 where, in vv 1-7, Paul writes of the baptism of believers as entering into the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. In v 4 he says that we are "buried" in the water, and then "raised up" as was Christ ; and in v 5 he says that we are "planted" in the

³⁷ Luke and John wrote of Jesus' baptism but did not describe it.

likeness of the burial of Christ, and resurrected (from the watery "grave") in the likeness of his resurrection.

We cannot be certain that Jesus baptized anyone, but v 22 seems to say that He did. Also, the wording of 4:2 ("...though Jesus Himself baptized not, but his disciples") can be taken to mean that Jesus did baptize his (closest) disciples. This verse could also be taken to mean that his disciples did all of the baptizing.

The differences of opinion concerning immersion, sprinkling and pouring as proper modes of baptism will probably not be settled until the Lord returns. Concerning the ministries of John the Baptist, Jesus and his disciples, however, the evidence seems to be heavily weighted in favor of immersion.

15. The Woman at the Well. (4:1-26)

Jesus, knowing of the interest (and potential interference) of the Pharisees in his rapidly growing ministry, decides to leave Judea and take his ministry to the region of Galilee³⁸. To reach Galilee it is necessary for Jesus and his disciples to travel through Samaria. They reach the vicinity of Sychar about noon ("the sixth hour"), Jesus stops at Jacob's well, and the disciples go on into the town to buy food³⁹.

Weary from the journey, Jesus rests, sitting on the wall around the well. A Samaritan woman comes to draw water from the well and Jesus asks her for a drink. The woman is taken aback, asking why He is speaking to her, for Jews have no dealings with Samaritans (whom they considered to be unclean spiritual and cultural mongrels)⁴⁰. Jesus, as He so often did, answers her with words that she cannot possibly understand; he seems to have done this to make people think, and to test their sincerity. He tells her that if she only knew his true identity she would ask Him to give her "living water." She, of course, does not understand (who would?), and points out that He has no bucket and rope for drawing water from a well⁴¹. Jesus replies that those who drink the water from this well will thirst again; however, He says, those who drink the (supernatural) water that He can provide will never thirst again. In fact, He tells her, this living water, once drunk, will become a well of water flowing out of her and bringing everlasting life.

³⁸ It is likely that Jesus knows that his growing ministry will become a threat to the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin, and that they might interfere with his life and ministry prematurely. In Galilee, far removed from Jerusalem, his ministry will be much less brought to the attention of the religious leaders and they will be much less likely to interfere.

³⁹ Ancient Sychar is identified with the village of Askar, about two miles northeast of modern Nablus, and about 1/2 mile north of Jacob's well.

⁴⁰ Jews could enter into business transactions with Samaritans, but could have no social interaction with them. They were the descendants of scattered Jews, left behind when the Assyrians carried the Northern Kingdom away into captivity, and the Assyrians who had been sent into the area to repopulate the land. They worshipped YHWH, but recognized only the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) as inspired.

⁴¹ Jacob's well is dug from solid rock. It is 12 feet across, 105 feet deep, and the water surface is 90 feet below ground level.

Not understanding at all, she doesn't even ask Him to explain; it sounds great to her and, in child-like sincerity, she says that she would like nothing better than to receive this water that will satisfy her thirst forever, and free her from having to come to Jacob's well to draw and carry water. It all sounds great to her!

At this point Jesus tells her to go get her husband and return with him (He is setting her up). She replies that she has no husband, and Jesus tells her that she has spoken truly; in fact, He says, she has had five husbands and the man she is now living with is not her husband. She is amazed at his supernatural knowledge of her past life (and undoubtedly uncomfortable). She says that he must be a prophet, and then hastens to change the subject. She says that Samaritans believe that worshiping must be done on Mount Gerazim (in Samaria), but Jews believe that Jerusalem is where people should worship; by implication she is asking Him which is correct. In his reply (vv 21-24) Jesus establishes five important principles: (1) She doesn't realize it but she is living in the beginning of an entirely new era in which worship will no longer be restricted to one holy place; instead, people will worship wherever they are; (2) God's plan of redemption for fallen man is revealed only to and through the Jewish people; (3) in this new era true worship will be spiritual--not by the offering of animals and other material things as sacrifices; (4) God desires spiritual worship; and (5) God is a Spirit. She doesn't understand, but says that she is aware of the coming of a Messiah who will reveal all things. Looking into her eyes, Jesus says plainly that she is looking at the Messiah.

NOTE: Notice in v 26 that, in the reply of Jesus, "he" is in italics. What He really said was, "I that speaketh unto thee am." Both Samaritans, and Jews, were well aware of the significance of "I am." By her silence at this she seems to understand and believe that He is divine.

16. Rushing to Town with Good News. (4:27-30)

At this time the disciples return with food and are amazed that Jesus is conversing with a Samaritan. But this is a woman of decision and action! Convinced that she has met the Messiah, she heads for town to share the good news, leaving her essential, and valuable, water-drawing equipment behind as if they are unimportant. Had not Jesus and his disciples been there, it would almost certainly have been stolen while she was gone, but she is too excited to care. In town she rushes to tell the men that she has met a man with supernatural knowledge, and she believes Him to be the Messiah; apparently convinced, the men return with her to the well⁴².

⁴² It is interesting that she declared her good news to the men of the town. Because of the way she has apparently lived, she would know many of the men; and, for the same reason, most of the women would probably not be receptive to what she said, or to being seen with her.

17. Spiritual Food and a Spiritual Harvest. (4:31-38)

While the woman is in town declaring the good news, the disciples urge Jesus to eat some of the food that they had purchased in town; that, after all, is why He had sent them to town. Jesus, as He often does, replies mystically, speaking deep truth; but, as usual, his reply is utterly bewildering to his disciples. He says that He has food that they don't know about. Very naturally, they wonder if someone else has brought him food. Explaining (but surely not to their satisfaction), Jesus says that his food is "to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish his work." Going on, He speaks metaphorically of multitudes of lost people, ready to hear the good news of redemption. He compares them with fields of grain, ready to be harvested, and speaks of the fact that God sends workers into the fields in waves. He tells them that some are sent to sow the seed, and others are sent to do the actual reaping, but both will be rewarded and rejoice in the results. We know that He is speaking of spiritual harvest, for it is gathered "unto life eternal" (verse 36); but his disciples must have been struggling to understand his meaning.

NOTE: Verse 38 requires some thought. Jesus tells his disciples that they are reaping a crop that other men have sowed; but these are Samaritans, and Jews have no social intercourse with them, so how could other men have been sent there to sow the seeds of the gospel? Does He speak of John the Baptist and his disciples? Perhaps--but there is no record of it. Jesus may be referring to the prophets that God had sent to the northern Kingdom of Israel, many centuries earlier. These Samaritans are the remnant of that kingdom, albeit "half breeds," having intermarried with Canaanites, Assyrians and other heathens brought there by conquerors, from the time of the captivity, 700 years earlier (and probably before that). Also, in the years following the return from captivity, many Jews settled in the tribal areas of their ancestors, increasing the Jewish component in that mixed population. Although the Northern Kingdom, born in paganism, and with wicked sovereigns like Ahab and Jezebel, never repented, God had sent prophets there, including Elijah and Elisha. Perhaps this is what Jesus means about those who had earlier sowed the seeds of redemption here.

18. A Two-Day Harvest in Samaria. (4:39-42)

The Samaritan woman, who seems to have become an "instant evangelist," has spread the good news among the men of that town and they have believed. Then, returning with her and seeing Jesus for themselves, they beg him to stay and teach them. He stays there for two precious days, teaching and preaching, and many more believe on Him. Excited and fulfilled, the newly redeemed Samaritans declare, to the woman who first told them of Him, that they first believed because of her testimony, i.e. that Jesus is the Messiah, and of his supernatural knowledge.

"But now," they say in effect, "we have something even better: we have the truly transforming reality, for now we have experienced Him for ourselves."

NOTES:

a. It is wonderful to see how Jesus loved the outcasts and the lowly, how He reached out to them, and how readily they received Him and his message!

b. In v 42 there is expressed a vital principle: that redemption/salvation is an entirely individual and personal matter. God has no spiritual grandchildren--only children. Like the Samaritan men above, each of us, to be redeemed, must make that decision personally and experience Him for ourselves.

c. It appears that Jesus here sowed the seeds for the great revival in Samaria that will come a few years later, under the preaching of Philip (Acts 8).

19. A Second Miracle in Cana. (4:43-54)

After two days of ministry in Samaria, Jesus goes on to Galilee. Word of his miraculous ministry is already spreading there, for many Galileans who had seen Him, or heard of him, while in Judea for Pentecost, have returned to Galilee and are excited. Returning to Cana, where He had performed his first miracle, He is met by a distressed nobleman. The man has a son in Capernaum, sick and dying, and he begs Jesus to go to Capernaum and heal him. Jesus responds in his usual cryptic way, challenging the sincerity of the man. Ignoring the diversion in Jesus' reply, and single-minded, the man repeats his plea, demonstrating his sincerity and his belief in the validity of Jesus. Jesus, apparently satisfied, replies simply that the sick boy is already healed, the man believes Him, and he starts for home. As the nobleman travels back to Capernaum he is met by a servant who tells him that the boy is healed. When the nobleman asks when the fever broke, the servant tells him it broke in the seventh hour (1:00 PM), the very time that Jesus had told him that the boy is healed. The nobleman and his entire household (family and servants) become believers.

NOTE: *This "certain nobleman" was almost certainly the centurion of Lk 7:1-10, a proselyte (convert) to Judaism who, at his own expense, built a synagogue at Capernaum. The ruins of a synagogue, dating from the 3rd or 4th Century AD, have been uncovered at Capernaum. It was built of white limestone brought from distant quarries. It was elaborate, with ornate carvings.*

Beneath it, the floor of a 1st Century synagogue, built of local black basalt, has been discovered; this is probably the floor of the synagogue, built by the centurion, and the place where Jesus taught.

20. Take Up Thy Bed and Walk. (5:1-9)

Soon after this healing at Cana, Jesus returns to Jerusalem. In the city, near the sheep market, there is a pool called Bethesda ("house of mercy or grace"); the pool is surrounded by five arched porches, or porticos, roofed enclosures facing the

pool. There are many crippled, blind and otherwise disabled people lying in those porches, hoping to be healed. There is a belief among the afflicted people that an angel comes periodically, apparently unseen, and stirs the water. The first one who enters the water after the stirring, they believe, will be healed.

On a Sabbath day Jesus goes to the pool and there He speaks with a man, one who has been crippled for 38 years, lying on a pallet. As he so often did, he asks this man if he would like to be made whole (it was his way to require the potential recipient of his touch to declare, out loud, his desire to be changed). The man, probably thinking that he had just been asked a ridiculous question, tells Jesus that he does want to be healed, but that he has no one to help him into the pool when the waters are troubled⁴³. With no further discussion, Jesus tells him to pick up his bed and walk. The man is instantly healed; he picks up his pallet and walks, supposedly toward his home.

NOTES:

a. Matthew Henry suggests that this opportunity for healing occurred only at certain times, probably during the feasts.

b. It is interesting to speculate concerning the purpose of this admittedly strange provision for healing. After the closing of the OT Canon God sent no more anointed prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, to bring healing to the people. Perhaps this tiny, imperfect-but-gracious opportunity for healing represented a thin line of promise, a connection with God's mercy, between the OT provision and the awaited Messiah. This is only speculation, but it would say to the people that God had not abandoned them, and the Messiah, with healing for all, is yet to come.

c. The modern versions omit the last seven words of v 3 and all of v 4; or they enclose them with brackets and use footnotes to declare them invalid. And yet, they include v 7, which makes absolutely no sense without the complete v 2 and v 3. The great majority of manuscripts include all of v 3 and v 4, without brackets or other disclaimers. Characteristically, Mrs. Siewert, in her Amplified Bible, although working from the Westcott/Hort family of manuscripts, includes the last seven words of v 3 and all of v 4, as in the AV; but they are in italics, for they are not there in the Greek text from which she worked.

*d. In 1888, during repairs to St. Anne's Church (4th Century), in the Bethesda quarter of Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate, a pool was found under the crypt. It has a five-arched portico, and faded frescoes **depicting this healing**⁴⁴.*

21. Angry Rabbis and a Word of Advice. (5:10-16)

⁴³ The man's words concerning his desire to be healed are not recorded. He may have thought it unnecessary to state the obvious, but his desire, and his sincerity are clearly expressed by implication.

⁴⁴ Unger, Merrill F.: Unger's Bible Dictionary, *Bethesda*, pp 139-140.

Jewish Leaders see the man carrying his pallet and rebuke him for "carrying a burden" on the Sabbath. He answers them saying, simply, that the one who had healed him told him to take up his bed and walk. They demand to know who has done this unlawful thing, but the man doesn't know, and Jesus has disappeared into the crowd. Later, Jesus finds the man in the Temple, where he almost certainly has gone to give thanks for his healing. He has apparently cared enough to seek the man out to give him some interesting advice. Jesus tells the man that, now that he is healed, he must sin no more, or another affliction may come upon him, one worse than that of which he has just been healed⁴⁵. Now the man knows who healed him, and he tells the Jewish leaders who healed him and told him to take up his bed and walk. The leaders then confront Jesus, so furious that they want to kill him.

*NOTE: In the remaining 31 verses of Chapter 5, Jesus responds to the hostile attitude of the Jewish leaders with a long and rich declaration concerning his divinity (this **really** sets them off), his relationship with the Father, the place of John the Baptist in all this, and their rejection of John and of Him. He challenges them to search the Scriptures, saying that, if they do, they will find that they speak of Him. He knows their true nature, He says, and the love of God is not in them (an understatement). The Law of Moses (concerning which, they take great pride in their vast knowledge), speaks of Him, Jesus says, and Moses therefore condemns them, because they do not believe it. This high-intensity, super-saturated, declaration of absolute truth is an amazing revelation of eternal things, and we are grateful for it.*

The reaction of the religious leaders to this amazing summary of messianic truth is not recorded; but we may safely assume that He left them in glassy eyed bewilderment, and fury.

22. Bread, Manna and Spiritual Blindness. (6:22-34)

Jesus has crossed the Sea of Galilee, fed the 5,000 (the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four gospel accounts) and has walked across the water to the middle of the sea, as his disciples went by boat. Catching up with them at mid-sea in a storm, he has entered the boat and it was "immediately" at Capernaum on the western shore (apparently another miracle). These events are fully described in Matthew's account (with cross-references to Mark, Luke and John), and will not be repeated here⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ It seems that we can bring on our physical and emotional sickness by sinful living; and, once set free by Jesus, to return to that destructive way of living can leave us in a worse condition than before we were set free (Matt 12:43-45).

⁴⁶ Only here in John's account are we told that, after the miraculous feeding of the multitude, the crowd wanted to make Him a king. Jesus wisely fled the scene and waited in a secret place until the disciples had departed and night

We begin here with Jesus and his disciples the following morning, on the west side of the sea, in the vicinity of Bethsaida and Capernaum. When the multitude He had fed the evening before think about the fact that they had seen the disciples take their only boat and depart for the other side, and that Jesus is nowhere to be found, many of them "take shipping" to the west side of the sea⁴⁷. After crossing the sea and finding Jesus teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum, they ask Him how he got there. As usual, He doesn't answer their question; instead, he cuts through all preliminaries and makes an important point: He tells them that the real reason that they have followed Him, beyond their curiosity, is to get more free food. Without waiting for a reply from them He launches into lessons about the temporal and the eternal, challenging them to seek spiritual food, which will never perish⁴⁸. Missing the point entirely, they ask Him how they can perform miracles (perhaps centering on creating free food). Graciously, He ignores their shallow thinking and answers that the work of God for them is to believe on Him whom God has sent, i.e. Himself. Again they miss the point completely, and ask him to perform another miracle (as a clue as to what is really on their minds--breakfast--they mention the manna that Moses gave their ancestors in the wilderness). He tells them that it was God who gave them the manna, not Moses, and that God has sent down from Heaven the true bread, a Man who has come to give life to the world. They, not understanding at all; but, responding to what sounds like a good deal, they say "we'll take it--and on a continuing basis."

***NOTE:** We may marvel at the blindness of these (and all such) people, and wonder how they could fail to understand! At times we may want to shout, "You blind fools!!! Can't you see what He is trying to show you?" But then we must remember what John has written in 1:1-5 about the non-comprehension of the darkness. We must also remember that his own disciples never really understood until they were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; and, without the help of the Holy Spirit, neither can we.*

23. I Am the Bread of Life. (6:35-52)

Then, in the plainest words possible, Jesus says that He is that bread of life, and that all who truly come to Him will never again hunger or thirst. He follows this with some foundational eternal truth about conviction and redemption: (a) only the Father can draw people to Jesus, i.e. cause them to know their need of Him and

had fallen. Only after the crowd had dispersed did He follow his disciples, they in the boat and He walking on the water (6:15-21).

⁴⁷ Surely all of that multitude didn't cross the sea to find Jesus; it would have required the shipping of an amphibious task force to carry 20,000 people across to the western shore, and they had only fishing boats and ferries available to them. It is likely that only those highly motivated crossed the sea to find Him.

⁴⁸ In v 27, concerning what Jesus said about Himself as the One whom the God the Father "sealed," see II Cor 1:22, 5:5 and Eph 1:13-14.

desire Him; and (b) those who do sincerely come to Jesus, He will never reject. He plainly states that He has come down from Heaven to do his father's will, and that the will of his Father is that of those the Father draws to Him, He should lose none. Those who are his own, those who trust Him with their eternal destiny, He says, will have everlasting life and He will raise them up at the last day. This sets the local Jews to murmuring; they are bothered with his talk about coming down from Heaven because some of them are acquainted with his family and have known Him as the son of Joseph and Mary⁴⁹. Aware of their murmuring Jesus again says that those who turn to Him must be drawn to Him by the Father, and that He will raise them up at the last day⁵⁰. This fundamental fact, that no one can truly come to Jesus as his disciple unless he is convicted of his need and drawn by the Father, is so important that Jesus repeats it three times in this famous exchange⁵¹.

Jesus goes on to say that the prophets (note the plural here) foretold that God's people would be taught of Him, and that the Scriptures will reveal His true identity and draw people to Him⁵². He declares that He is the only one who has actually seen the Father, and that all who believe on Him will have everlasting life⁵³.

