

## The New Testament, Book 3

### The Gospel According to Saint Luke

Luke's gospel is the third of the four gospel accounts, and is the last of the three "synoptic" gospels. Like the other two, although it tells the same basic story, it has distinctive characteristics.

Approach and Style. Luke's writing style is that of a careful scholar, and his gospel is noteworthy for the elegance and eloquence of its Greek expression. He also set out to record the story of Christ thoroughly and completely; thus Luke is the longest of the four gospels. **More than half of the content of Luke's gospel is unique**--i.e. not found in the other three gospels. Among these are: the account of Gabriel's visit to Zacharias, Elisabeth's supernatural conception and the birth of John the Baptist; the account of Mary's miraculous conception and her prenatal visit to Elisabeth; the account of the shepherds at the birth of Jesus; the dedication of the Christ Child in the Temple with the prophecies of Simeon and Anna; and the parables of the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep, and the Prodigal Son.

Jesus the Perfect Man. Although Luke mightily declares the divinity of Jesus, he also emphasizes, much more than the other three gospel writers, the humanity of Jesus. He presents Jesus as the Perfect Man. "Son of Man" is Luke's hallmark phrase in referring to Jesus, and Luke 19:10 may be taken as the hallmark verse: "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Beauty of Expression. Of all the gospels, Luke is distinctive for its beauty of expression. It contains some beautiful passages not found in the other gospels--some so dear to the Church that they have for many centuries been part of classical liturgies. These are: Elisabeth's *Beatitude* (1:41-45); Mary's *Magnificat* (1:46-55); Zacharias's *Benedictus* (1:67-79); the angels' *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* (2:13-14); and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* (2:28-32).

Luke the Historian. Sir William Ramsay, Oxford professor and eminent scholar of the 19th and early 20th Centuries, is considered by many to have been the greatest archeologist of all time. He was an intellectual product of the prevailing German (Tubingen) school of skepticism which denied the value of the Bible as history. Basically hostile to the idea of validity of the Scriptures as history, he was especially critical of Luke and Acts because they contain so many names of officials, dates, place names and other details, of which there was no other record in ancient literature<sup>1</sup>. Ramsay went to the Mediterranean to prove them wrong; and he was amazed to discover that his archeological findings proved just the

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of this precise, detailed recording of names, dates and places, see Lk 3:1-2.

opposite--that the records in Luke and Acts were accurate. He declared: "Great historians are the rarest of writers...Luke is a historian of the first rank...this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

Was Mary His Source? Some interpreters say that Luke writes from Mary's point of view. There is a widely held tradition (and one that is probably reliable) to the effect that Luke visited Mary many times in her Jerusalem home, and that she was the source for much of his gospel account. And, if we think about this, since Luke was a careful and thorough historian, it would seem to be irrational to think that he would **not** have sought her out as a vital source of this knowledge. Since, after a supernatural conception, she delivered, nursed and reared Jesus in a completely natural way, no one else on Earth could know the human side of Him better than his mother. Only Luke tells us of the events leading up to Mary's miraculous conception, the birth of Jesus, his dedication in the Temple and the prophecies of Simeon and Anna. All these things, so important to a mother, are told in great detail. The story of the boy Jesus when He stayed behind in Jerusalem to discourse with the scholars in the Temple, found only in Luke's account, is likewise the sort of thing that a mother would remember and relate. Yes, the logical case for Mary as Luke's primary source is very strong. In fact, as already pointed out, to think otherwise would be illogical.

Jesus the Healer. Luke emphasizes the healing ministry of Jesus, which would be expected of a writer who is himself a physician. The late Dr. J. Vernon McGee, in his introductory notes on Luke, makes the interesting observation that "Luke used more medical terms [in his writings] than Hippocrates, the father of Medicine." I can't confirm or deny this, but it is an interesting thought.

**A. Author.** It is almost universally agreed that the human author was Luke, a physician of Antioch in Syria, and a companion of Paul. It is likewise generally believed that he was also the author of the Acts of the Apostles, which the salutation of Acts seems to make clear.

The Muratorian Canon. The Muratorian Canon (ca 150-170 AD), also called the Muratorian Fragment because the first part is missing, is the earliest known listing of the New Testament books. This ancient Latin document identifies Luke as the author: "The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. Luke the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, whom Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law, composed it in his own name, according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to discern the events, so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John [the Baptist]<sup>2</sup>."

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the Muratorian Canon return to "Introduction to the New Testament," final topic.

Luke and Paul. Luke was probably a convert of Paul, who referred to him as "Luke the beloved physician." He and Paul were both intellectuals, Luke accompanied Paul on some of his apostolic journeys, and was with him during his imprisonment and martyrdom in Rome. Colossians 4:9-14 suggests strongly that he was a gentile for, although he was with Paul, he was not listed among those "who are of the circumcision." He was probably a native of Antioch of Syria, and he is generally believed to have been the only gentile writer of a book of the Bible.

**B. Place and Date.** Luke's gospel was probably written ca 40-45 AD. The salutations of Luke's gospel and the book of the Acts of the Apostles make it clear that Luke was written before Acts, and the evidence strongly indicates that Acts was written prior to 50 AD<sup>3</sup>. The place of writing is unknown.

**C. Occasion.** As expressed in the salutations of both Luke's Gospel and Acts of the Apostles, the occasion was Luke's desire to gather the story completely, and to set it forth in an orderly, scholarly way. In both books Luke expresses this goal to someone named Theophilus, apparently a man Luke held in high regard<sup>4</sup>. We should be very grateful that this was Luke's occasion for writing and his goal, for we are now the beneficiaries.

**D. Theme.** As is the case with all four gospel accounts, the central theme is the coming and redemptive work of Jesus the Messiah, the Christ of God. But Luke emphasizes the humanity of Jesus ("Son of Man"). And, throughout, Luke's account reveals his desire to tell the **complete** story, with a scholar's urgency to present an unassailable case for vital truth.

**E. Highlights.** Highlights in Luke's Gospel include the following:

1. Luke's Salutation. (1:1-4)

Luke addresses his book to "most excellent Theophilus," and declares that he has gathered the testimonies of the credible eyewitnesses concerning the life and ministry of Jesus. Luke assures Theophilus that he has not only carefully gathered the facts of the matter, but that he also has "perfect understanding" of them. Having gathered the eyewitness accounts, and clearly understanding them, he has set them forth "in order." And the purpose of all this is that Theophilus, apparently a recent convert, may know "the certainty" of all that he has been told, and in which he has been instructed. In light of the probability that Theophilus was a ruler of some sort in Antioch of Syria, and that Luke was also a native of

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<sup>3</sup> A fragment of Acts 27:38 was found among the documents in Cave Seven at Qumran, and all of the Qumran documents ("Dead Sea Scrolls") have been dated by Israeli scholars at between 50 BC and 50 AD. For more on this remarkable discovery see "New Testament Fragments in the Dead Sea Scrolls" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

<sup>4</sup> The name Theophilus is Greek for "lover of God." For this reason some believe that the two books were addressed to all believers; but the personal nature of the salutations in both books argues strongly against this.

Antioch, and a respected physician there, it would seem that Luke would be the perfect choice for the full instruction of Theophilus<sup>5</sup>. It appears that the man had already heard the gospel, believed, and received some instruction; and in this way Luke gives him a solid foundation for his newly found faith. We shall see more on this in the similar salutation in Luke's other book, The Acts of the Apostles.