Again He declares that He is the bread of life, the true manna which has come down from Heaven. Their ancestors with Moses ate the manna from Heaven, were satisfied for the moment, needed more manna the next day, and died in the natural course of things. Now He gets really serious; He tells them that the true bread from Heaven is his flesh, given for the salvation of all who come into the world, and that those who eat it shall live forever⁵⁴. This causes passionate discussion among the Jews concerning eating his flesh (and how could it fail to do so?).

24. "You Can't Be Serious!" (6:53-65)

At this point Jesus makes the most shocking statement of his entire ministry: He says, very plainly, that unless people eat his flesh and drink his blood, they have no life in them⁵⁵! Now, you and I understand that He is speaking in figurative, spiritual terms here--not in literal, physical terms; but most of those who can hear his voice on this occasion do not understand this. They think He is speaking of

⁴⁹ Some are troubled by the word "know" in v 42 because it seems to imply that at this time Joseph is still alive (see Highlight 10, **NOTE b**). Perhaps he is; but it may simply mean that "his father, mother and family are known to us," i.e. "we know who he is."

⁵⁰ He will declare this feat accomplished on the night of his betrayal (17:2).

⁵¹ Verses 35-37, 44 and 65.

⁵² See in this regard Isaiah 54:13; Jer 31:34.

⁵³ See in this regard John 3:16, 36.

⁵⁴ In v 51 the Greek word rendered "world" is *kosmos*. In this context Jesus is saying "all of mankind."

⁵⁵ Here, again, He declares his divinity, by referring to Himself as "the Son of man."

cannibalism, and are understandably revolted! Instead of explaining this, however, He simply repeats it, saying that those who do this eating and drinking will be raised up at the last day. And then He seems to make things even more difficult to understand by saying that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood will dwell in Him, and He will dwell in them.

He then returns to the comparison between the literal manna in the Exodus and Himself, and heads are spinning throughout the synagogue! Even many of his disciples (perhaps all of them) are saying, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" They are saying that what He has said is not only hard to understand, but that it is disgusting and offensive to have to listen to it.

Without being helpful, Jesus simply challenges them saying, in effect, "If you can't handle this concept, what will you do when you see Me ascend back into Heaven⁵⁶?" Then, in one sentence (verse 63), loaded with more distilled, eternal truth than most theological chapters, He states that all things that really matter are spiritual, not physical, that there is no life without the Spirit, and that his words are both Spirit and life⁵⁷.

Jesus follows this concise statement of fundamental truth with the observation that some of those listening would not believe Him. At a glance (or taken alone) this would seem like a logical closing of his discourse; but it isn't. John goes on to explain parenthetically, seeming to say that the statement Jesus has just made is a fundamental declaration about being ultimately rejected by the majority of mankind (Matthew 7:14), and of God's foreknowledge concerning those who would accept and reject Him (Romans 8:29-30). He also seems to be saying that the statement is a cryptic prophecy concerning his coming betrayal by Judas.

Then, perhaps for our benefit and not that of his listeners, Jesus again makes the point that no one can truly come to Him unless he is drawn (convicted) by the Father.

25. Many of His Disciples Leave Him--Permanently. (6:66-71)

At this point, "many" (not a few) of his disciples (his committed followers, not those who have a shallow, casual interest, or who have come for the free food) turn away from Him, apparently never to return.

Turning to the twelve, Jesus asks if they are going to leave Him like the others. Peter's response is one that we should all ponder, for it is also true of you and me;

⁵⁶ Compared with those shocked and offended listeners in the Capernaum synagogue that day, you and I have an enormous advantage in our ability to understand this; but, even today, I am not sure why He then compared it to his coming ascension, except that that event would be the capstone of his identity as the divine Messiah.

⁵⁷ In v 63 the AV (KJV) translators used the lower case "s" throughout. It seems to me that the capital S should be used because the reference appears to be to the Holy Spirit. They may have believed that Jesus is referring here to the human spirit, for without the human spirit the flesh has no life (Jas 2:26).

speaking for the others he says, "Lord, to whom shall we go [if we leave you]?" Only you, he says, have the words of eternal life. "We may not understand what you have been saying about your flesh and your blood," he is probably thinking, but he declares that he and the others are convinced that Jesus is indeed "that Christ, the Son of the living God"⁵⁸.

Then Jesus, as He so often did, abruptly changes the subject without explaining, and speaks of one of the twelve who is a devil and will betray Him⁵⁹.

26. A Clandestine Trip to Jerusalem. (7:1-31)

By this time there is so much hostility on the part of the Jewish leaders that Jesus is ministering only in Galilee, avoiding Judaea. The time for the Feast of Tabernacles is approaching, his brothers are going up to Jerusalem for the feast, and they ask Him to go with them. Their stated reason for this is so that his disciples at Jerusalem may see some of the miracles that He has performed in Galilee. At this point they still do not believe Him to be the Christ, and their advice to Him seems to be mockery, sarcasm or a challenge. Jesus replies that he is not going yet, for his time is not yet come⁶⁰. About 4 days after his half-brothers have departed, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem secretly (in the middle of the eight-day feast). He, of course, is right about what awaits Him in Jerusalem, for the Jewish leaders and their agents expect Him to come for the feast, and are searching for Him to seize Him. There is much discussion among the people concerning whether He is good or evil, and many believe that He is a good man but fear to say so because of the hostility of the Jewish leaders. At this point Jesus goes to the Temple to teach; He will "beard the lion in his den."

The religious leaders are amazed at his knowledge of the Scriptures, since they know Him only as an uneducated carpenter from Nazareth. Jesus says to them that his message is not his own (in a human sense), but is that of God, and if they would do the will of God they would know that He speaks the truth. However, He says in rebuke, instead of believing and seeking this knowledge of God, they are scheming to kill him. He, of course, knows what they are trying to do; and they, of course, lie about it.

⁵⁸ Here, near the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, Peter, speaking for the others, makes the same great confession of faith that he made earlier in Jesus' ministry. (Matt 16:16; Mk 8:29).

⁵⁹ The Greek word here translated "devil" means just that; it is *diabolos*, the name applied to Satan, and not *daimon* ("demon"), the word for an evil spirit. Perhaps Jesus, with this choice of words, means that Judas will so give himself over to Satan as to be identified with him.

⁶⁰ Casual readers are sometimes troubled by this passage, thinking that Jesus told his brothers that he was not going, yet He went later secretly; however, they overlook the word "yet" in v 8. He said that He would not go **with them, at that time**; and his reason was probably to protect them, for to be with Him in Jerusalem, at that time, might expose them to the same growing hostility of the Jewish leaders and the danger that He faced.

Jesus confronts them with the fact that they condemn Him for healing on the Sabbath, yet they frequently circumcise babies on the Sabbath. The on-looking people marvel, that here is a man whom the rulers seek to kill (the word that the religious rulers want Him dead is clearly out), and yet He speaks to them boldly and gets away with it. They wonder if the rulers fear him because they know that Jesus is the Christ.

Yet, they say to one another, they know this man, and where he comes from, so he couldn't be the Christ.

Then Jesus cries out in a loud voice that they do know who He is, and from where He has come⁶¹. But, He says, He has not come without being sent, and the One who sent Him is true. Although what He cries out is rather cryptic, and not easily understood by those around him, He is loudly declaring that He is the Messiah.

At this point the rulers have heard enough, and try to arrest Jesus; but they are unable to take Him. They are apparently restrained supernaturally, because his time has not yet come; there is more for him to say and do⁶². At this point many of the people are convinced, apparently familiar with his history of performing miracles, and they believe on Him as the Christ.

27. An Invitation to All Who Thirst. (7:37-53)

Jesus, on the climactic last day of the feast of Tabernacles, seeming to burst with urgency to reach the people with the message of redemption, cries out to them in a loud voice and with great emotion. He shouts that if anyone (Jew or Gentile) who hungers and thirsts for true spiritual fulfillment will come to Him, believing on Him, accepting Him completely and "drinking in" without reservation all that He has to give, then two wonderful things will happen. First, that person will be transformed by receiving the Holy Spirit. And, second, that same life-changing power of the Holy Spirit will also flow from him without measure, like inexhaustible rivers, touching and transforming the lives of others.

Here Jesus is actually speaking of something in the future (the infilling with the Holy Spirit) that his disciples will receive at Pentecost, for He has not yet gone to the cross, died, been resurrected, and glorified in victory over sin and death. The people are greatly impressed, and some think He is the Messiah; others, however, argue against it, pointing out the He is not from Bethlehem (they just didn't research his history carefully--if at all). The officers of the Sanhedrin (religious police) listen to Him and report to the chief priests. Obviously displeased, they ask the officers why they have not arrested Jesus and brought Him before them.

⁶¹ We know that, when Jesus said these things, He was raising his voice to a shout, because the Greek word rendered "cried" in v 28 is *krazo*, meaning to shout, or to cry out. This Greek word will be used again here, in v 37.

⁶² See in this regard John 10:17-18.

The officers reply that they didn't even attempt to do so because of his compelling words--like none they had ever heard. These men are speaking the truth from their hearts; but it is definitely not what their masters want to hear!

The chief priests and their associates in the Sanhedrin are furious, and anxious to rid themselves of this nuisance; but Nicodemus, one of them, and the one who had visited Jesus by night (Chapter 3), cautions the others not to condemn Jesus without a trial. They don't like it, but he is right; they splutter and grumble in frustration and go home (they probably yelled at their wives and kicked the dog).

NOTE: The word rendered "cried" in v 37, as we just saw in v 28, is a form of the verb krazo, meaning a loud cry of great emotion, or of pain. In Matthew it is used to express: the plea of the Canaanite woman for deliverance for her demonized daughter (15:22), the cries of the children praising Jesus in the Temple (21:15), and of the crowd screaming at Pilate to crucify Jesus (27:23). Here in John it is used three times: twice in this chapter (vv 28 and 37); and in 12:44.

28. The Woman Taken in Adultery. (8:1-11)

Jesus and his disciples go to the Mount of Olives where they apparently spend the night, and they return in the morning to the Temple. A crowd gathers to hear Him and he begins to teach. The scribes and Pharisees arrive and interrupt his teaching. They have with them a distressed woman, a prisoner, whom they bring before Jesus and force her to stand, surrounded, before Jesus. She is undoubtedly frightened and ashamed. They say that she was taken in adultery, "in the very act"; and then, dripping with self-righteous insincerity and confidence, they remind Him that the law requires that she be stoned to death. Thinking that they now have Jesus right where they want Him, they ask Him if He agrees with Moses, that the woman should be stoned.

But Jesus never plays his adversary's game; He doesn't answer. Instead He stoops down without a word, as if He had not heard them, and begins to write something in the dust. They continue to ask Him to answer them and He stands up, faces them and utters some of the most wonderful, often-quoted words in Christendom: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Then, without another word, He stoops down again and continues writing in the dust. In chess terms it is checkmate, and they had only made their first move!

One by one the scribes and Pharisees, beginning with the eldest, turn and slink away in silent defeat; finally the youngest among them turns and follows his defeated friends, leaving Jesus with the trembling woman.

Imagine the intensity of this scene! In mere moments the proud and powerful Pharisees arrive, dragging their pathetic prisoner, their lines perfectly planned, and their trap perfectly set. They are certain that they can't lose; this time, no matter how He answers, He will be wrong. We can almost hear them saying, "Ahah!"

Yet, within a few electrified seconds, their plan collapses and they are defeated. A monumental victory over the lying manipulations of the wicked religious power structure has been won, and not a word has been spoken by the religious plotters in reply!

Jesus stands up and asks the woman, rhetorically, where her accusers are. At this point her head must have been spinning; but she simply answers that they are gone--that not one of them is left to condemn her. Jesus replies in still another oft-quoted classic, "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more"⁶³.

NOTES:

a. What was it that Jesus was writing in the dust? This will be one of my first questions when I get to Heaven. Until then, I have a theory. I suspect that Jesus was writing names, dates, and places where these self-righteous accusers had committed the same sin of which they were accusing this woman, or some other grievous sin.

b. Why did the eldest among the accusers leave first? Probably because the eldest were wisest, thus they were the first to realize that they had been completely foiled in their wicked scheme.

c. We must ask, where was the man with whom she was caught "in the very act" of adultery, for the same penalty applied to both participants⁶⁴. And what a remarkable "coincidence" that these schemers had just happened to see this transgression taking place and seized the woman (such transgressions are seldom committed in public). It appears to me that she had been set up--perhaps a prostitute, or perhaps just a poverty stricken wife driven to agree to the act because of desperate need for money in her family (such things have happened throughout human history). And it may be that she was just a poor woman who was afraid to say "No!" to one of these powerful and "righteous" men. If she wasn't set up by her accusers it is difficult to believe that these devious schemers "just happened" to be at the right place at the right time, jumped out from a place of hiding and said, "Aha! This is a violation of the law and you must come with us," and allowed the man to go his way uncharged.

And what of the man? I believe that he was one of the scribes and Pharisees (or someone with whom they conspired), who wisely stayed away. Otherwise it is impossible to explain how it was that the man involved was not included in the accusation. I look forward to meeting this woman in Heaven and hearing her side of the story.

⁶³ Sinful people who don't like being confronted with their sinful behavior--those who know a little Scripture--will often mention this story, and then quote the first five words of Jesus' reply to the woman; but they will omit the last five words. That boat won't float.

⁶⁴ See in this regard Leviticus 20:10 and Deut 22:22-24.

d. This passage, perhaps my absolute favorite event in the entire Bible, is omitted in the modern versions; the 12 verses from 7:53 to 8:11 are simply not there, or they are set off with notes to the effect that they should not be trusted. This is done for the usual reason: these twelve verses are thusly treated in the modern Greek NTs in the Westcott-Hort tradition. Mrs. Siewert's "Amplified Bible," as is so often the case, is the exception; she footnotes it but includes it without a discrediting comment. For an example of my reason for admiring her and her work, regardless of her primary use of the Westcott-Hort-type Greek text, see her footnote "d" on this passage.

Dismissing the Ancient Evidence. *The devotion of most modern translators to the Westcott-Hort Greek NT and all those which have followed in the Westcott-Hort tradition is, I think, a vivid example of the herd mentality among biblical scholars today. All of these Greek NTs are based primarily on two 4th Century manuscripts, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, both of which are decidedly flawed and significantly incomplete, and one of which (Sinaiticus) was reportedly found among discarded (rejected) manuscripts in a monastery on Mt. Sinai. According to the man who discovered them, these rejected manuscripts were being used to start fires⁶⁵.*

Trusting these two codices (and all of the Greek NTs based upon them), the story of the woman taken in adultery, recorded by the apostle John--an eyewitness to the event--in his 1st Century gospel, is rejected and dismissed. This, in spite of the fact that Papias, disciple of John and one who knew Aristion (one of the "other 70" disciples sent out by Jesus) refers to it as valid: "And he also gives another story of a woman who was accused of many sins before the Lord...⁶⁶." Also Rufinus, commenting on the writings of Papias, wrote in the 4th Century that this comment by Papias was definitely a reference to the woman taken in adultery, as recorded by John in his gospel.

Thus, omission of this passage in the modern NTs seems to me to be a case of blind commitment to one school of thought, never mind the facts, intellectual dishonesty, or both. Here intellectual respectability, and/or the herd mentality, clearly trump the evidence.

29. "I Am the Light of the World." (8:12-30)

Turning to the people gathered there, Jesus declares, "I am the light of the world." Without pause He declares also that all who follow Him shall not walk in darkness, but will always have with them "the light of life." Then follows a rather

⁶⁵ Constan von Tischendorf said that he found some pages of Sinaiticus in a trash bin at the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mt Sinai. Some doubt this part of his story; nevertheless he did discover and rescue the old codex from oblivion, and most of it is now in the British Museum.

⁶⁶ ANF, Vol 1, Fragments of Papias, VI, pp 154-155.

long exchange in which Jesus states plainly that He has come “from above” and does only the things that his Father tells Him to do. He tells them that they do not know from whence He has come, and that he will be going to a place where they cannot follow. When they “have lifted up the Son of Man [in crucifixion]” then they will know “that I am⁶⁷.” He ends the exchange with the Pharisees by saying that He always does the things that please the Father. The passage ends with the statement that, as a result of these rather cryptic declarations of Jesus, “many believed on Him.” Jesus is speaking primarily to the Pharisees, and his statements are not easily understood. Thus it seems a little strange to me that this odd conversation caused many people to believe on Him. If I were writing an amplified version or paraphrase of this passage I would be tempted to end v 30 with “anyway”; but then, we must remember that “never man spake like this man” (7:46). Perhaps it was not the words that convinced them; it may have been the compelling, unmistakable, power with which He spoke them.

30. “And the Truth Shall Make You Free.” (8:31-32)

Turning to the Jews who have decided to believe on Him, Jesus declares one of the best known, and most often misquoted, promises in the Bible. He says that if these brand new believers will continue in his Word (i.e. make a habit of diligently studying and following his Word), then they will truly be his disciples (not half-hearted, lukewarm followers), they will then come to know the truth, and that truth will make and keep them free.

*NOTE: This promise is probably the most misquoted and misunderstood promise in the Bible. Most will declare with confidence, thinking that they are quoting Scripture, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (with slight variations in wording). This makes it sound like this liberation is an unconditional, inescapable, promise--that, no matter how we live, we will all somehow be made to know the truth, and that truth will then set us free (whatever they mean by “free”). Wrong! This is a **conditional** promise. In order to receive its blessings we must first meet the conditions. We must continue in his Word, thereby becoming his true disciples, and never forsake the practice of continuing in (feeding regularly on, and practicing) his Word. Only then will we truly be his disciples, will be made truly free, and will continue to be free.*

31. “Ye Are of Your Father the Devil.” (8:33-50)

The Pharisees are still in the crowd and they don’t like what they are hearing. They insist that they are free already because they are descended from Abraham, but Jesus tells them that he who commits ongoing sin is the servant (slave) of sin.

⁶⁷ Notice that “he” in this statement is in italics, thus it is not present in the underlying Greek. Here Jesus is saying that “then they will know that I am God.” This prophetic statement will be fulfilled following his crucifixion (Matt 27:54; Mk 15:39, et al).