## 2. Gabriel Brings Amazing News to Zacharias. (1:5-16)

During the reign of Herod, King of Judea, an elderly priest named Zacharias is ministering at the Altar of Incense in the Temple, while a large crowd of people is praying out in the Court of the Congregation. Zacharias is a priest "of the course of Abiah," and his duty here is to maintain the Altar of Incense. Suddenly an angel is standing by the right side of the altar and Zacharias is surprised and afraid. The angel tells him not to be fearful; rather, he says, he has come to bring him good news, and the news is truly amazing! The angel tells him that his "prayer has been heard," that his wife Elisabeth shall conceive and bear him a son, and that he is to be named John. Not only that, says the angel, but this John will be great in the sight of the Lord, he is to be consecrated as a Nazarite, that he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost while he is yet unborn, and that he shall turn many Israelites to the Lord.

***NOTE:** Think about how long it has been since Zacharias first prayed for a child! He is now an old man, his wife is also old, and barren, long past the age of child-bearing. And the following verses will show us that he has given up hope. We must wonder **when** his prayer was heard; but God is not deaf, and it seems to me that his prayer for a child must have been heard the very first time he prayed--perhaps 40 or 50 years earlier! Remember that Daniel's prayer was heard when he first prayed, but the fulfillment was delayed by conflict in the spiritual realm (Dan. 10:13). In Zacharias's case the much longer delay may have been in order to coincide with the coming of the Messiah. Whatever the cause, this should be a source of encouragement for us when years go by and we don't see the thing for which we have prayed. Surely our prayers are "heard" when we first pray; but they may be acted upon/fulfilled much later--some, perhaps, even after we have died. Notice that Gabriel doesn't say, "Zacharias, I realize that you have prayed for this child for a long time, it has been discouraging, and you have even given up hoping that your prayer would be answered, but...." No, the angel doesn't say anything of the kind; he simply says, matter-of-factly, as if nothing unusual is taking place, "thy prayer has been heard"--as if the old man had prayed only yesterday! This is a point to ponder, and it should give us hope and encouragement, reminding us that such things are very different in the economy of*

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<sup>5</sup> The author of the Muratorian Canon refers to Luke as "Luke the well-known [famous] physician."

*Heaven, where all things are known, and where time does not exist.*

3. Prophecies to Be Fulfilled and a Rebuke for Doubting. (1:17-22)

The angel goes on to say that this child will prepare the way for the Messiah, in the spirit and power of Elijah (Elias) fulfilling Malachi's prophecy (Malachi 4:5-6). At this point Zacharias, a bit skeptical, asks why he should believe this, pointing out the obvious problem of his and his wife's ages. The angel identifies himself as Gabriel, and says that he stands "in the presence of God". Because of his unbelief, Gabriel tells him, Zacharias will be unable to speak until this miraculous birth is fulfilled. Meanwhile, out in the Court of the Congregation, the people notice that Zacharias is remaining in the Holy Place longer than usual. When he does come out he cannot speak--he can only gesture to them, and they perceive that he has had some sort of encounter with God. When his week of duty is ended, the old man goes home, still mute.

4. Elisabeth's Miraculous Conception. (1:23-25)

Zacharias goes home, and we can only wonder how he communicates with Elisabeth; but soon ("After those days") Elisabeth conceives, and she remains in seclusion for five months, praising and thanking the Lord for blessing her in this amazing way. She thanks Him for taking away her "reproach among men." In that culture, at that time (and in many cultures today), a woman who failed to conceive and bear children was looked upon as having failed in being a woman. For so many years, Elisabeth has lived with this feeling of failure, knowing that this is how most people viewed her.