Therefore, He says, they need to be set free from the power of sin. He tells them that, if it is He who frees a person from sin, then that person is “free indeed” (truly, utterly free). They arrogantly continue to insist that they are Abraham’s descendants and don’t need his help to be free. Then Jesus reduces it all to fundamental facts: that He is from God, sent by God from Heaven; and that the reason they can’t understand and receive the plain truth is that they are the children of Satan! Expanding, He says that those who are of God will hear and accept God’s words; but they (the Pharisees) cannot hear God’s words because they are not his children. They demonstrate the truth of what He says by calling Him a demonized Samaritan.

NOTE: This passage can be puzzling because v 33 begins with “They answered Him...,” and at a glance it appears that “They” refers to the new believers. This cannot be true, however, because what follows is an extremely hostile exchange in which Jesus tells his accusers that they are children of Satan, and they accuse Him of being a Samaritan with a demon (the ultimate insult for a Jew). The Pharisees are still standing there in the crowd (v 13), along with the new believers and others, and the new believers do not speak at all during this heated exchange. They are probably standing there with their mouths hanging open, afraid to speak, and taking it all in as Jesus hammers the feared Pharisees with truth!

32. “Before Abraham Was, I Am.” (8:51-59)

Continuing this gloves-off exchange with the Pharisees, Jesus says that if a man will obey his teachings and live by them he will never die. The Pharisees, of course, take offense. They are still talking about their being the seed of Abraham; he died a long time ago, along with the great prophets, they say, so who does Jesus think He is? He reminds them that they are liars, and says an amazing thing: He says that Abraham rejoiced to see his day! Observing that Jesus is “not yet 50 years old,” they declare that Abraham could not have known Him. With this Jesus makes (in my opinion) the most mind-boggling statement of his entire ministry: He replies, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” Now, we can’t fault the Pharisees for not understanding this mixing of tenses, for it is an infinite concept and they (like all of us) have only finite minds. However, instead of asking Jesus to please explain this strange and fascinating declaration of his divinity, they lose control completely and begin to pick up stones to kill Him. Of course, they cannot kill Him, because it is not yet time. He simply passes through them, apparently invisible, and leaves the Temple.

NOTES:

a. The observation on this amazing declaration of Jesus by the great 17th Century commentator, Matthew Henry, is interesting and, I think, clarifying. He wrote that, in so saying, Jesus “bespeaks Abraham a creature, and himself the Creator.”

As always, Matthew Henry's commentary on this passage is expansive and elaborate, which causes some students of the Bible to reject his work as tiresome; but in rejecting his work they miss great riches. This man of God was so brilliant, and insightful, that he shines light on passages as no one else does; and he was so knowledgeable that cross-references naturally and spontaneously arced across his brain.

To read just his commentary on vv 58 and 59 is both instructive and delightful; I strongly recommend it.

b. Some commentators say that in escaping from the murderous Pharisees, Jesus simply darted into the crowd and hid from the Pharisees until they gave up the search and dispersed. This, it seems to me, is a blasphemous insult to the Creator God of the Universe. Why should we believe that He would run away and hide for fear of the Pharisees? An unredeemed sinner could do that, if he is fast on his feet! The only reasonable assumption is that his departure was miraculous, and that his disappearance left these murderous Pharisees even more furious, running around in frustrated confusion. Jesus performed the same miraculous departure, I believe, at Nazareth, when his friends and neighbors tried to throw Him off a cliff (Lk 4:28-31).

b. We must wonder what stones there were for the Pharisees to pick up, for it appears that this exchange took place in the treasury of the Temple (v 20). Matthew Henry concurs with Dr. John Lightfoot in the explanation that the temple was undergoing restoration, which for a time resulted in the presence of chunks and fragments of stone, which were to be cleared away when the project was completed⁶⁸.

* * * * *

Preface to Chapter 9. Chapter 9 is entirely devoted to one incident: the healing of an un-named man who has been blind from birth, and the reactions of the disciples, the healed man, his parents, and the predictably offended Pharisees. Here, once again, Jesus heals on the Sabbath--a thing, it seems, in which He took delight, for it gave Him opportunities to vex the hard-hearted Pharisees, show them their error, and to make teaching points. The incident also features the historic Pool of Siloam, fed by spring water through Hezekiah's amazing tunnel⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ Dr. John Lightfoot (1601-1700) was a great English theologian and Hebrew scholar. Lightfoot was contemporary with Matthew Henry, but much older. Matthew Henry had great respect for Lightfoot, and in his commentaries he often referred to his work.

⁶⁹ II Kings 20:20; II Chron 32:30,f. For more information on Hezekiah's Tunnel and the Pool of Siloam, see "Hezekiah's Amazing Tunnel" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

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33. Healing A Man Born Blind. (9:1-16)

Still in Jerusalem, Jesus and the disciples pass a man blind from birth, begging. The disciples ask whether the man's blindness was caused by the sin of the man's parents or by his own sin. Jesus replies that neither the man's sin, nor those of his parents, caused his blindness; rather, He says, his blindness is an opportunity to demonstrate the power and love of God. Stooping down He takes spittle and dust and makes a small amount of mud. He then anoints the blind man's eyelids with the mud and tells him to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash the mud from his eyelids⁷⁰. The man does so, and is healed. People who know him are so amazed that some believe that he is someone else who just looks like the formerly blind man. When asked how it was that he was healed, the man tells them exactly what happened. Some of them then take the man to the Pharisees and tell them what has happened; predictably, they are not pleased. They are forced to confront the contradiction of their petty legalism. To them, the act of making a small bit of mud was "laboring" on the Sabbath, which they considered a sin. Yet some of them argued, how can a man heal the blind, if he is not a man of God?

NOTE: It was commonly believed in ancient times that physical infirmities were the result of sin, either of the parents or the afflicted person. The wording of this reply of Jesus can be troubling, for it seems to say that God had decreed that the man would live from birth to manhood blind, so Jesus could demonstrate the healing power of God. This would seem to be in conflict with all the rest that the Bible has to say about the infinite goodness, kindness and mercy of God. At any rate, it may be that the rest of the man's life, healed by a mighty miracle, would not only glorify God, but make this man such a mighty witness and his life so rich and fruitful that, in the economy of God, the ultimate outcome made the first 30-plus years of suffering worthwhile.

34. The Parents Are Interrogated. (9:17-23)

The disgruntled Pharisees ask the healed man what he thinks of Jesus and he replies simply that "He is a prophet." The Pharisees, changing their argument, decide that the man has never been blind, thus there had been no healing; so they send for his parents. They ask the parents if this is their son and, if so, how it is that he can now see. The parents reply that the man is indeed their son, and that he was born blind, but they have no idea how he was healed. Wishing not to be

⁷⁰ Over and over in the Bible we see that water was (and is) so important in that part of the World that pools, springs, and wells were named.

associated with the possible trouble to come of it, they tell the Pharisees what is obvious: that their son is of full age, not a child, and that they should ask him--not them.

35, "One Thing I Know...I Was Blind [and] Now I See." (9:24-34)

With their argument that the man was not born blind blown out of the water by the parents, the Pharisees turn their attention back to the man. They tell him that Jesus is a sinner, and that he should give God the praise for his healing. The man's reply is a classic. In a simple declaration of truth he says that he has no way of knowing whether or not Jesus is a sinner; but, he says, the one thing that he does know is that he was blind before, and that now he can see. With their argument shattered, along with their composure, and with the healed man getting cheeky, the confrontation degenerates into flustered name-calling. The Pharisees again ask the man to tell them what had happened. He reminds them that he has already answered that question, and asks them why they want to hear it all again. Going on the attack, he sarcastically asks the Pharisees if they want to become disciples of Jesus⁷¹! They reply with some inarticulate blustering about their being disciples of Moses, accuse the man of being a disciple of Jesus, and say that they don't know where Jesus came from. The man, now amazingly staying on the offense, mocks them saying that it is a marvelous thing that they are the learned authorities on such matters, that Jesus has healed him of blindness, and yet they don't even know where He has come from. With the proud Pharisees on their heels, the man goes on to say that God does not hear sinners, yet Jesus has done something previously unknown--to heal a man born blind. Thoroughly defeated in this exchange, and by an uneducated nobody, they ask him who he thinks he is, and drive him away.

36. One-on-One Redemption. (9:35-38)

Hearing that the healed man has been driven from the presence of the defeated Pharisees, Jesus looks for him and finds him (He must have been very proud of the man's amazing courage, and his steadfast holding to the truth before the attacks of the Pharisees). In what seems to be one-on-one redemption, Jesus asks the man if he believes on the Son of God. Obviously wide open to whatever it is that Jesus is talking about, he asks who this might be, and Jesus replies that it is Himself. Without hesitation, the man declares, "Lord I believe," and he worships Jesus. As was apparently the case with Nicodemus (Chapter 3), it seems that Jesus has made a single disciple here in one-on-one ministry. The Lord must have been really touched by the man's sincerity, boldness, refusal to be intimidated into denying

⁷¹ I must say that this is remarkable courage (or foolhardiness), for the Pharisees could have arrested him, accused him of blasphemy and had him executed. Why didn't they? It appears that the simple declarations of truth by him and his parents had them flustered and on the defensive.

Him before the fearsome Pharisees, and his utter, child-like, openness to whatever Jesus is offering him.

37. Jesus Speaks of Sheep, Shepherds and Sheepfolds⁷². (10:1-10)

Speaking to some Pharisees who had overheard the exchange between himself and the healed, new disciple, Jesus says some things about sheep, their relationship with their shepherds, and those who would steal or victimize the sheep. He declares that He represents the door to the sheepfold, and that all who would enter the safety and blessedness of his flock (the Church) must enter only by way of Him. Anyone claiming to be his disciple without coming through Him is false; and any self-proclaimed shepherd who would intrude himself falsely into the sheepfold, not through Him, is a thief and robber, come to victimize the sheep. Such a thief, He says, comes only to steal, kill and destroy; but He has come in order that his flock may have life, and have it more abundantly⁷³.

38. The Good Shepherd. (10:11-15)

Jesus then defines the true relationship between a Christian leader and those under his care. In one verse (verse 11), speaking metaphorically of Himself, He sums it all up. He says that He is the personification of the good shepherd, and that the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. In verse 15, He repeats this bedrock principle, and prophesies of his coming death, saying "...and I lay down my life for the sheep."

By comparison He says that the hireling, who has no commitment to really care for the sheep, but is doing what he does just for the pay, will flee when danger comes and leave the sheep unprotected, to be victimized. In addition, He says, the good shepherd knows his sheep and is known by them. Each individual in his flock is known by, and important to, the good shepherd; and each individual is not just someone to fill a pew for services. Likewise, each member of the flock will know the good shepherd personally--his strengths, his weaknesses and his needs, ready to support and encourage him; the shepherd will not be just a distant authority figure in a pulpit. He will know his people, and they will know him.

NOTES:

a. Verse 15 is interesting in its choice of words. In saying that He "lays down" his life for the sheep (us), it seems that Jesus is not just saying that the good shepherd is willing to die for the sheep, expressing this in different words; rather, it seems that He is adding to the meaning of a good shepherd's commitment to his

⁷² A sheepfold is a walled enclosure where sheep are kept at night, protected from predators, both human and non-human. There is a single door. In warm weather the shepherd keeps the sheep in the field overnight, watching over them; in cold weather he returns the flock to the sheepfold, to sleep more warmly there.

⁷³ In v 10 Jesus seems to be speaking both of false teachers, who victimize believers, and of Satan himself, the author of such self-serving deception.

flock. As our human leaders relate to those under their care, they should be willing, day by day, to subordinate their plans and desires to the needs of the flock when necessary, in both small matters and large.

b. This passage expresses the bedrock principle of good leadership, whether spiritual, civil, or military. For only one example, in the Marine Corps the commander always eats last--always at the end of the chow line; if he and some of his men are wounded, he will be the last one evacuated to the aid station⁷⁴. If subordinates know that the leader places their welfare above his own welfare or gain, they will follow him anywhere and go for him until they drop. On the other hand, if the leader selfishly uses them while advancing his own career or providing for his own safety, they will do as little as they can get away with; and, at the first opportunity, they will seek a transfer out of that unit. And the troops cannot be fooled; if the leader is selfless and committed to them, or if he is self-serving and committed to his own welfare or advancement, be assured that they will know it.

39. An Escape Clause in the Atonement Plan. (10:16-21)

Continuing to bombard the Pharisees with profound, timeless, revelation that their hard hearts cannot receive, Jesus states that He has other sheep which must be brought into the fold, and that one day there will be a single, unified, flock (the Church) and one Shepherd (Himself). There is something somewhat mysterious about the "other sheep" of which Jesus speaks here. He may mean the gentiles, who will soon be brought into the Church, but his meaning is not made clear.

But here He makes it perfectly clear that in God's plan for the atonement of sinful mankind, there is a highly significant escape clause: at any time, Jesus can decide not to go through with the horror of the torture and the agony of becoming sin on the cross; He can, if He chooses, return to Heaven and there will be no reproach from the Father. This makes the voluntary sacrifice of his sinless Self perfect. He would not be the victim of Caesar, nor of the Sanhedrin; his self-sacrifice will be completely and perfectly voluntary.

The hostile Jews are now divided. Some say that Jesus is demonized; others question this, saying that his words are not those of a demoniac, and ask "Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?"

NOTE: *Mormon doctrine seizes on v 16 as support for their belief that Jesus came to the New World to bring the Gospel to the Indians, as described in the spurious Book of Mormon. Today, however, even Mormon archeologists admit that there has never been found in the New World even a scrap of archeological evidence to*

⁷⁴ I remember one wounded battalion commander in Vietnam, lying with several of his wounded men. He refused to be medevac'd until all of his wounded men were flown out; he bled to death while he waited. That fine, selfless man lived (and died) John 10:11-15.

support the stories of the vast civilizations, tribes and epic battles described by Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon. It is entirely spurious.

*It is also interesting that, although Joseph Smith taught (and sincere-but-wrong Mormon missionaries will tell you if you listen to their pitch) that his reason for supernaturally receiving and writing the Book of Mormon was that the Bible has been copied and translated for so long that it is full of errors and cannot be believed. Yet they hang **their entire doctrinal system** on this one verse (10:16) from the "erroneous, unreliable" Bible.*

* * * * *

NOTE. Although it is not made clear in the passage, a significant period of time passes between verse 21 and verse 22. Verse 21 closes the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles. John has recorded nothing about where Jesus was, and what he was doing during the 6-8 weeks between the last 2 weeks of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication (also called Hanukkah). Without break or explanation we take up the narrative again with verse 22.

* * * * *

40. "I and My Father Are One." (10:22-31)

It is Winter in Jerusalem, the final one of Jesus' earthly ministry. And it is the Feast of Dedication (what Jews today call Hanukkah)⁷⁵. Jesus is walking in the Temple, in what was called Solomon's Porch, a place where He has done much teaching⁷⁶. The Pharisees, who seem to be tormented by this exasperating man whom they do not understand, surround Him; having his attention they demand to know whether or not He is the Messiah. He replies that He has demonstrated the answer amply by the things that He has done; however, He says, they cannot perceive or accept the answer because they are not of his flock. Repeating a principle previously stated, He says that his sheep hear his voice, follow Him and He gives them eternal life. Not only that, He says, but no one can pluck his sheep out of his hand; nor can they be plucked out of the Father's hand. Then, plainly and unmistakably, He declares his divinity; He says, "I and my Father are one."

⁷⁵ The Feast of Dedication (today it is commonly called Hanukkah) celebrates the cleansing and re-dedication of the Second Temple after the Jewish victory in the war of the Maccabees. The Temple's menorah was re-lighted; because of this, the feast of Dedication/Hanukkah is also called the Festival of lights (I Maccabees 4).

⁷⁶ The Court of the Congregation was surrounded by roofed colonnades, or porticos, here called "porches." These were public gathering places. Solomon's Porch was on the east side of the court, and was very large.

This pushes them over the emotional edge, and they again begin to pick up stones with which to kill Him.

NOTE: Here in vv 28 and 29 we are walking very close to the minefield of divisive doctrine. Those who hold to the doctrine of "eternal security" (the belief that, once born again, it is impossible to turn away from one's salvation, reject it, and follow sin) will remind us that once in the hand of God no man can snatch us out of it. This is undeniably true; no one can pluck us out of God's hand, against our will⁷⁷.

Those who believe that our freedom to choose is never taken from us (the doctrine of "free will"), will reply that no one can snatch us out of God's hand, but we can jump.

There is evidence in Scripture for both positions.

The doctrine of "eternal security" is based on these verses (and others, including Jn 3:16 with its phrase "everlasting life," Jn 5:24 (again, the word "everlasting") and I Peter 1:23, speaking of being born again "of...incorruptible [seed] by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever.").

The doctrine of free will is based upon such passages as Ps 51:10-13, Gal 5:1-4, I Tim 4:1-7, Hebr 6:4-6, Jas 5:19-20 and Rev 22:19.

*There are those among us who feel strongly about one or the other of these positions; but **we should not** allow this to separate us from one another! It seems certain that this doctrinal difference will not be resolved until Jesus returns, and I will definitely not attempt to do it here.*

41. Another Escape and Ministry in the Countryside. (10:32-42)

Jesus, undaunted by their picking up large stones, asks the hostile Jews for which of his good works are they about to stone Him. They reply that they are going to stone him, not for his good works, but because He says that He is God. Then He really bewilders them by quoting from Ps 82:6, "I [have] said ye are gods." He then again declares Himself to be the one "whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world," i.e. the Christ; and He reminds them of his mighty works that verify his divinity.

This is too much for these blind and deaf Pharisees, overcome with murderous hate, and they rush to seize Him. And, once again, He vanishes! It is difficult to imagine the frustration with which the Pharisees are left, and with no outlet for their unleashed fury!

At any rate, Jesus leaves Jerusalem and goes across the Jordan, where John the Baptist first proclaimed Him as the Lamb of God and He met his first disciples.

⁷⁷ The Greek verb rendered "pluck" is *harpazo*, and its literal meaning is "catch, seize, snatch, or carry away"; and the clear implication is that this cannot be done against our will. It is unnecessary to "snatch, seize or carry away" someone who wants to go with us anyway.

This is the region called Perea. It is not yet time for Him to die, and He tarries there, making many more disciples.

NOTE: I must admit that this statement in Ps 82:6, quoted by Jesus to the Pharisees, can be bewildering to me. It seems to say that the people of God are somehow gods themselves; however, the verse could not mean this (or anything even close). In this verse “gods” begins with a lower case “g,” and the Hebrew word is “elohim.” This word, as we have already seen, can be applied to God Himself (e.g. in Gen 1:1), or to pagan gods. In the context of the eight verses of Ps 82, it seems refer to representatives of the true God (representatives with the lower case “g”). Remember also that Hebrew words ending in “im” are plurals. In the case of God Himself, Elohim is a subtle reference to the triune nature of the Godhead; in Ps 82:6 the psalmist is referring to multiple listeners, probably the priests, Levites and other earthly judges whom Elohim has anointed to represent Him and serve the people.

*And it is important to note that here, in the last verse of Ps 82 (v 8), the psalmist is beseeching Elohim to correct the sinful errors of these representatives, and to bring justice to the people. These earthly chosen ones are being criticized for judging falsely--they are **not** being declared divine. This fact is surely not lost on the Pharisees, who are familiar with Ps 82 and are now even more offended.*

42. The Sickness and Death of Lazarus. (11:1-13)

Except for his 12 apostles, the closest friends that Jesus has on Earth are Mary and Martha of Bethany, and their brother, Lazarus. While Jesus is teaching and healing east of the Jordan River, in Perea, word comes to him from Mary and Martha that Lazarus is seriously ill. He tells his disciples (and, presumably, the messenger) not to worry--that the sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God. It is made clear (verses 3 and 5) that Jesus loves Mary, Martha and Lazarus⁷⁸. After hearing of the sickness of his friend, Lazarus, Jesus deliberately remains where He is for two days, obviously waiting for Lazarus to die. After two days He tells the 12 that they will now go up to the Jerusalem area: as we shall see, He knows that Lazarus is dead and buried, but He has not told his disciples of this. The disciples think this is a bad idea, and they remind Him that He has only recently escaped stoning there. Abruptly changing the subject, as He often did, Jesus waxes philosophic, saying that a man should work in the daylight hours, for if he tries to work at night he can't see and will stumble. Still more cryptically, He becomes spiritual, and says that the man who works in darkness will stumble

⁷⁸ The Greek word translated “lovest” in v 3, in the message from Mary and Martha is *phileo*, the verb form of the noun for brotherly affection. They were dear friends. In v 5, however, describing Jesus' love for Mary and Martha, the Greek word rendered “loved” is a verb form of the divine love of God, *agapeo*.

because “there is no light **in him**⁷⁹.” He goes on, saying to them that Lazarus is sleeping, and that He will now go to Bethany and wake him. Now they are really confused, and point out the obvious: that if Lazarus is sick, but is sleeping, the sleep is what he needs; it would be harmful to disturb his sleep. But Jesus is speaking of sleep metaphorically; He knows that Lazarus is dead.

43. “Lazarus Is Dead, and I Am Glad.” (11:14-16)

As if the twelve don’t already have enough to struggle with in their understanding, Jesus announces abruptly that Lazarus is dead. And then, even more confusing to them, He adds, “and I am glad.” In an expansion of this amazing declaration, but one which really doesn’t explain it, He says that He is glad for their sakes, so that they may believe. Then He concludes with, “nevertheless, let us go to him.” Here the apostle Thomas, also called “Didymus” (the twin), rises to the occasion. Being sure, as the others must be, that Jesus will surely be killed if He goes to Bethany, he says to the others that they should all go with Jesus “that we may die with him⁸⁰.”

NOTE: On its face, the declaration by Jesus that “Lazarus is dead, and I am glad...” is one of the most outrageous statements in the Bible. We have just read (in vv 3 and 5) how much He loves Lazarus and his sisters. How could He then say that He is glad that Lazarus is dead? He does go on to say that He is glad for the sake of the apostles, that it may help them to believe; but that is far from a satisfactory explanation. The explanation of this is extremely important to our understanding of the dual nature of Jesus, Who was both fully human and fully divine (“very man and very God”). We shall have this explained as we proceed.

44. “Why Didn’t You Come?” (11:17-27)

The village of Bethany is near Jerusalem--about 15 furlongs to the east⁸¹. At Bethany a crowd of sympathizers is at the home of Mary and Martha, to comfort them as they grieve over the death of their brother. Someone notifies them that Jesus is coming, and Martha hurries to meet him; Mary, however, stays in the house⁸². Meeting Jesus on the road, Martha, with deep disappointment if not bitterness, states the obvious: that if He had come sooner Lazarus would not have

⁷⁹ Jesus loved to use what we call the “non sequitur,” an abrupt change of subject which is not a normal response to what has just been said. He seems to have done this to make his hearers think; but surely at times it must have been frustrating--even for his friends.

⁸⁰ Poor Thomas is usually remembered only in a negative way, as “doubting Thomas”; he deserves much better. In a few years he will go to India, establish churches there, and die as a martyr.

⁸¹ The word “furlong” is unfamiliar to most readers. On the other hand, to anyone who has lived in thoroughbred horse country it is as familiar as “yard” or “mile,” for it is a unit of measure used in horse racing. A furlong is 1/8th of a mile. Thus, Bethany was a little less than 2 miles east of Jerusalem--about a 30 minute walk.

⁸² This is an interesting role reversal for Mary, usually thought of as the “spiritual” sister, compared with “practical” Martha.

died. She must have been thinking, "Didn't you care enough to come? We thought you loved us."

Still, hopeful and believing, however, she says suggestively that she knows that, even now, God will give Jesus whatever He asks. Obliquely, Jesus says that Lazarus will rise again. Martha responds that she knows that Lazarus will rise in the resurrection; but she implies that this is not what she is thinking about--she wants him resurrected to life now. The response of Jesus is classic--one that has become part of liturgies, comforting words in funeral services, and a statement carved in church furniture and stone monuments. He declares that He **is** the resurrection and the life, that those who believe in Him, though they were dead, yet they shall live, and that whoever lives and believes in Him shall never die. And He asks her if she believes this, and she emphatically replies in the affirmative.

45. Jesus Wept. (11:28-35)

Martha acknowledges that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God" and, with the matter of his delayed arrival still not settled, she goes back to the house. She tells Mary that Jesus has come and is calling for her to come to Him, and Mary quickly leaves the house and goes to Jesus. The mourners, thinking that she is going to the tomb, follow her, weeping. When she gets to the place where Jesus waits, she falls at his feet, sobbing, and utters the very same gentle rebuke as that of Martha. Seeing her sobbing at his feet, and the sobbing of the others with her, Jesus suddenly groans within and is deeply moved in his (human) spirit. Choking on the words, He asks where the body of Lazarus is buried, and He breaks down, weeping with Mary and the others⁸³.

***NOTE:** How can we explain the apparent indifference of Jesus to the death of Lazarus, from the time that He was first notified of the serious illness, and then, with Mary sobbing at his feet, his being suddenly stricken with grief Himself? This is indeed a point to ponder.*

I believe that it is an illustration of his dual nature as the unique God-man. In his divinity, He knew from the start that Lazarus would not remain dead, and so there was no reason to grieve; rather, the death of Lazarus would be a glad thing that would glorify God, and bring gladness to those who love him, when he is restored to life. This is why He could say to his puzzled disciples, "Lazarus is dead and I am glad."

But then, seeing the agonized weeping of Mary and the others, in his humanity He experiences their grief, and the situation as they are experiencing it, and

⁸³ The Greek verbs used here for weeping are revealing. The word used for the weeping of Mary and the other mourners (and elsewhere in the NT) is *klaio* meaning loud expressions of grief. The word "wept" in v 35, describing the grief of Jesus, is *dakruo*; it means the quiet shedding of tears; this word **is used nowhere else** in the New Testament.

quietly grieves with them. The way I find it convenient to think of this sudden change in his response to the situation is that He "down-shifted" from his divine nature to his human nature, and entered into the grief of the others. For more on this dual nature of Jesus see "The Divinity of Jesus the Christ--the Mystery of the God-Man" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

46. "Lazarus, Come Forth!" (11:36-44)

As the mourners question among themselves as to why Jesus could not have prevented the death of Lazarus, another surge of grief arises in Jesus. He arrives at the cave in which the body of Lazarus lies and commands that the stone which covers the entrance to the cave be removed. Martha, again pointing out the obvious, replies that Lazarus has been dead for four days, and that by now the smell will be awful. Jesus reminds her that He has said that if she would believe, she would see God glorified. The stone is removed, and Jesus prays. Lifting his eyes to Heaven, He prays to the Father, saying that He prays so that the people will hear the prayer and know that the Father has definitely sent Him. Then, with a loud voice, He commands, "Lazarus, come forth!" Lazarus, restored to life, comes out of the cave, wrapped in grave cloths and with a separate napkin wrapped around his head to cover his face⁸⁴. Jesus commands that the grave cloths be removed, and Lazarus is restored to his family and friends, alive and with the stench of decomposition apparently banished.

***NOTE:** Hebrew graves were often small natural caves, with the entrance covered by a large, flat stone. On the stone there were markings, to warn passers by of the contents of the cave, so they would not touch them, thus becoming ceremonially unclean. For this purpose the stones were also whitewashed annually, on the 15th day of the month Adar (our February-March)⁸⁵. The rich often had tombs carved out of solid rock (instead of natural caves), as in the case of the burial of Jesus in the tomb prepared for Joseph of Arimathaea.*

The stone covering the entrance to a burial place was probably sealed with mud or mortar to prevent the odor of decomposition within from escaping. If this were not so, the warning of Martha about opening the tomb of Lazarus would not make sense; if the cave opening were closed merely by placing a flat stone against it, they would have smelled Lazarus without removing the stone. It is an unpleasant odor, both unmistakable and unforgettable.

47. A Divided Reaction to the Great Miracle. (11:45-48)

⁸⁴ For those interested in small details, it is unlikely that Lazarus came walking out of the cave, for only the wealthy could afford a tomb large enough to permit this. And, if it were a natural cave this large, the sealing stone would be so large as to require special equipment to move it. Lazarus probably crawled out and then stood up.

⁸⁵ In this regard, see the rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees by Jesus in Matt 23:27.

There are many people in the crowd of mourners, and they have seen an undeniable, great miracle. Many of them become believers on the spot--but not all. Some, who must have had very hard hearts, go instead to the Pharisees and reported what they have seen; and their report leads to an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin. The religious leaders are becoming frantic, fearing that if Jesus goes on performing such miracles, all the people will become his disciples and the Romans, not understanding, will see the situation as a threat to their control. The Romans, they fear, will interpret the generalized, growing excitement among the people as a rebellion against their authority, remove the high priest and members of the Sanhedrin from their positions of authority and power, and rule directly themselves.

48. A Wicked High Priest Prophecies. (11:49-57)

As the religious leaders wring their hands over what Jesus might do next, they apparently have one collective thought: in order to protect themselves and their way of life, Jesus must die. Caiaphas, in his capacity as High Priest, takes the floor and speaks prophetically (although I am convinced that he is not aware that he is prophesying--he did not think that way). He says that it is expedient that one man (Jesus, of course) should die so that the entire Jewish nation would not perish, and not for the Jewish nation only, but for others scattered abroad. He probably has no idea of the true meaning of his prophetic words; but, it seems clear that God is using Caiaphas, honoring his position as Chief Priest⁸⁶. From this moment onward, the Sanhedrin will have but one policy concerning Jesus: He must die. As a result, Jesus no more moves about openly in the vicinity of Jerusalem; He withdraws instead, with his disciples, to Ephraim, a remote village on the edge of the wilderness, and there they remain. The time for Passover is approaching, and many people are going up to Jerusalem to prepare.

The Sanhedrin, desperate to find and kill Jesus, issues what police today would call an "all-points bulletin"--an order to all the people to watch for Jesus and, if they see him or know of his whereabouts, to report this so He can be arrested. They really want the man dead.

49. A Celebration in Bethany. (12:1-11)

Returning from the back country six days before the beginning of Passover, Jesus and the twelve go to Bethany where they have dinner with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. What a joyful dinner that must have been! After dinner, Mary takes a pound of expensive ointment of spikenard, anoints the feet of Jesus with it and

⁸⁶ We should remember that God has made prophetic utterances through unlikely instruments before; wicked King Saul prophesied at least once, and in the case of the corrupt prophet, Balaam, God spoke through a jackass.

wipes his feet with her long hair⁸⁷. Judas is offended, saying that this is a waste of something valuable that might have been sold, and the money given to the poor. Actually, Judas is not concerned with the needs of the poor; he is the keeper of the purse, and he has been stealing from it. Jesus knows this, but He doesn't say so. Instead, Jesus says that there will always be the poor who need help, but He will not always be with them, and that Mary has kept this expensive ointment to prepare his body for burial⁸⁸. As usual, a crowd has gathered outside the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. In addition to wishing to see Jesus, people are also hoping to see Lazarus, the man raised from the dead. Now the religious leaders want Lazarus dead, along with Jesus, because the miracle of his being raised from the dead is causing still more people to believe on Jesus.

* * * * *

NOTE: At this point, the morning after the dinner at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (vv 12-19).

The final week of his earthly life and ministry has begun.

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50. To Live We Must Die. (12:20-27)

Among the multitude of Jews who have come to Jerusalem for the Passover there are also Greeks (Gentiles). Having heard of Jesus, they approach his disciples and tell Philip that they would like to see Him. Philip reports this to Andrew, and the two of them take the Greeks to Jesus; they are about to get much more than they have asked for. Speaking to them, Jesus expresses a spiritual principle so important that it is found in all four gospel accounts (and, in two of them, Matthew and Luke, twice): that, in order to live in the Spirit as children of God, we must first die to our old, fleshly nature⁸⁹. Jesus Himself will be the first example of this in about a week when He dies a horrible death in the flesh, but rises to new life in a glorified body. He says that unless a grain of wheat is planted in the earth (buried) and dies (ceases to be what it was before), it cannot germinate and produce a new, living plant bearing many new grains. He says that if we cling to this life the

⁸⁷ Used as incense and perfume, as well as an herbal medicine, the oil of spikenard is extracted from the fleshy rhizome (underground stem) of the plant of the same name. It grows in the Himalayas of China (Tibet), Nepal and Northern India. It grows to a height of about three feet and has pink, bell-shaped flowers.

⁸⁸ There is much in the reply of Jesus that calls for explanation, but He doesn't bother; in a little more than a week they will all understand.

⁸⁹ Matthew 10:39, 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24, 17:33; Jn 12:25.

result will be that we ultimately lose it; but, He says, if we "hate" the life in this world (compared with the gift of everlasting life as children of God), and abandon its values and goals to follow Him, we will live in eternal blessedness. He also says that if we are to serve Him we must follow Him and no one else. He says that his soul is troubled (by what He knows will soon happen), but He cannot ask to be spared what awaits Him because it was for this reason that He has come into the world as a man.

51. God Speaks from Heaven. (12:28-33)

At this point Jesus looks up to Heaven and prays. In a fresh expression of relinquishment--his surrender to the Father's will--He says, "Father, glorify thy name." In reply, God the Father speaks audibly, with his mighty voice coming from Heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again⁹⁰." Those around Jesus heard the voice of God were not sure what they had heard; some thought it was thunder, and others thought an angel had spoken to Jesus. Speaking of what has just happened, Jesus says that it was done for the sake of the crowd, and not for Him. Then, in two brief verses He expresses two profound truths: that, in what He is about to endure, Satan's power (as prince or god of this world) will be shattered; and that, when Jesus is "lifted up" in crucifixion He will draw all people to Himself (all of mankind will have their need of Him, and his gift of salvation, revealed)⁹¹.

***NOTE:** The late Henry M. Morris, PhD, LLD, LittD, author of The New Defender's Study Bible, observed that the thought that all men (including all types of men) would be drawn to an itinerant, local, relatively unknown teacher, put to death as a criminal on a Roman cross, seems absurd. And yet, that is exactly what has been happening for almost 2,000 years since He died.*

52. Fulfilling Isaiah's Prophecy. (12:34-41)

The people in the crowd still don't get the picture. They ask what He means by saying that the Son of Man must be lifted up; and they ask who this Son of Man is. However, they are not asking with the openness and hunger for truth so obvious in some others, such as the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. They seem almost insolent in their questioning. Jesus, rather than answer their questions, speaks of walking in the day when there is light, and recommends that they "believe in the light" while there is time, and become children of light. He, of course, is speaking figuratively about spiritual light and darkness. At this point, apparently knowing that the people are insincere, He performs another disappearing act and is gone.

⁹⁰ There are three such occurrences in the New Testament: where God the Father speaks from Heaven, at the baptism of Jesus; the transfiguration; and here. This is the third and final one.

⁹¹ The greatest tragedy in the human experience is that, although all men will have a revelation of their need of Him and his gift of redemption, most will reject his unspeakable gift.

These people still don't believe or sincerely want to understand, and they fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah about those who would not believe the good news of redemption, for their eyes are blind and their ears deaf to spiritual truth⁹².

53. The Messiah's Last Message to the Public. (12:42-50)

In spite of the spiritual blindness and deafness of the crowd, many of the religious leaders, who are watching it all, do understand and are convinced that Jesus is all that He claims to be. However, they do not confess their belief because they fear the persecution that would follow their confession. Like many today they prefer the approval and praise of men more than the approval of God. This, it seems, makes them even more guilty of rejecting Jesus than are the people of the crowd who do not believe⁹³. At this point, seeming to be mightily moved, Jesus cries out, shouting a summation of the message that He has come to Earth to declare, and declares his divinity. In a human sense, He must be grieved by the general rejection of his message, for He delivers this last oration with emotional intensity. He says that He has come from God to offer spiritual light and life, and that in the last day those who reject Him will be confronted with, and judged by, the very words that He has spoken.

***NOTE:** This is the last time that Jesus will declare the good news of redemption to the people of Israel. His public ministry is finished. He has warned the public about the judgment to come, that they will be judged by his words--by the message that He has been declaring for three years.*

In the remaining hours of his life on Earth, He will teach only his closest disciples; he will make great revelations of truth, but He will speak them only to the 12. And, of these revelations, the vast majority will be spoken only to the 11, for Judas will leave during the Passover meal, and will never rejoin the rest.

54. Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet. (13:1-17)

Jesus and the twelve have enjoyed the Passover meal, the thing about which He has said that He greatly desired it ("with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you, before I suffer")⁹⁴. It was the very last pleasant experience of his earthly life. His time of climactic horror is about to begin.