*NOTE: It is interesting to speculate about how Zacharias went about telling his wife what had happened (and what was going to happen). Undoubtedly he wrote the good news on a clay tablet. Being human, she must have had trouble believing it at first; but perhaps she was soon feeling some strange changes going on in her body, which gave her confirmation of the news. And, for those of us who are interested in anatomy and physiology, there is much here to ponder. Only God knows exactly what took place in the bodies of Elisabeth and Zacharias; but it is interesting and, I think, entirely proper, to speculate. It would seem that in some ways the aging process must have been reversed in both of them; like Abraham's wife, Sarah, Elisabeth not only conceived and bore her miraculous son, but would nurse him. What an amazing sequence of miracles there must have been performed in order to bring John the Baptist into the world!*

5. Gabriel Visits Mary. (1:26-38)

Six months later, Gabriel visits a young girl named Miriam (Mary) in Nazareth, a small town in Galilee. She is a virgin, espoused to (engaged to marry) a carpenter named Joseph. Like her, he is a descendant of King David. Gabriel greets Mary in a way that one would greet a person of lofty position, and this is bewildering to

her, for she is just the opposite. It is important, I think, to remember that this blessed girl, chosen by the God of the Universe, from eternity past, to be the mother of the Messiah, is an utterly obscure adolescent, in an utterly obscure village. Not only is her village obscure, it is one that is generally looked down upon by other Israelites (see John 1:46). In the eyes of the rest of Israel, young Mary is "a nobody from nowhere." She is probably barefooted, with dusty feet, and she may have just come from milking the goats, with manure between her toes. As Mary herself shall soon declare, inspired by the Holy Spirit, she is a maiden "of low estate" (1:48). She may have looked around to see to whom the angel is speaking, thinking that "There must be someone important here--surely, he can't be speaking to me." Gabriel tells her not to fear, assures her that she has found favor with God, and tells her that she will conceive, bring forth a son, and shall name him JESUS. He goes on to tell her that her baby will be the "Son of the Highest," that He shall sit on the throne of David, and that his kingdom shall be eternal. Mary, with child-like innocence and trust, accepts all of these mind-staggering predictions; but she does have one question: she reminds him that she is a virgin and asks how, then, can these things happen. Gabriel tells her that her conception will be supernatural--that she will be impregnated by the Holy Ghost and, to be sure that she understands, he tells her plainly that her baby will be the Son of God. With Mary's mind still spinning, he tells her that her older cousin, Elisabeth, is also with child, and is in her sixth month of gestation.

It is almost certain that Mary cannot take all of this mind-staggering news in (who could?); but with absolute trust in what Gabriel has told her, she replies with purest, simple submission, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." In her reply she seems to be saying, "I don't understand any of this--nevertheless, may God do with me whatever He wishes to do." It is no wonder that she has such a special place in the heart of God.

***NOTE:** When did the incarnation occur? Was it when Mary conceived, or was it when Jesus was born? When Mary arrives at the home of Zacharias and Elisabeth, tiny Jesus is probably not more than 5-10 days old in fetal development, about the size of the period at the end of this sentence. And yet Elisabeth acknowledges that Mary is "the mother of [her] Lord." The mere presence of Mary, with her tiny baby inside, causes the unborn John the Baptist to "leap...for joy" in Elisabeth's womb. This is a question for theologians to discuss, and we will not belabor the point here; but it seems to me that God came to Earth and put on human flesh at the moment of Mary's conception. That, after all, in a purely scientific sense, is when human life begins.*

6. Mary and Elisabeth--a Prophesying Duet. (1:39-56)

- a. Mary Visits Elisabeth. Mary goes "with haste" to see her cousin Elisabeth,

in the city of Judah where Zacharias and Elisabeth live. Mary enters the house and greets her older relative. At the sound of Mary's voice, little John the Baptist leaps in Elisabeth's womb "for joy" and Elisabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. This leaping by little John in his mother's womb probably marks the moment when he is also filled with the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of Gabriel's prophecy (1:15).

b. Elisabeth Prophecies. Immediately, Elisabeth begins to speak prophetically, and in a loud voice. She greets Mary with great respect and deference: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." As was the case when Gabriel greeted Mary, this is socially reversed; according to custom, Mary should be greeting her elder relative with respect. And how does Elisabeth know that Mary is with child? She doesn't--this is all supernatural revelation. But it gets better, for Elisabeth speaks of Mary's unborn baby as her "Lord." Then it gets still better; Elisabeth declares that Mary is blessed because she believed (what Gabriel had told her), and declares that the Lord has told her some things and that they shall be fulfilled. This is likewise supernatural revelation.