After the meal Jesus, fully aware of his own divinity, stands up, removes his cloak, wraps a large towel around his waist, pours water into a bowl, and begins to wash the feet of the twelve. This is too much for Peter, who objects; he knows

⁹² Isaiah 6:10; 53:1.

⁹³ John 10:41

⁹⁴ See Luke 22:15. Repetition is a Hebrew way of emphasizing a point. For Jesus to say "With desire I have desired" meant that He has greatly desired, looked forward to it with intense desire and anticipation. In modern English He might have said, "I have really looked forward to this Passover meal with you; it means a great deal to me!" I think that it is one of the most telling illustrations of his full humanity in all of the Bible.

that it is customary for a servant to wash the feet of his master, and here Jesus is reversing the traditional roles. Jesus, of course, understands, and He tells Peter that a time will come when he also will understand. Nevertheless, impulsive Peter, quick to speak, declares emphatically that he will "never" allow this to happen; quietly, Jesus says that if He is not allowed to wash Peter's feet, then Peter will no longer be his disciple. Peter doesn't understand, but he knows that this is a very serious matter; to lose his relationship with Jesus would be unthinkable--the ultimate loss. He really doesn't want Jesus to wash his feet but, to make it easier to accept, he replies, in effect, "Oh, alright, you may wash my feet; but I can more easily go through with this if you also wash my hands and head." Jesus, having none of this evasion, says that if one is already clean only the feet need to be washed, and He makes a cryptic reference to Judas ("ye are clean, but not all"). Peter submits.

Having washed the feet of all the twelve (including Judas), Jesus drives home his teaching point about humility. He, indeed is their Lord and Master, He says, yet He has washed their feet; if they would be happy (greatly blessed), they must follow his example and wash one another's feet⁹⁵.

NOTES:

a. Note that it doesn't say here that Jesus, in an emotional act of love, forgot his own divinity and washed his disciples' feet. On the contrary, we are told that he performed this act of humility and love fully aware that He was (and is) the Creator God of the Universe. And then, in case the situation is not clear, He states clearly that he is their Lord and Master.

b. In the early Church this became a mandate; at Passover, the elders went out into the streets and washed the feet of the poor. This is the origin of our "Maundy Thursday"; it is derived from the Latin word "mandatum," meaning a mandate or commandment. The washing of feet, however, has been largely abandoned among most Christians and, I think, to our loss.

55. "One of You Shall Betray Me." (13:18-30)

Seated again at the Passover table, Jesus speaks plainly of his betrayal⁹⁶. He says that a prophecy in the Psalms is about to be fulfilled, because one that shares their meal "hath lifted up his heel against me⁹⁷." Then, for yet another time in John's gospel account, He plainly declares his divinity, saying that He is telling them what will happen (before it happens) so that they may believe that "I am" (note that in verse 19 "he" is in italics, meaning that "he" is not in the Greek text,

⁹⁵ The Greek word rendered "happy" in v 17 is *makarios*, meaning greatly or supremely blessed.

⁹⁶ Actually, they were not seated at the table as we would be; in the oriental fashion, they were reclining around a low table.

⁹⁷ Psalm 41:9.

but was added by the translators). Then, deeply troubled, He says plainly that one of them shall betray him, and the disciples look at one another, wondering who it will be (Judas must be extremely uncomfortable at this point). One of them, seated next to Jesus, is leaning on Him, and Peter signals to him that he should ask Jesus who will do this⁹⁸. Asked who it is, Jesus says that it is the one to whom He gives the sop (a piece of bread dipped in the sauce of the meat platter). Jesus then dips bread into the sauce and gives it to Judas, telling him to go on out and do the thing that he is going to do⁹⁹. Strangely, the others at the table still do not know what Jesus means by this. Judas goes out into the night, heading for the palace of the high priest, and the betrayal is set in motion.

NOTE: There are supernatural things going on here. The words about who it was that would betray Jesus are plainly spoken; and what could be more clear than the act of handing the delicious morsel to Judas? Yet, the other eleven think that Jesus is sending Judas out to buy more food and wine for the meal, or to give something to the poor. It appears that Jesus said what He said to fulfill the prophecy, and to send Judas out to betray Him. Had He not blinded the understanding of the other eleven, they would undoubtedly have tried to prevent Judas from leaving.

56. A New Commandment: Love One Another. (13:31-35)

Knowing that his time on Earth with his disciples is almost gone, Jesus tells them that He is going away, and that He is going to a place where they cannot follow. Because of this He leaves them with a new and final commandment: that they love one another¹⁰⁰. And then He says that this will be the way in which the surrounding world will know that they are his disciples--by seeing their love for one another.

NOTE: If you have a red letter edition of the New Testament you will see that the last eight verses of Chapt 13 and almost all of Chapt 14, 15, 16 and 17 are solid red. In these four-plus chapters John has recorded a very long discourse by Jesus, for his disciples, on things to come, including promises and guidance for living through the time between his departure into Heaven and his return in the Second Advent. Although Chapter 17 is a prayer, it is rich in teaching points, and his disciples were listening. In these chapters He makes remarkable revelations about the Trinity that are found nowhere else in the Bible. These chapters must be

⁹⁸ This is generally considered to have been John, and that this description as the one "whom Jesus loved" is his subtle way of identifying himself. Mark appears to have similarly identified himself (i.e. in the third person) in his gospel account (Mk 14:51).

⁹⁹ The fact that Jesus could hand this tasty morsel to Judas suggests that Judas was seated very close to Jesus--perhaps next to Him, on the opposite side from John.

¹⁰⁰ See in this regard **Traditions Concerning John's Later Life** (2), under "Author" in the introductory material to this study guide to John. See also I Jn 4:21.

read carefully, for they are extremely filled with profound revelation, not only about the nature of our Triune God, but also about our relationship with the Trinity. And, of course, the things that He says to the eleven disciples who are with Him apply also to us.

Sprinkled through these rich chapters are revelations concerning the work of the promised Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who will come to replace the presence of Jesus after He returns to Heaven. For a summary of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, between the departure of Jesus and his return in the Second Advent, see “When the Comforter Comes” in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

57. “Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled.” (13:36-14:3)

Peter, ever the brash one, and failing to understand (actually, none of them will understand until the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost), misses the point about loving one another, and objects. He asks where it is that Jesus is going. Patiently, Jesus says again that He is going to a place that they cannot go now; but, He adds, they will follow Him in the future, Peter, being particularly un-teachable, asks why **he** (not they) can't follow now (never mind the other 10). And, he declares, he will follow Jesus if it means laying down his life. At this point Jesus silences Peter with some unpleasant truth. He tells Peter that, in that very night, before the rooster crows the next morning, Peter will deny Him three times to save his own life. Peter is staggered and speechless.

Having just shattered Peter's well-meant bravado, and knowing full well the pain that is now rising in Peter's heart, Jesus immediately follows with words of comfort and reassurance--words that have been loved and repeated by Christians ever since that night. Speaking to all of the eleven, but surely with his compassionate eyes fixed on Peter, Jesus says that their hearts must not be troubled and distressed, Instead, they must believe in the Father and in Him, trusting completely in their goodness and provision. He is going to prepare a place for them to be, when the time comes for them to follow Him, and He further promises that He will come back for them when the time comes, to escort them to their wonderful dwelling place.

NOTE: *We must remember that, although the Scriptures are “God breathed” (divinely inspired), the verse and chapter divisions are man-made, and are **not** inspired. As a result, they are sometimes in the wrong place. This break between Chpts 13 and 14 is, in my opinion, such a mistake. In the last verse of Chapt 13, Jesus shatters Peter's heart and mind with some unexpected, ugly truth. Surely, He would not leave Peter standing there, in emotional pain and shock, then turn around and say, in effect, “Now, on to another subject....” Note that in Jesus' very next utterance, those words of ageless comfort and reassurance that we love, He says, “Let not your heart (singular) be troubled....” He is not saying that to*

*everyone in the room; He is offering comfort to one man, the only one in the room who needs comforting just then--Peter. Although in liturgies "heart" is often pluralized, speaking to the entire gathering, and although many of the modern versions follow suit and use "hearts" in verse 1, Jesus is here telling Peter that everything is going to be alright in the end. Remember that in the message the risen Jesus gave the angel, to pass on to the disciples the following Sunday morning, about meeting Him in Galilee, began with, "Tell the disciples **and Peter...**" (emphasis mine). It appears that He knew that Peter would need some reassurance, and is saying, in effect, "...and mention Peter by name--he needs that."*

58. "I Am the Way..." (14:4-6)

Further, and a little strangely, Jesus tells them that they know where this place is and they know how to get there. Completely bewildered, Thomas points out, very reasonably, it seems to me, that they don't even know what place Jesus is talking about, so they cannot know the way to get there. Jesus replies, in the hallmark declaration of his entire earthly and heavenly ministry, that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and that He is the only means by which sinful and lost mankind can be redeemed and reconciled to the Father. Of all the things He has said about his divinity, and his identity as the awaited Messiah, this declaration is the linchpin. It separates Him from all others; He and He alone is the means of our redemption and reconciliation to our Holy God.

NOTE: *John 14:6 permits no equivocation, and it gives the lie to all those people, including quite a few who call themselves Bible-believing Christians, who insist that Hindus, Buddhists, etc who are "sincere about their beliefs" will make it to Heaven. This is the kind of feel-good teaching and preaching that fills "mega-churches" and makes their preachers rich; but, in very clear effect, it is calling Jesus a liar, and declaring that the sacrifice of his sinless life to redeem us was, "nice but not necessary."*

And now I must confess. Many times, in tears of anguish, when people--really good people--whom I loved have died without Jesus, I have wanted to tear John 14:6 out of my Bible! Eternity is such a long time to be separated from God, alone and trembling in outer darkness, or burning in the Lake of Fire; but God put John 14:6 in the Bible and I cannot take it out. It is the irreducible minimum of redemptive truth. Even if I could remove or modify it, I wouldn't; for that would be to insult and trivialize that unspeakable gift of redemption that He has provided for us. No, that statement of his that can break my heart is there, carved into cosmic granite, unchangeable and inescapable; and I can live with it for two reasons: (1) I know that He loved those whom I have loved, and loved them much more than I; and, (2) In the final analysis, I can live with it because I trust Him.

59. The Most Outrageous Verse in the Bible. (14:7-14)

Jesus, with his characteristic, abrupt, changing of the subject, says that if they have known Him, they have known the Father, and that in the future they will see the Father. Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father, saying that, then, they will be satisfied. Speaking more plainly, Jesus says that those who have seen Him have seen the Father. Then He launches into a rapid-fire discourse about the inseparableness of Him and the Father that is difficult for us to untangle, even today, when men have had almost 2,000 years to think about it. It must have been really bewildering for those 11 men at that time. And then, as if their minds were not already overloaded, Jesus pronounces, in plain words, what I consider to be the most outrageous verse in the entire Bible! He says that, because He is going to re-join the Father in Heaven, his disciples will perform the same miraculous works that He has performed. And, as if that were not more than their understanding can handle, He takes the concept a giant, mind-boggling step farther, saying that not only will they do the things that He has done, but **even greater things!**

But wait--we must remember that He is not saying that this statement applies only to those 11 men; He is saying that he is speaking of "he that believeth on me" In other words, He is speaking of you and of me. In all of my long life, and in all that I have read and heard, I have never heard of anyone who has done all of the things Jesus did, let alone greater things than He did.

Jesus goes on to say that whatever his disciples ask in his name, He will do. That alone is enough for those apostles to meditate on for days; but surely their minds are still on v 12 (mine would be).

So, What Can We Make of All This? To understand how we can do the same things that Jesus has done, because He will go to the Father and (as we shall see) will send the Holy Spirit, is challenging but not difficult; this explanation will unfold as we proceed in our study¹⁰¹. But how can we come to terms with the thought that we can do **even greater** things than Jesus has done? I can't; and that is why I call this the most outrageous verse in the Bible. But I know that it is true. **NOTE:** Commentators have wrestled with v 12 for centuries, trying to explain it. Some say that Jesus refers to the fact that we will bring people to a saving relationship with Him, declaring that this is something that He never did. The problem with this is that **He did**--for at least 11 people: the repentant thief on the cross (Lk 23:43); and 10 of his eleven surviving apostles, after his resurrection,

¹⁰¹ For a condensed version of the explanation, and the key to understanding this, see Acts 10:34-38.

when He breathed on them and said "Receive the Holy Ghost" (Jn 20:21-23); One cannot receive the Holy Ghost and remain unredeemed¹⁰².

Others attempt to explain this by saying that Jesus is speaking of the **quantity** of miracles, **not the nature or quality of the miracles**. Obviously, with all of the future Christians going into all the world and making disciples, with miracles confirming the Word (Mk 16:15-20, et al), countless millions will ultimately be healed, set free from demonic oppression, and raised from the dead. Or, if you choose to omit the overtly miraculous, He means that countless millions will ultimately be brought to a saving relationship with Christ, as opposed to the necessarily limited number who could personally experience the ministry of Jesus Himself in three years¹⁰³.

Some Fascinating Possibilities.

But does any of this really explain the "greater works" of v 12? An interesting event that may be relevant here is the account in Acts 5:12-15, where so many miracles were being performed on Solomon's Porch that sick people were laid in the street in hope that Peter's shadow might touch and heal them. Of course, it doesn't say that Peter's shadow actually touched and healed people--only that people believed that it would; but the implication is strong and, if so, there is no record of Jesus' having done this. The woman with the issue of blood was healed by touching the hem of his garment--but not by being touched by his shadow¹⁰⁴.

A similar possible example of what Jesus was talking about is found in Acts 19:11-12, where cloths touched by Paul were sent out to sick and demonized people and they were healed and set free. Again, there is no record of Jesus' having done this. For more on this see the study Guide to Acts Chapters 5 and 19, with notes¹⁰⁵.

In the final analysis, I believe that the only honest conclusion about that troublesome word in v 12 ("greater") is that we simply don't know; I certainly don't. But I do know that what Jesus said is true, and that the provision of God is unlimited.

60. The Promise of the Comforter. (14:15-18)

Jesus goes on to say that if the disciples love Him they will keep his commandments, a vital point that He makes four times in the next 10 verses. And,

¹⁰² Thomas was not with the other apostles when this occurred. But we can probably use the figure 12 here, because it is not reasonable that Jesus would give 10 of his apostles this greatest of blessings, and leave Thomas out just because he happened to be away from the others at the time. Jesus did not do anything in a haphazard way.

¹⁰³ I consider the new birth, creating a "new creature," with new values and new understanding, to be a great miracle--perhaps the greatest of all.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8:43-48.

¹⁰⁵ I owe the insights in this paragraph to Mrs. Teresa Landrum, a member of the study guide project. In my more than 40 years of studying and teaching the Bible, they had never occurred to me.

He says, because they love Him and keep his commandments, the Father will send “another Comforter” to abide with them forever. He then identifies this Comforter as the Spirit of Truth (another name for the Holy Spirit), and says that the Spirit has already been manifested **with** (among) them, but in the future shall be **in** them. He is apparently referring to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit Whom they will soon receive¹⁰⁶. And then, in what seems to be a contradiction, He says that, in the coming of the Comforter, it will be He (Jesus) who will come to them to bring comfort. But this is not a contradiction; it is but another glimpse into the mystery of the Trinity.

***NOTE:** In v 16 the word “another” is extremely important. Although in the English language we have only one word for “another,” in Greek there are two: “allos” (another of the **same** kind) and “heteros” (another of a **different** kind). Here “allos” is used, making it clear that what Jesus is saying is that, when He must leave them, the Comforter Whom He will send in his place “**will be just like Me.**” With the disciples already feeling insecure about his soon-coming departure, what could be a more comforting promise?*

61. Two Things the Comforter Will Do. (14:21-26)

Jesus says that those who love Him will keep his commandments, and then the Father will love them, and Jesus will also love them, and will manifest Himself (make his presence real) to them. Judas (not Iscariot--he is out planning the betrayal) asks Jesus how it is that He will manifest Himself to his disciples, and not to the world¹⁰⁷. In reply, Jesus gives us another glimpse into the Trinity, and into what life will be like for believers after He returns to Heaven. In verse 23 He says that if we keep his words (commandments), not only will the Father love us, but both He and the Father will come and make their abode with us! It is already clear that the Holy Spirit will come and be a permanent part of all disciples’ lives; and this seems to say that those believers who keep his commandments will experience the abiding presence of the complete Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, as a way of life.

But, let’s get back to the Comforter. Jesus says that when the Comforter comes, He will teach us (give us understanding of) all (spiritual) things, and will cause us to remember “all things” that He has said. Could this be part of the case for the verbal inspiration of the New Testament?

¹⁰⁶ See in this regard Romans 8:9.

¹⁰⁷ This Judas is the brother of James, the son of Alphaeus.; he is also called Lebbaeus (Matt 10:3) and Thaddaeus (Mk 3:18). Yet another Judas (Jude) will appear as we progress through the epistles; he is Jude, author of the Book of Jude, and brother of James (author of the Book of James), both of whom were half-brothers of Jesus. For a complete listing of the apostles see "The Twelve Original Apostles" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

***NOTE:** In this final time of preparing his disciples for life on Earth without his physical presence, Jesus will list five more specific things, for a total of seven things that the Holy Spirit will do for them after He comes to replace Jesus as God's presence on Earth. For a summary of the Holy Spirit's ministry to the Church and the lost world, including an annotated list of these seven functions, see "When the Comforter Comes" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

62. The Promise of Abiding Peace. (14:27-31)

Continuing, Jesus makes his classic promise of the peace which only He can give, saying that the believers should not be troubled or afraid¹⁰⁸. It is an elaborate way of saying to them that, after He leaves, troubles and trials will come; but that they will be prepared to meet and overcome them because they will be prepared and equipped for them and He will be with them (in the person of the Comforter). He says that Satan (the prince [god] of this world) is looming large in the immediate future, but that he cannot succeed because Jesus has yielded nothing to him in sin¹⁰⁹.

***NOTE:** At this point Jesus and The Eleven apparently leave the upper room where they have enjoyed the Passover supper (we see that v 31 ends with Jesus saying, "Arise, and let us go hence. "). They leave the city, probably through the Eastern (Golden) Gate, and walk down into the Cedron (Kidron) Valley, in the direction of the Garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus continues to teach.*

This can easily be overlooked, especially in red letter editions of the Bible for, in the text, Jesus's teaching continues without interruption.

63. The Vine and the Branches. (15:1-11)

As Jesus and the apostles walk out of the city Jesus, continuing this ongoing stream of revelation, uses the analogy of the grapevine to describe the Church, the Body of Christ. He says that He is the true vine, we are the branches, and the Father is the husbandman (vinedresser/vintner). Keeping things simple, He says that the branches which produce no fruit are "taken away" (cut off and discarded) by the Father; and those branches which do bear fruit, He will prune (cut them back to stimulate production of more fruit, and cut off unproductive or diseased parts, but retain the branch)¹¹⁰. He warns the disciples that, unless they (and that means you and I as well) abide in Him, they cannot bear fruit; for, if separated from Him, they (we) can do nothing good. In fact, He says, if we separate from Him, and remain separated (abide not), we will be like fruitless branches, pruned off and dried up, to be taken by men and burned in a fire. On the other hand, if we

¹⁰⁸ See also in this regard Philippians 4:7.

¹⁰⁹ II Corinthians 4:4.

¹¹⁰ Like the chastening of us by God, this pruning will probably be painful; but afterward we will have the peaceable fruit of righteousness and bear much fruit.

abide in Him, we will bear "much fruit" and the Father will be glorified. If we remember this, and live accordingly, He says, we will have joy and our joy will be full.

64. "Greater Love Hath No Man." (15:12-17)

Repeating his commandment that the disciples love one another, Jesus makes a landmark declaration about human relationships: He says that there is no greater expression of love than that a person lay down his life for his friends. Selflessness is a virtue so important as to be near the very center of the nature of God. Then Jesus says that, from this moment forward, the disciples will no longer be merely servants, but will be his friends, made fully aware of his purposes and what He is doing. There is, however, a condition to this new relationship; He says that if they do not keep his commandments, they cannot be his friends. He says that He has chosen them for the purpose that they bear fruit that is permanent, so that the Father will give them what they ask in his name. And then he reminds them, once more, of his commandment that they love one another.

NOTE: Laying down our lives for one another (v 13) doesn't necessarily mean jumping on a grenade, or in any other way dying to save the life of another, although this is certainly part of the meaning. It may also mean giving up our desires or plans, in favor of what others desire or need. In military leadership this is a bed rock principle and an unwritten law. In everyday terms it means that the commander eats only after all of his men have been fed. If a commander considers the welfare of his men more important than his own welfare, and acts on that principle, his men will follow him into the most difficult or deadly situations, and will go for him until they drop. If, however, the commander values his own welfare more than he values the welfare of his men, they will know this immediately, and they will do as little as they can get away with.

65. The World Will Hate the Faithful. (15:18-21)

The next four verses express an extremely important principle of the Christian life, and it is one that is often forgotten today. It is that the secular world system, the ungodly, pleasure-seeking, self-serving, world system hated and persecuted Jesus, and we should expect to experience the same¹¹¹.

This is an unpleasant reality, but it is reality nevertheless. If you come to know and love the Lord (and to know Him is to love Him--the one cannot exist without the other), some people that you thought were your friends won't be glad to see you anymore. You will talk about Jesus and his wonderful Word, and it will be offensive to them. "What has happened to Tom," they will say to other former

¹¹¹ John 15:18-20, 17:14.

friends; "he used to be such a sensible guy, and now he is obsessed with this Jesus and the Bible thing?" You will no longer be on their Christmas card lists.

Whether Christian leaders, or we ordinary, rank-and-file Christians, if we compromise with the Christ-rejecting, secular world system, which values only success, wealth, and fame, in order to be accepted by it, we are turning our backs on the truth of the Bible, and on Jesus Who is Truth.

This, sad to relate, may be easily seen today in prominent Christians who are frequently interviewed and warmly accepted by worldly secular radio and television personalities. In order to be accepted and approved, these celebrity church leaders compromise the plain truth of the Word of God. Tragically, it is also readily seen in pastors of huge churches who speak only "feel good" things to their massive followings and write "feel good" books that are immediate best sellers; but they never teach simple matters of right-from-wrong (unless it is to preach against "intolerance" of sin and sinners). They don't warn their followers of the deadliness of the sin that prevails in the secular-humanist world around them¹¹².

Similarly sad is seeing and hearing prominent Christians who socialize and play golf with ungodly, sinful, world leaders and other celebrities, are accepted by them, and speak well of them.

But the truth is plain. Jesus has warned us: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets." And Paul spoke of this, in a few hard-hitting, not-very-pleasant words: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."¹¹³ "Shall" is an imperative; this doesn't mean that it may happen; it means that it **will** happen. This persecution may come in the form of unfair treatment by an employer or a military commander, rejection by people that we thought were our friends, or it may be as serious as a martyr's death. The warning by James, about this kind of compromise with the secular-humanist world around us, should give us pause if it were the only such warning; in fact, it should stop us in our tracks¹¹⁴!

66. Does Ignorance Equal Innocence? (15:22-25)

The next four verses of Chapter 15 call for some special consideration. As Jesus goes on speaking of how the world has hated Him and the Father without cause, He says that if He had not come into the world and spoken truth to the unbelievers they would not be guilty of sin. He has earlier expressed the same principle,

¹¹² The Rev. Dr. Ray Charles Jarman, brilliant intellectual with multiple doctorates who came to know the Lord late in life, taught me much. One thing he often told me is that, to evaluate a preacher's validity, we must not only listen to what he says, but we must also listen to what he **doesn't say**.

¹¹³ Luke 6:26; Jn 15:18-20, 17:14; II Tim 3:12.

¹¹⁴ James 4:4.

speaking directly to (and of) the Pharisees who rebuked Him for healing the man who was born blind, on the Sabbath¹¹⁵.

Here, however, He is speaking, not only of the Pharisees and other religious leaders who have rejected Him, but also of all who hear and reject the truth. The literal Greek translation of this part of verse 22b is, “they have no pretext [excuse] for their sin.” Can this mean that unredeemed people who never hear the truth of the gospel are sinless? No--it can’t mean that--for the rest of the New Testament makes it clear that we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and that none is righteous--no, not one. And yet we can’t just ignore this as if these words of Jesus were never spoken. Perhaps, as Matthew Henry observed, it is a matter of degree, or seriousness of the sin, in the final judgment. It seems that it is less sinful to be ignorant of the truth than it is to see and hear the truth, yet willingly reject it, vilify it and become its enemy. Verses 22-25 seem simply to be a condemnation of the wicked religious leaders, who are steeped in knowledge of the truth, yet hate it and are enemies of the truth.

67. The Holy Spirit Will Testify of Jesus. (15:26-27)

Continuing his revelation about the unavoidable conflict between the truth of the gospel and the secular world, Jesus reveals something that the Holy Spirit will do when He comes to replace Jesus as the Divine Presence on Earth. Using one of the Holy Spirit’s names, Spirit of Truth, He says that the Spirit “shall testify of me.” The Spirit will bear witness to, make known and validate, the reality and identity of Jesus before men; and, He adds, his 11 apostles will do the same thing, for they have known and been with Him from the beginning.

***NOTE:** And this they most certainly did! Within 30 years they had carried the Good News of Jesus to the ends of the known World--to India, what is now Russia, all of Europe, Persia, the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, Ethiopia and North Africa, all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. And they all paid for it by dying terrible deaths as martyrs except John, for whom Jesus had a different plan.*

68. Expect Persecution--Including Death. (16:1-4)

The foundational fact, that if we follow and obey Jesus without compromising the truth we will be persecuted, has already been dealt with in highlight 65. It is also dealt with in the study guide to Matthew 10:21-28. John, however, goes on briefly with the subject, to reveal an interesting detail concerning this (and one not included in the synoptic gospels). He says that the disciples will not only be dis-

¹¹⁵ John 9:41.

fellowshipped (put out of the synagogues), but that Christians will be so hated that those who kill them (and us) will think they are doing God a favor¹¹⁶.

69. The Holy Spirit Will Reprove the World. (16:5-11)

Jesus again tells his disciples that it is good that He is leaving them, for when He leaves, He will send the Holy Spirit to them. When the Holy Spirit comes, He says, He (the Spirit) will reprove, reveal and expose before the world the reality of sin, righteousness and judgment.

Concerning sin, He (the Spirit) will make clear and apparent the sin of those who reject Jesus as Redeemer.

Concerning righteousness, the Spirit will reveal the true righteousness in believers who will, by contrast, expose the shabby, wicked, unrighteousness of the unredeemed sinners. And it will be the Spirit who will do this because Jesus the Son will have returned to the Father.

Concerning judgment, the Spirit will make it clear and obvious that Satan ("the prince of this world") is already judged and found guilty of rebelling against God.

70. Other Things the Holy Spirit Will Do. (16:12-18)

Jesus tells them that there are many other things that they need to know and understand, but they are not ready and able to receive them now. However, Jesus says, when the Spirit comes He will take care of that. He then lists three more things that the Comforter will do when He comes:

He will guide the disciples into all truth;

He will show believers things to come; and,

He shall glorify Jesus (and no one else).

Summing up, Jesus says that He has the revelation of the mind and will of the Father; therefore, He says, the Spirit will also have the revelation of the mind and will of the Father, and will reveal this to the disciples.

Verse 16 must have left the heads of the 11 apostles spinning; it definitely does this to mine. Jesus says that in "a little while" they will not see Him. And then He says that "and again [in] a little while" they shall see him again, "because I go to the father."

Does He mean that He will die on the cross and be buried so that they will not see Him for three days and three nights? Or is He speaking of their seeing Him (periodically) for 40 days after the resurrection, then He will return to Heaven but, after an unknown period of time, He will return in the Second Advent and they will see Him come in glory? Perhaps He means both. At any rate, He creates an immediate discussion (and one with no resolution) among the apostles.

¹¹⁶ We are seeing this in the early 21st Century as Christians are being murdered, and in horrible ways, by Muslims and Hindus who are following the teachings of their pagan religions and serving their pagan gods. And they commit these horrible atrocities on Christians simply because they are Christians.

71. Henceforth They Will Pray to the Father, as Jesus Has Done. (16:19-28)

Jesus acknowledges their bewilderment but He doesn't immediately clarify it. He instead uses the analogy of a woman in labor, giving birth to a baby. In labor, He says, she suffers great pain; but, when the baby is delivered she forgets the pain for the joy of having the child. He is speaking of the fact that they will grieve at the loss of Him but that the loss will be temporary and they will rejoice when they see Him again. He still doesn't clarify the matter of which separation He is speaking; yet, in light of what He tells them about prayer it sounds like He has been speaking of the long separation to come, i.e. between his Ascension into Heaven and his glorious return in the Second Advent.

He tells them of a significant change concerning prayer. After Jesus departs, He says, the believers will pray directly to the Father, making their petitions and requests to Him. They will pray to the Father in his name, Jesus says, and the Father will grant their requests because He loves them, even as He loves Jesus. They are stepping into an entirely new way of life in many ways; one of these fundamental changes will be the nature of their direct relationship with the Father; and what a wonderful privilege it will be for them (and now, for us)!

***NOTE:** This last-pronounced coming change is worthy of a pause. Read again vv 23-28 and think of what Jesus is saying. In these six verses Jesus announces a paradigm change concerning the life of each believer, and concerning the life of the Church as a whole.*

*He tells the apostles (and us) that, after his work as the Messiah Redeemer on Earth is finished, and He returns to Heaven, they will not make requests to Him, which He will then present to the Father, as they have hitherto done. Instead, He says, they will pray to the Father **directly**, praying in Jesus' name. And, of course, this also applies to you and to me.*

This fundamental change presented us with the unimaginably wonderful privilege of relating directly to God the Father in prayer. This direct and personal relationship with God Himself, through Jesus, became the keystone concept of the Protestant Reformation. And, giving each believer the privilege of direct access to the Father in prayer makes it possible for us to minister to one another in prayer. In theological terms, this concept is usually called "the priesthood of all believers."

Paul summarized this new relationship, and what it would mean to the Church, in the sixteen simple words of I Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

72. A Final Warning about the Coming Hours. (16:29-33)

Once more, Jesus says clearly that He has come from God and will soon go back to his Heavenly Father. Then He tells them that they will soon be scattered, fleeing in fear, and will leave Him to die alone. But, He says, He will not really be alone, for the Father will be with Him.

Then, as one last bit of prophetic guidance, He tells them that as they make their way through life in the unredeemed world, serving Him, it will be difficult; they **shall** have tribulation. "Shall" is an imperative. Jesus is saying that this **is going to happen**; the way ahead is going to be difficult. He made this quite clear at the beginning of this chapter (vv1-4); and He closes the chapter on the same note (vv 31-33). But He closes the warning with a comforting promise: He tells them to be of good cheer, for He has overcome the world. In the end they will triumph, sharing in his victory.

73. The Great High Priestly Prayer.

The entirety of Chapter 17 is a prayer. This prayer of Jesus is often called "the great high priestly prayer" because it is a summation of his intercession for the Church that is soon to be born at Pentecost.

We are not told where Jesus was when He prayed this great prayer, but it seems almost certain that it occurred in the Cedron (Kidron) Valley, at the end of his teaching, as He and his apostles walked from the city, toward Gethsemane. Because of the nature of the prayer, many think that it occurred in the Garden of Gethsemane; but it didn't. His prayers in Gethsemane were prayed in solitude, agonizing alone before the Father; and this prayer was uttered in the presence of his 11 apostles. And, although it was truly a prayer, it was also a teaching moment for his apostles, for they must have been listening carefully; John recorded it for us, apparently verbatim. The 1st verse of Chapter 18 clearly states that **after** the prayer was finished, Jesus led the apostles (less Judas) across the Brook Cedron (Kidron), and onto the slope at the foot of the Mount of Olives. When Jesus prayed this landmark prayer, they were still in the Cedron (Kidron) Valley, on the city (west) side of the stream. They were about 1/5th of a mile from their destination at Gethsemane¹¹⁷.

a. "Glorify Thou Me." (17:1-5)

Jesus lifts up his eyes to Heaven and says that the hour for his sacrifice has come, and asks the Father to glorify Him, so that He might glorify the Father. In an unmistakable declaration of his own divinity, Jesus states that He has been given power over all flesh, and authority to give eternal life to those the Father has given Him. Then He defines eternal life, saying that we who receive it may know, fully and experientially, both the Father and the Son. This knowing of the Father and the Son **is** eternal life. Continuing, He declares that He has finished the work He came to do, and asks to be glorified with the glory that He shared with the Father before the world was created¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁷ Although the Bible gives us the general location of Gethsemane, only God knows precisely where it was. See Unger, "Gethsemane," pp 400-401.

¹¹⁸ What could be a more clear declaration of his divinity? See in this regard John 1:1-3.

b. Jesus Prays for His Disciples. (17:6-11)

Jesus declares that He has taught his disciples the things that the Father has given Him. He concludes that He is glorified in the successful ministry to his disciples; and He prays for his disciples, asking that they might be one, even as He and the Father are one.

c. Jesus Commits His Disciples into the Care of the Father. (17:12-17)¹¹⁹

Because his work on Earth is finished, Jesus commits the care of his disciples into the Father's hands, again asking that they may be one, even as He and the Father are one. He says that, of those the Father committed to his care He has lost none, except for Judas, whose loss was necessary in order to fulfill the prophecies¹²⁰. He asks not that the disciples be protected by being taken out of the world, but that they, making their way through the world, be protected from "the evil"¹²¹.

Verse 17 is important enough to be a highlight by itself, because it is such a concentrated bit of revelation. In this verse Jesus asks the father to sanctify the disciples with his truth, and defines truth as being the Father's Word (Logos). So, what is truth? Truth is the Word of God; and Chapter one of John's gospel account makes it clear that Jesus and the Word are one and the same.

Mathematically we might express it this way: "Jesus=The Word=Truth."

d. Jesus Prays for You and Me. (17:18-26)

Jesus concludes his prayer by making it clear that He prays not just for the current disciples, but also for those who will believe as a result of their ministry--and that means you and I. He also asks that we not only may be one with the Father and the Son, as He and the Father are one, but he asks also that we be with Him in glory, and that the love of God be in us as the personification of Jesus may indwell us.

***NOTE:** As Jesus closes this great, concluding, prayer for his disciples, knowing that his arrest is about to take place, his closing thought and request is for the friends that He is leaving behind. His final request is for them--his very human friends--"that they might be with me where I am," that they might join Him and the Father and behold the glory that they share. Read again v 24, with this in mind. See Jesus, in a sense looking back at these men and remembering all that they have shared so intimately with Him in the past three years, and knowing with an aching reluctance that he must now, in a human sense, leave them on their own.*

¹¹⁹ The reference to v 11 in both this highlight and the one above it is not an error; v 11 applies fully to both highlights.

¹²⁰ Psalm 41:9; Obad 7.

¹²¹ In this verse most modern versions render "evil" as "the evil one," meaning Satan. For a discussion of this rendering see the study guide to Matthew, The Sermon on the Mount, Sub-Highlight 9 h, explanatory NOTE b.

I think it will give you a clearer understanding of the paradigm change that is about to take place, and a much deeper sense of the very real humanity of this unique, magnificent, God-man. It definitely does this for me.

* * * * *

Author's Note

The arrest of Jesus, his illegal trial, condemnation, scourging and crucifixion are covered thoroughly in the study guides to the synoptic gospels, and will not be repeated here. There are, however, some aspects of Christ's passion found in John's account that are not found in the synoptics. Treatment of these things follows.

* * * * *

74. A Difficult, but Necessary, Arrest. (18:1-13)

Jesus ends his last teaching session with his closest disciples, and his high priestly prayer, and they go across the Brook Cedron (Kidron), into the Garden of Gethsemane, where He agonizes in prayer¹²². With the prayer time finished Judas, knowing the Lord's habits, leads a band (cohort) of Roman soldiers to Gethsemane, accompanied by officials from the Sanhedrin, and undoubtedly with a growing mob of idle miscreants, gathered up along the way, with swords, staves and torches or lanterns¹²³. It is the Roman Army, accompanied by a lynch mob smelling blood.

Jesus, knowing that the time has come for Him to be arrested, steps forward and speaks to the multitude, saying "Whom seek ye?" The leaders reply, undoubtedly with angry, authoritative shouts, "Jesus of Nazareth." He replies simply and quietly, "I am *he*," and a miracle occurs. The entire multitude: soldiers, Pharisees, hoodlums and all, is blown backward by an invisible force and slammed to the ground. We can only stand in awe of even this small release of the power of God, and we can only wonder what was in the minds of the multitudes, flat on their backs, looking up at the stars and wondering what hit them! I love this scene!