c. Mary Prophecies. Mary then begins to speak prophetically, in what has come to be known as "The Magnificat." In beautiful poetic language she declares that her soul magnifies the Lord, and that her spirit has rejoiced "in God my Savior." Acknowledging her "low estate" she states that from this time onward "all generations shall call [her] blessed<sup>6</sup>." She declares that "He that is mighty hath done great things, and holy is his name." She praises God because He is merciful to them that fear him. He has manifested his power, scattered the proud, exalted those of low degree, fed the hungry and sent the rich away. And, Mary declares, in all this He has cared for and protected Israel.

**NOTES:** *There are several interesting aspects to Mary's visit to Elisabeth:*

*a. There is no record that, at this point, Mary has told anyone about her amazing visit from Gabriel. It is certain that she has not told Joseph, for in Matthew's account, after she is obviously with child (at least three months along), Joseph is preparing to divorce her quietly until the angel visits him to explain (Matt 1:18-25).*

*b. Mary went to see Elisabeth "with haste." But why the haste--what was her reason for hurrying? It seems obvious to me that Mary, unable fully to understand what has happened to her (after all, who could?), upon hearing that her older relative has also conceived supernaturally, she would want to speak with Elisabeth. More than anyone else in the world, Mary needed to see Elisabeth, to*

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<sup>6</sup>This part of Mary's prophetic utterance has been fulfilled, for there has not been a generation of believers since that day that has not honored Mary. And, if we think of it in a literal sense, just think how many times she has been called "blessed" in countless repetitions of the "Hail Mary" prayer of Roman Catholics.

*ask questions, and "compare notes" with the only one who could possibly understand, and could help her to understand. This she did, and lingered there for three months; she may have been present for, and assisted in, John's birth.*

*c. Elisabeth knows, supernaturally, that Mary is with child (and no ordinary child), and that Mary is "the mother of my Lord." She also knows, supernaturally, that Mary has had a visitation from an angel who told her some amazing things, and that Mary believed "those things which were told her from the Lord."*

*d. Mary speaks prophetically of "God my Savior" which seems to negate the belief that she was, like her Divine Son, sinless from birth; for if she were sinless she would not need a Savior--in fact she could not have a Savior<sup>7</sup>.*

#### 7. The Birth of John the Baptist. (1:57-63)

The time has come for Elisabeth to deliver and, of course, the baby is a boy. Her relatives and neighbors rejoice and, on the eighth day, they gather for the baby's circumcision<sup>8</sup>. They declare that the baby's name will be Zacharias, like his father, but Elisabeth says no; his name, she says, shall be John. Those gathered then look to Zacharias and make "signs" to him, asking what his position is concerning the name<sup>9</sup>. Zacharias, also using signs, calls for a writing tablet. Leaving no room for discussion, he writes four words on the clay tablet: "His name is John." Notice that Zacharias uses the present tense ("His name is John"--not that his name "shall be" John); little John has already been named by the angel, and we may be sure that Zacharias remembers that, and has probably thought about it daily for the past nine months.

#### 8. Zacharias Prophecies. (1: 64-79)

As soon as Zacharias writes those four words he is healed--released from his deaf-mute condition, and is filled with the Holy Ghost. He immediately gives praise to God, and then he begins to prophesy. Looking at his baby he declares that he is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies about the one who will be the forerunner who will prepare the way for the coming Messiah (Isaiah 9:2 and 40:3). In prophesying thusly, Zacharias speaks of the coming Messiah as "the Dayspring from on high." i.e. the One who will bring light to penetrate the spiritual darkness. This is the only place in the Bible where this expression is used.