Jesus, knowing exactly what has happened, asks again, "Whom seek ye?" Some of them reply; but now they most likely reply in choked, apologetic, whispers, "Jesus of Nazareth," as they struggle to their feet, rearrange their uniforms and robes and pick up their weapons. Jesus replies, "I have told you that I am *he*."

¹²² The agony of prayer in the Garden is recorded only in the synoptic gospels.

¹²³ The "band" of Roman soldiers was a cohort, a unit usually consisting of 480 soldiers. Altogether, there were probably at least 100 hundred or more following in the growing crowd, which would be best described as a lynch mob, attaching itself to the soldiers. The synoptic gospels call the crowd "a [great] multitude."

(Surely they are again blown backward to the ground, but John did not record it.) And now, in complete control, Jesus orders the mob to allow his followers to leave, unharmed, in keeping with his own statement to the Father in prayer¹²⁴. Peter, ever the audacious one, draws his sword and slices off the right ear of a man named Malchus, a relative of the high priest¹²⁵. Jesus tells Peter to put away his sword, and allows the soldiers to tie Him up. Once bound, Jesus is led off to begin his great ordeal.

NOTES:

a. Only John tells us of this marvelous manifestation of the unimaginable power of the Holy Presence of God. Throughout the Bible we see glimpses of it: when God told Moses to keep the people at a safe distance on Mt. Sinai¹²⁶; when Daniel, hearing the voice of God fell to the ground, face down, as in a deep sleep¹²⁷; the Sanhedrin's guards, confronted with the glorious heavenly creature at the empty tomb of Jesus, become "as dead men¹²⁸;" and when this same John, confronted with the glorified Christ in Revelation 1, "fell at his feet as dead¹²⁹."

b. So, what blew this blood-thirsty mob and a cohort of battle-hardened Roman soldiers backward and slammed them to the ground? Notice that each time Jesus said, "I am he," the word "he" is italicized. This means that the word is not in the underlying Greek text, but was added by the translators. What Jesus really said to them was "I am," identifying Himself as The Great I Am--as Almighty God--and in that revelation the presence of God was apparently released in such powerful measure that those in that unredeemed mob were not only unable to stay on their feet, but were also blown backward several feet.

c. Jesus probably had to help the soldiers tie Him, for surely they were still shaky from being decked by an invisible force. I can imagine his saying to them, "Come on now, get up, get yourselves together and tie me up--you can do it--we must get on with fulfilling the prophecies." Here again we see vividly illustrated the vital fact that no man could take his life from Him--He willingly laid it down, in the perfect, complete, ultimate sacrifice.

*d. Further proof that Jesus is now in complete command of the situation is that He **commands** the soldiers, chief priests and the mob to allow his disciples to leave and to do them no harm, and they obey. In a secular sense there was then no one*

¹²⁴ John 17:12.

¹²⁵ Only John gives us the name of Malchus. Because Malchus lost his right ear, it is probable that Peter was left-handed. We know that, at this point Jesus, in his last recorded miracle of healing, restores the ear of Malchus who hates Him; this gracious miracle of healing is recorded only by Luke, the beloved physician.

¹²⁶ Exodus 20:20-25.

¹²⁷ Daniel 8:15-19; 10:5-19.

¹²⁸ Matthew 28:1-4.

¹²⁹ Revelation 1:11-18.

of greater authority in Judaea than a Roman officer, acting in the name of Caesar. And, in a religious sense, there were none with more authority than the representatives of the High Priest. And, as for the lynch mob, one does not reason with a mob, let alone give it commands. And yet here, Jesus clearly commands them all, and they meekly obey Him.

* * * * *

Author's Note

The synoptic gospels tell us of the conflict between Pilate and the high priests, of Barabbas, and of Pilate's attempts to set Jesus free; but none takes us so close, and tells the story as completely, as John does. And in John's account we see vividly the combination of integrity, honesty, and weakness in Pilate, the hatred, and clever political manipulation of Pilate by the Chief Priests, and the blood lust of the mob¹³⁰. We now move beyond the questioning of Jesus by the High Priest and Peter's denials; and, as the cock crows, Jesus is taken from the palace of the High Priest to the judgment hall of Pontius Pilate.

* * * * *

75. "What Is Truth?" (18:28-38a)

In one of the most interesting interactions between two men, in of all of human history, Jesus is brought before Pilate for judgment. Pilate, a basically just and honorable man, quickly sees that Jesus is guilty of nothing worthy of death, and he wishes to set Him free. Pilate's wife is involved in this crisis, having been warned in a dream that Jesus is innocent, and she urges her husband to set Him free¹³¹. But Jesus, knowing that He must go through with his ordeal as the sacrifice Lamb of God, is not cooperating.

Pilate asks Jesus if He is King of the Jews, and Jesus replies cryptically, without answering the question. Asked if He is a king of any kind, Jesus replies that He is, that He was born for this purpose, but that his kingdom is not of this world, and that He came into the world to bear witness to the truth. And, He says, everyone who is a friend of the truth, who is committed to truth, hears his voice and believes Him. Pilate, torn and tormented, is undoubtedly trying to follow and understand what Jesus is saying, but failing. Pilate looks at Jesus and, in a sincere, classic, cry out of the depths of spiritual darkness, asks "What is truth?" When I think of

¹³⁰ For some interesting speculation concerning what became of Pilate and his wife after the crucifixion, see "What Ever Became of Pontius Pilate?" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

¹³¹ Only Matthew tells us of this involvement of Pilate's wife.

this moment, I think I can hear sincere pleading and a touch of despair in Pilate's voice. This poor, honest, but weak and wretched man doesn't realize that, as he asks "What is truth?" he is looking into the very eyes of Truth.

Jesus does not reply, and John tells us nothing more of the exchange; but I can imagine Jesus, looking earnestly at poor, pathetic Pilate with the same aching compassion with which He had looked at Peter a few hours earlier, as Peter thrice denied Him.

I am particularly grateful to God and to John for allowing me to be a silent witness to this fascinating, pivotal, moment in human history.

NOTE: Caiaphas and the chief priests do not go with Jesus into the judgment hall of Pilate, for they don't want to be made ceremonially unclean by being in that "unclean" Gentile place. According to their legalistic rules, that would make them ceremonially "unclean" and unable to participate in and enjoy the Passover.

Instead of going with Jesus into the judgment hall, they deliver Him to the guard and wait in the street below, manipulating the mob.

The blind fools can't see that they are made much more spiritually unclean and detestable to God by being among those murderous miscreants in the mob, and by doing what they are doing to the only completely innocent human being ever to walk the Earth.

Significantly, Jesus faces Pilate alone.

76. Pilate Is Still Conflicted. (18:38b-19:11)

Pilate again tells the Chief Priests at the head of the mob that he finds no fault in Jesus; and he offers to release Him, and crucify Barabbas. Barabbas is a thief and murderer who has led an insurrection against Rome, and he really deserves to be crucified; but, of course, this is not what the Jewish leaders want. They want Jesus dead.

The Sanhedrin-led mob demands that Barabbas be released and that Jesus be crucified¹³². Jesus is scourged and mocked, and Pilate again brings him before the people, in a purple robe and crown of thorns, says "Behold the man," and says that he finds no fault in Him. At the sight of Jesus, standing, bloodied but unbowed, they scream "Crucify him!" In apparent frustration (and, perhaps, mockery) Pilate tells them to crucify Jesus themselves (knowing that they have no authority to crucify Him). In reply, the Chief Priests insist that Jesus must die because He has said that He is the Son of God. Pilate already knows that Jesus is innocent and that there is something about Him that is very different and unsettling; but, hearing that Jesus may be in some way divine, he is suddenly afraid.

¹³² Matthew describes Barabbas only as a "notable" criminal; Mark and Luke tell us that he was a murderer and an insurrectionist. John identifies him only as "a robber." Here, again, we see that we must consider all that the Bible tells us about a matter in order to get a complete picture.

Pilate returns to the Judgment Hall where Jesus is standing and asks Him from where He has come; but Jesus, with blood running down his face from punctures by the thorns, and soaking in red the purple robe, bleeding from the scourging, makes no reply, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy¹³³. Pilate, conflicted, bewildered, and now even more afraid, is incredulous. He asks Jesus if He doesn't realize that he, Pilate, has the power to free Him or to crucify Him. To this question Jesus does not reply; instead He says that Pilate could have no power over Him unless it were granted to him "from above." Continuing, Jesus goes on to say a fascinating thing: He says that because Pilate has been given this power "from above" he will not be held responsible for his execution, but the High Priests who delivered Him up for execution are guilty of "the greater sin"¹³⁴.

NOTES:

a. The scourging that Jesus had undergone was delivered by sadistic experts. The scourge was a special whip, designed to tear the skin, and the soft tissues under the skin, without killing the victim. It had a handle of wood, with several leather strips (thongs) attached to the front, each with a piece of flint, glass, metal or other hard, sharp object at the tip of the strip. The blows were delivered from the rear, but they could also tear the chest, abdomen and groin, by standing closer so that the tips of the thongs wrapped around the victim and jerking them back. The upper body of Jesus would have been torn and very bloody, both front and back.

b. We must remember that, when one of the chief priests says that Jesus has claimed to be the Son of God, and when Jesus says that Pilate's authority to put Him to death has come "from above," Jesus and the chief priests know what these things mean. You and I know what these things mean. Pilate, however, is a Roman pagan, and he has no idea what they mean. Surely, in his Roman mind, he hears them saying that Jesus may be "a son of the gods" and, therefore, a god himself, and that he, Pilate, has somehow been given power "from the gods" to execute Jesus. This elevates the matter to an entirely new level of significance in Pilate's thinking, and we can only wonder about its impact on his already-troubled mind.

77. The Debate Becomes Political. (19:12-16)

Pilate continues to declare the innocence of Jesus, and the High Priests cleverly turn the debate to political considerations. Because Jesus has called Himself a king, they say, He has spoken against Caesar; therefore, they say, if Pilate releases Jesus he "is not Caesar's friend." For Pilate the plot suddenly thickens; the

¹³³ Isaiah 53:7.

¹³⁴ It is difficult to know just what Jesus meant by "the greater sin"; but it is interesting to speculate concerning what will go through the minds of Caiaphas and Annas when they kneel, naked and trembling, before the Judgment Seat of Christ in the final day.

argument has taken on still another troubling dimension. Again he sits down in the judgment seat, brings Jesus forth and says to the crowd, “Behold your king.” In a master stroke the Chief Priests reply, “We have no king but Caesar!” It is checkmate, Pilate knows it, and he delivers Jesus up to be crucified. It is about noon (“the 6th hour”) on the day of preparation, the day that the Passover lambs are ceremonially killed in the Temple.

*NOTE: We must ask ourselves how it is that Jesus and his apostles had their Passover meal the night before, and yet, as we shall see in v 31, this is the day of preparation when the lambs are killed, roasted and eaten. Rabbinic tradition tells us that in that year there were so many people in Jerusalem for the Passover that it was necessary to have two days of preparation. Thus, on the first preparation day Jesus ate the Passover lamb; and on the second preparation day He **was** the Passover Lamb.*

78. “What I Have Written, I Have Written.” (19:17-22)

Jesus is crucified between two thieves, and Pilate has composed a sign to be attached to the cross of Jesus. It says, “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.” Because the crucifixion is done near the city, and because many people from many countries, there for the Passover, will see the sign, Pilate has it written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin; he doesn’t want anyone to miss his point.

This, of course, offends the Chief Priests, and they demand that the sign be changed to say, “He said that he was the King of the Jews.” But Pilate has his limits; he is fed up with these trouble-making Jews and he will not be pushed another inch. His only reply to them is an unconditional dismissal: “What I have written, I have written.” Is this interesting tribute to this innocent, and most unusual, man Pilate’s calculated slap at the Caiaphas and Annas? Or is it a tribute to Jesus, his compelling presence and his innocence? We will probably never know; but I suspect that, in this closing shot, Pilate intended it to be both.

79. That Very Special Robe. (19:23-24)

With Jesus on the cross, the four attending soldiers divide his garments among them; it is apparently a small perquisite that came with the job. When they notice that the robe is seamless, woven in one continuous process (and valuable), they decide not to cut it up into four parts, which would ruin it. Instead, they decide to deal with it separately and cast lots to see which one gets it. In so doing, they unwittingly fulfill a significant prophecy concerning the Messiah¹³⁵.

NOTES:

a. Although paintings, statues and crucifixes have his loins discreetly covered in some way, usually with a loin cloth, Jesus actually hung on that cross naked. This

¹³⁵ Psalm 22:18

was a deliberate part of the crucifixion process, intended to make it as humiliating and dehumanizing as possible, and to strip the victim of any shred of dignity.

b. There is great significance in the nature of Jesus' unusual robe. This robe, woven completely as one piece without any seams or stitching, is like the robe of the High Priest, worn directly under the ephod¹³⁶. Yes, Jesus was and is our great, eternal, High Priest; and the significance of the robe was not lost on John, the only gospel writer to include this interesting detail.

80. Jesus Commits His Mother to John's Care. (19:25-27)

Standing near the cross are three Marys: Mary, mother of Jesus; his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas; and Mary Magdalene. John ("the disciple...whom He loved") is also standing there, and Jesus commits his mother into John's care. Both Mary and John accept this arrangement and, "from that hour," John took her into his own home.

NOTES:

a. Verse 25 requires some explanation. It is made clear that Mary, wife of Cleophas, is the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus; but it seems very odd that two sisters would have the same first name. The explanation is that in Greek the name of the wife of Cleophas is "Maria," and the name of Jesus' mother is "Mariam," derived from Hebrew, "Mar-yam" (which, in English becomes "Miriam," a name which appears 17 times in the Old Testament, including Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron).

So the mystery is solved: in Greek the names of the two sisters are different; but in English both names become "Mary."

b. By this we know that it is almost certain that Joseph is no longer living; but Mary has four grown sons who could care for her, so why would Jesus direct John to care for her? The only intellectually honest answer is that we don't know; however, although at least two of them, James and Jude, will become Christians, and each will write one book of the New Testament, there is no evidence to support the belief that they are already believers. It appears that they did not become believers until after the Resurrection. Also, Jesus has a very special mission for John, the only apostle who will escape a martyr's death, and He may have wanted Mary to be a unique source for John in writing his unique gospel.

81. "It Is Finished!" (19:28-30)

Having suffered and bled so much, Jesus is dehydrated and thirsty¹³⁷. Knowing that his work of redemption is complete, he says that He is thirsty, and a sponge dipped in "vinegar" is raised to his mouth by a soldier. This is not what we would

¹³⁶ Exodus 39:22-23.

¹³⁷ Significant loss of blood causes dehydration and thirst. This is why on battlefields wounded men cry out for water; the thirst can be extreme, and Jesus, by three o'clock that afternoon, had suffered massive blood loss.

call vinegar today; the “vinegar” given to Jesus was sour wine, the ordinary drink of laborers and common soldiers. He apparently took some of it into his mouth from the sponge and drank it¹³⁸. Then, with a triumphant voice He shouts, “It is finished” and yields up his spirit. His perfect work of atonement for the sins of mankind is complete.

NOTES:

a. The “vinegar” offered to Jesus at his crucifixion was nothing like what we call vinegar today. It was wine that was old and had begun to go sour¹³⁹. This was the beverage of the poor and ordinary Jews, and the daily beverage of the Roman soldier. Jesus was offered this “vinegar” (sour wine) at his crucifixion three times. The first time, it was mixed with myrrh, making it a strong intoxicant; this was a common step in preparing a condemned man for crucifixion, to somewhat deaden the pain. Jesus rejected this wine, insisting on fully experiencing the pain of atonement (Matt 27:34; Mk 15:23). He was offered sour wine again (without the drug), on the cross, as the soldiers mocked Him, and he apparently took it (Lk 23:36). The third time, He said “I thirst”; He was offered the sour wine, and He drank it (Mk 15:36; Jn 19:28-30)¹⁴⁰. After this He said, “It is finished,” and He gave up the ghost.

*b. In verse 28, where it says, “all things were now accomplished,” the underlying Greek is a form of the verb “teleo,” meaning to bring to an end. The Greek text literally says, “all things now have been finished.” The very same Greek word underlies the triumphant cry of Jesus, “It is finished!” in verse 30. Our English word, “teleological,” derived from “teleo,” describes a process or legal agreement that is completely finished, which needs not be, and cannot be, added to. Thus Jesus is making it very clear that his perfect work of atoning for the sins of mankind is perfectly, utterly, completed--nothing more need be done, nor could anything more be done, to atone for the sins of man. His atoning work was indeed, as He triumphantly cried out, **finished**, brought to its end, once and for all time!*

82. More Prophecies Fulfilled. (19:31-37)

The Sun is getting low in the western sky, and Jewish leaders are anxious that the three crucified men be buried before the Sabbath begins at sundown; the law

¹³⁸ Many have interpreted the offering of vinegar to the thirsty Jesus as an act of cruel mockery; however, it was almost certainly an act of kindness and mercy, for it was the same sour wine that the soldiers, who offered it to Jesus, drank themselves. Nothing in the passage suggests that Jesus refused the sour wine, except when it was first offered, mixed with myrrh, to prepare Him (to drug Him) for crucifixion. See the study guide to Mark 15:23-33.

¹³⁹ Not for another 1,800 years would Louis Pasteur invent a way (“pasteurization”) to prevent wine from going sour. About 20 years after Pasteur's discovery, this process was first applied to milk.

¹⁴⁰ His massive bleeding had caused dehydration and extreme thirst.

forbad leaving executed criminals unburied after sunset¹⁴¹. These “kind and compassionate men of God” plead with Pilate that the legs of the three victims be broken to hasten their death. Soldiers arrive to break the men’s legs and are amazed to find Jesus already dead. The leg-breakers are amazed, but we aren't. In fact, we know that He has been dead since 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon (the "9th hour") when, with his perfect work of atonement finished, He had yielded up his human spirit, commending it into the hands of the Father¹⁴².

And so, the legs of Jesus are not broken, fulfilling the prophecy that "He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken"¹⁴³." One of the soldiers thrusts his spear upward and pierces Jesus’ side, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10: both water and blood flow from the wound¹⁴⁴. Thus, two more prophecies of the Messiah are fulfilled, and John himself is a witness to this closing scene of the crucifixion.

NOTES:

a. The flowing of both water and blood from the spear wound were as would be expected. Because the spear thrust was from below, the point would have passed upward through his lung, releasing fluid accumulated because of inability to breathe normally. It is also likely that the spear point continued upward to pierce the heart, releasing fluid accumulated around the heart because of congestive heart failure, and a lot of blood. The flow of water would largely have come first (mixed with blood from the pierced skin and soft tissue below it); most of the blood would have followed, from the heart (and/or the large artery associated with the left lung).

*b. Much has been written from a scientific point of view concerning what caused the death of Jesus on the cross. Most of it, although well-intended, does not, it seems to me, apply to Him because the Romans did not kill Him--He willingly yielded up his life as the perfect sacrifice¹⁴⁵. This is explained thoroughly in the study guide to Matthew 27:50 and the explanatory **NOTE** following. That is why He is already dead when the leg-breakers arrive. What has been written about the physiology of crucifixion does, however, help us to understand the death of all others who have been crucified.*

¹⁴¹ Deuteronomy 21:22-23. Some crucified men lived for several agonizing days on the cross. This tells us that the two malefactors crucified with Jesus were Jews.

¹⁴² Luke 23:46.

¹⁴³ Psalm 34:20.

¹⁴⁴ For an interesting connection to the flowing of both water and blood from the spear wound, see the study guide to I Jn 5:6.

¹⁴⁵ See also in this regard Jn 10:18. What is expressed here **must not** be taken to mean that Jesus willed his death because He couldn't take any more pain; He yielded up his spirit into the Father's hands, just as he said, and died because his perfect work of atonement was **finished**.

It seems that when the victim becomes so weak that he can no longer push himself up with his legs to breathe, but hangs suspended from his hands, the position makes it impossible to breathe, and he dies from suffocation. Thus, breaking the legs quickly brings on the death of men already terribly weakened.

c. The Sabbath that is about to begin at sunset is not the weekly Sabbath (what we call Saturday). Sunset would be the beginning of the Sabbath of Pentecost (a "high day," v 31), probably our Friday. Jesus had prophesied plainly that He would be in the grave three days and three nights¹⁴⁶.

83. A Hasty Burial in a Rich Man's Tomb. (19:38-42)

Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin and a secret disciple of Jesus, visits Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus¹⁴⁷. Pilate approves, and Joseph (almost certainly with help from servants) takes the body of Jesus to a tomb, one hewn out of solid rock. It is a tomb where no one has ever been buried¹⁴⁸. Joseph of Arimathea had had it prepared for himself. The tomb is in a garden, not far from the site of the crucifixion. Nicodemus, another member of the Sanhedrin, the one who had come to see Jesus by night (John 3:1f), came also and brought expensive spices. They wrap the body in a linen cloth packed with the spices, wrap a linen napkin around his face, and lay him in the tomb. All this is done as quickly as possible, so as to avoid breaking the Levitical law which required that the bodies of executed criminals must be buried before sundown¹⁴⁹. There may have been particular urgency to hasten the burial of Jesus because the day that would begin at Sunset was Pentecost.

NOTE: *For a summary of the timing of events surrounding the crucifixion, burial and resurrection, see "Was Jesus Crucified on Good Friday?" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

84. The Tomb Is Empty. (20:1-18)

Early on the first day of the following week (our Sunday), "while it is yet dark," Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, finds it empty and runs back to tell Peter and John (again identified as the "disciple whom Jesus loved")¹⁵⁰. Peter and John immediately run to the tomb, with John arriving first. John stoops down and looks in; he sees the linen burial cloths but does not enter. Hard-charging Peter arrives and, characteristically, goes immediately inside. It is difficult to imagine how Peter and John could still not know that Jesus would rise after three days and three

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 12:38-42.

¹⁴⁷ This Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin and wealthy. He must have been also a man of exceptional prominence, for very few could simply go to see Pilate without being summoned.

¹⁴⁸ Jesus was "plowing new ground," even in death. Remember that the young, unbroken, donkey that He rode triumphantly into Jerusalem had never before been ridden.

¹⁴⁹ Deuteronomy 21:22-23.

¹⁵⁰ John used this expression to identify himself four times: John 19:26, 20:2, 21:7; and 21:20.

nights, for He has been telling them for months that it would happen; but they still don't get it. They return to the others, but Mary Magdalene, who has returned to the tomb, remains. Weeping, she looks into the tomb and sees two angels sitting, one at each end of the stone shelf where the body had lain. They ask her why she is weeping, and she--obviously not realizing that she is seeing angels--says that her Lord has been taken away and she doesn't know what was done with his body. Turning away from the tomb she sees Jesus, but fails to recognize Him, thinking that He is the gardener¹⁵¹. She says that if the gardener has moved the body, and if he will tell her where it is, she will take responsibility for the body. In reply, Jesus speaks her name, and she recognizes Him, saying "Rabboni"¹⁵². He tells her not to touch Him yet, for He must ascend to the Father; then He instructs her to return to the others and tell them what He has said¹⁵³. She obeys.

85. Jesus Appears. (20:19-23)

At the end of this unforgettable first day of the week, the disciples are gathered, with doors closed (probably locked) for fear of some hostile act of the Jewish leaders. Jesus appears, speaks reassuringly, and shows them his wounds. He then says to them, "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you"; having said this, He breathes on them and says, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Continuing, He says that whose soever sins they remit (forgive) are remitted, and whose so ever sins they retain are retained.

NOTE: *This matter calls for some understanding. Three extremely significant things are found in these five verses.*

First is the commission. Jesus says, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Here, in abbreviated form, is what we have come to call "the Great Commission," which is spelled out in greater detail in the accounts of Matthew and Mark, i.e. to go into all the World, declaring the good news of redemption and making disciples. For the past three years Jesus has prepared them to this end.

*Second is the impartation of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. Jesus breathes on them and says, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." There is disagreement among Christian groups as to when the apostles and other close followers of Jesus became born-again Christians; it appears that this was the moment. The fact that Jesus breathed on them is significant. The Greek verb, "emphusao" **is used nowhere else in the New Testament**; and, it is the same Greek word used in the Septuagint (the Greek OT, ca 300 BC) in Gen 2:7 where it is written that God*

¹⁵¹ We must wonder why Mary did not recognize Jesus. Perhaps she was blinded by her tears. It may also be that, in his resurrected, glorified body, his appearance was somehow changed. See in this regard I Corinthians 15:51-52.

¹⁵² This is Aramaic, for "Master."

¹⁵³ The Greek word rendered "touch" in v 17 is *hupto*, meaning "to cling to." She thought he was lost to her forever, she has unexpectedly found Him, and in her joy she obviously didn't want Him to leave.

breathed into man's nostrils "the breath of life" and he became a living soul. Thus, Jesus breathed on these disciples and imparted spiritual life, as God had breathed the breath of life into Adam, causing him to become "a living soul." This unique and extremely significant use in verse 22 appears to me to be still another of John's ways, in his unique gospel, of declaring the divinity of Jesus.

*Third is the matter of forgiving the sins of others. The underlying Greek verb is "aphiemi" and its literal meaning is to send away. The wording of v 23 appears to say that these disciples will now have authority to forgive (or not forgive) sins. And yet, there is no instance in the New Testament where a disciple--even an apostle--forgave the sins of another. Verse 23 may be a reference to the new powers of supernatural discerning and knowledge that the Holy Spirit will bring into their lives. They will be shown the validity or the falseness of the professions of others, as in the matter of Peter, Ananias, and Sapphira (Acts 5), or of Peter and Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8). Another possibility is that v 23 is merely a restating of the authority to bind and loose in spiritual matters (Matt 18:18). Once more, it seems, we cannot be certain about what Jesus intended here, although Catholic and Protestant theologians have firm (and conflicting) opinions concerning it. In Roman Catholic theology a priest has authority to absolve (forgive) sin, or to withhold absolution. In liturgical Protestant theology, after the Prayer of General Confession, the priest or minister **pronounces** the absolution (forgiveness) prior to serving Holy Communion; but he does not do the absolving. In some liturgical Protestant churches, this is taken one step farther, and the congregation, in turn, pronounces, in unison, the absolution of the priest or minister prior to the receiving of Communion.*

86. The Great Confession of Thomas. (20:24-29)

When this occurs, Thomas (the twin) is not present; and, when the others tell him what has happened, he finds it difficult to believe. He says that he cannot believe it until he sees Jesus for himself, alive, and puts his finger into the nail wounds and thrusts his hand into the wound from the spear. I am inclined to think that Thomas is speaking hyperbole here, because of the enormity of the issue. He will forever after this moment be remembered as "doubting Thomas"; but I think this is probably unfair--a disservice to a good man. Perhaps he is still just so crushed at what he perceives as the permanent loss of his beloved Master that he cannot allow himself to hope that Jesus is still alive, and risk having that hope dashed again. We cannot know.

At any rate, eight days later the disciples, this time including Thomas, are again gathered there; and again the doors are shut (and probably locked), apparently still in fear of being arrested. Although there is nothing in the passage about it, surely,

as each day has passed, it has become still more difficult for Thomas to believe that his beloved Master is alive.

Suddenly, with no warning, Jesus appears, standing among them. His appearance is supernatural because the doors are shut (verse 26), and probably locked. Jesus knows what Thomas has said to the others, and He speaks immediately to Thomas, telling him to put his finger into the nail wounds and to thrust his hand into the spear wound. Then, in gentle rebuke, he tells Thomas to “be not faithless, but believing.”

But Thomas does not need to touch the wounds--he is immediately convinced! In his great confession of the divinity of Jesus he exclaims, “My Lord, and my God!” This is the first time that a follower of Jesus has addressed Him as “God,” and Jesus does not correct him. Jesus says to Thomas that he has seen Him and so believes; blessed, He says, are those who have not seen Him, yet have believed (and this includes most of us).

NOTE: Three times in John's gospel (and nowhere else in the Bible) Thomas is identified as "Didymus." This is Greek for "a twin." It is interesting that Thomas is identified three times as a twin, yet nothing in the Bible is said about his twin brother (or sister). Perhaps he (or she) died in infancy or childhood; infant and child mortality rates were high in the ancient World, and continued to be high, even in the most developed nations, until the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. In many parts of the undeveloped world such mortality rates are still high.

87. John's Purpose in Writing. (20:30-31)

At this point John inserts a brief statement of his purpose in writing his gospel. He says that Jesus performed many more miraculous acts in the presence of his disciples which he has not recorded¹⁵⁴. Then, in one verse, he states his purpose in writing his book. He says that he is doing it so that all who read the book might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the divine Son of God, and that in believing they (we) might have eternal life "through his name" (the fullness of the reality of his divine identity). In this one brief verse John expresses the theme of his gospel: the divinity of Jesus the Redeemer, the Christ, the unique God-man¹⁵⁵.

88. A Joyous Fish Fry on the Sea Shore. (21:1-14)

Peter, Thomas (the “doubter” twin), Nathaniel, and James and John (sons of Zebedee), and two other, unnamed disciples, decide to go fishing in their old fishing grounds off Capernaum¹⁵⁶. They fish all night and catch not a single fish.

¹⁵⁴ He repeats this statement, more forcefully, in the very last verse of his gospel, 21:25.

¹⁵⁵ See in this regard Psalm 2:7, 12.

¹⁵⁶ Why this particular group of disciples was together is not explained; but it may be that the others, such as Matthew, were not fishermen. The five who are named are apostles; the two who are not named seem also to have

As the new day dawns they see Jesus standing on the shore, but do not recognize Him. He calls to them, asking if they have caught anything, and they say “No.” Jesus tells them to cast their net from the starboard (right) side of the boat and promises that they will catch fish. They follow his suggestion and catch so many fish that they cannot get the net into the boat. At this point John recognizes Jesus and tells Peter, “It is the Lord.” Peter, characteristically, jumps overboard without hesitation and, one would assume, begins to swim for the shore. The rest bring the boat the 300 feet to the bank, dragging the net full of fish.

On the beach they see that Jesus has a fire going, burned down to good hot coals, and some fish cooking, with bread. He tells them to bring the fish that they have caught, and Peter drags the net, overloaded with 153 large fish, onto the rocky beach, and the net is not damaged. They cook and eat all the fish and bread that they want. It must have been a wonderfully pleasant, entirely human time of fellowship: we may think of it as a cookout on the beach.

*NOTE: Verse seven says that Peter put on his fisherman’s coat before jumping into the sea “for he was naked.” He probably had not been fishing truly naked, but had taken off his outer tunic while fishing, and was probably wearing his inner tunic (and a loin cloth, an under garment). He took time to put his outer tunic back on before jumping overboard. Since **any** hesitation was not characteristic of impulsive Peter, we might wonder why he didn’t leave his fisherman’s coat in the boat, especially since any additional garment makes swimming more difficult and slow; but this is not explained.*

Finis Dake suggests that the water was then shallow enough for Peter to wade, and that he got out of the boat to pull it with its heavy load, in order to hasten their moving for the last 100 yards¹⁵⁷. The problem here is that 100 yards from the beach the water is too deep to wade. Perhaps Peter swam until his feet could reach the bottom and waded the final distance, pulling the boat. In the final analysis it seems that we cannot know.

89. “Peter--Do You Love Me?” (21:15-17)

After they have eaten their fill, it is time for a necessary exchange between Jesus and Peter. He asks Peter if he loves Him, and Peter responds saying, “Yes, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.” Jesus says to him, “Feed my lambs.” Again, Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him. Peter makes the same response, and Jesus replies, “Feed my sheep.” For the third time, Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him. By this time Peter, not knowing why Jesus continues to ask the same question, is

been apostles because of the wording "and two other of his disciples." The use of the word "other" at the end of the list suggests this.

¹⁵⁷ Dake, Finis J., *The Dake Annotated Reference Bible*.

grieved and hurt. He says, "Lord thou knowest all things--thou knowest that I love thee." Jesus replies, "Feed my sheep."

NOTE: *This strange exchange between Jesus and Peter requires some explanation.*

a. Why Three Times? *First, why did Jesus ask the same question three times? The most likely reason is that this three-fold confession of love for the Lord is for Peter's sake--to balance his previous three-fold denial of the Lord in the High Priest's palace.*

b. What Kind of Love? *A fascinating aspect of this unusual exchange is in the words used for "love." In the first two questions Jesus uses the Greek verb "agapeo," love with the supreme love of God, perfect and without condition or limit. In both responses, Peter replies using the Greek verb "phileo," love with brotherly affection or fondness. The third time Jesus asks the question He, in a sense, comes down to Peter's level and uses "phileo" (are you fond of me?). For the third time, Peter answers with "phileo." It seems that Jesus is challenging Peter to love with the perfect love of God, supremely, perfectly and without condition; this is a level of selfless, sacrificial love that Peter has not yet reached; and he is humbled.*

c. Feed and Lead. *The first time Peter answers, the reply of Jesus is to feed (Greek, "bosko," to provide for, and care for) his lambs. The second time Peter answers, the reply of Jesus is again to feed his sheep; but here Jesus uses a different word for "feed": it is "poimaino," and it means not only to feed and provide for, but to guide, direct and protect the sheep¹⁵⁸. The third time Peter answers, now deeply humbled, Jesus tells him to feed his sheep, returning to the word (Greek, "bosko") that He used in the first instance, concerning his lambs.*

What is the Lord doing here, besides requiring a three-fold confession, to counteract Peter's three-fold denial of Him? It seems that Jesus is re-affirming Peter's apostolic commission; but that is not all. In the first and third instances (vv 15 and 17), Jesus tells Peter to feed the believers (of all ages) with the Word of God, which is the constant necessity. In the second instance (v 16), He is telling Peter that he is also to lead, direct, discipline and restore the believers when necessary. These functions are necessary in a leadership role, but are secondary compared with the constant feeding with the Word.

90. A Grim Prophecy for Peter. (21:18-19)

Without a pause, Jesus speaks a grim prophecy about the death that Peter will die in service to the Lord, one in which he would "stretch out his hands" and would be

¹⁵⁸ The verb used here for "feed," *poimaino*, is related to the Greek noun *poimen*, which means "shepherd." Thus Jesus is saying, "feed them as a shepherd provides pasture and feed for his sheep."

handled by others who will take Peter where he doesn't want to go. In this Peter will glorify God. With this said, Jesus reduces Peter's commission to its simplest terms, saying, "Follow me."

***NOTE:** According to tradition, supported by the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, including Clement, Tertullian, and Origen (quoted in Eusebius, "Ecclesiastical History"), Peter, after a long life of service to the Church, traveled to Rome where he was crucified in the persecution by Nero, soon after the martyrdom of Paul by beheading, and was buried in the same cemetery as Paul. By that time Peter had learned well the lessons in humility which Jesus had tried to teach him during the three years of earthly ministry. According to Origen (184-253 AD) Peter, considering himself unworthy of dying the same death as his Lord, asked to be crucified upside down, and died in that way¹⁵⁹.*

91. "What about Him?" (21:20-23)

Peter, apparently not clearly understanding the prophetic statement about his future, but sensing that it did not bode well for him, turns, looks at John and asks, "Lord, what shall this man do?" He is saying, in effect, what you said about me sounds pretty grim, so what about him--what will happen to him? Jesus replies, "If I will that he tarry until I come [back], what is that to thee? "[you, Peter,] Follow me."

Because of what Jesus said to Peter about John, a belief spread among the Christians that John would live until the return of Jesus in the Second Advent; but Jesus didn't say that. He said, "If" that should be his will, it would not concern Peter; the thing for Peter to do is to concern himself with what Jesus had just said about him, and get on with his ministry ("follow thou me").

92. What Could Be More Clear? (21:24-25)

Closing his gospel account, John signs off with a flourish. Taking care to avoid any possibility of being misidentified, or misunderstood, and speaking of himself as usual in the third person, he closes with, "This [writer] is the disciple which testified of these things, and wrote these things; and we [he and his fellow Christians] know that his testimony is true." He closes with his famous statement that Jesus did many more noteworthy and miraculous things, but that they could not all be included in his gospel. In fact, to make his point, he waxes hyperbolic, saying that if all that Jesus did were written in books the World could not contain them.

Leaving us to ponder this, he ends with "Amen [so be it]"

¹⁵⁹ Origen, quoted by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, III.1.