#### 9. Joseph and Mary Travel to Bethlehem. (2:1-6)

About 4 BC Augustus Caesar, the first and greatest Emperor of Rome, decrees

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<sup>7</sup>The Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception holds that Mary was conceived in her mother's womb without original sin, and that she remained sinless for all of her life. This doctrine, based partly on Elisabeth's inspired statement that Mary was "full of Grace," was declared as Dogma by Pope Pius IX on 8 December 1854. Protestants do not accept this doctrine because there is no scriptural basis for it.

<sup>8</sup> See the Study Guide to Genesis, Highlight 45, and the **NOTE** following, concerning the eighth day.

<sup>9</sup> This passage makes it clear that Zacharias was not just struck dumb by Gabriel, but that he was also made deaf.

that all of the Roman world is to be taxed, concurrently with a census. This requires the return of the people to their ancestral home towns because genealogical records are kept there. This combination of census and taxing makes it much less likely that some people will be overlooked and avoid paying the tax. This taxing "was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria<sup>10</sup>." Joseph and Mary, who is now great with child, travel to Bethlehem, "the city of David," their ancestral home (both are descended from David)<sup>11</sup>. This is a trip of about 35 miles, undoubtedly traveling with many others; and, considering Mary's condition, it probably takes them two days, with frequent stops for rest. By the time they reach Bethlehem, Mary is ready to deliver her baby.

***NOTE:** For many years critical Bible scholars cited v 2 as "proof" that the Bible record is not reliable, for Josephus wrote that such a census and taxing took place under Cyrenius in 6 AD, about 10 years after the birth of Jesus. However, the careful wording by Luke says the census and taxing was "**first** made" when Cyrenius was Governor, implying clearly that there was also a **later** census and taxing (i.e. the one in 6 AD, recorded by Josephus). Nineteenth Century scholar A.W. Zumpt of Berlin made an exhaustive study of the Roman records and correspondence and demonstrated that Cyrenius served two terms as Governor of Syria, and that his first term was from 4 BC, the probable year of the birth of Jesus, to 1 AD. His second term was from 6 to 12 AD, and he died in 14 AD. Other prominent scholars, including Oxford professor Sir William Ramsay (1851-1939), who made a life-long study of this and related matters, have concurred in Zumpt's conclusions. Once again, the Bible proves to be an extraordinarily accurate historical document.*

#### 10. The Birth of Jesus. (2:7)

It appears that Mary and Joseph found lodging in a Bethlehem stable ("for there was no room for them in the inn"); most likely this stable was associated with one of Bethlehem's inns, where the guests kept their donkeys, mules, camels and horses. With no more room in the Inn, travelers could sleep in the innkeeper's stable, on clean straw, for little or nothing. What could be a more humble beginning for the King of Kings? Mary brings forth her miraculous first-born son in the stable, probably in a corner made semi-private by hanging a blanket from a joist pole<sup>12</sup>. The babe (after cutting and tying the umbilical cord and washing him) is wrapped in "swaddling clothes"; the baby's cradle is a manger, a feed box or

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<sup>10</sup> Cyrenius (the Greek form of Quirinius) was Rome's Governor of the province of Syria, which included Judea.

<sup>11</sup> The ancient name of Bethlehem was Ephrath and its citizens were called Ephrathites (see Ruth 1:2). In the Bible it is also called Bethlehem-ephratah, Bethlehem-judah, Bethlehem of Judah and the City of David (it was David's ancestral home town).

<sup>12</sup> For the significance of the word "firstborn" in v 7, see the study guide to Matthew, Highlight 2.d.

trough, filled with straw. The birth of the tiny Messiah in Bethlehem fulfills the prophecy of Micah 5:2<sup>13</sup>.

**NOTES:**

*a. The swaddling cloth was what today we would call a baby blanket. It was square, the baby was laid on it diagonally, with one corner at his head. The side corners were folded across his body, the one at his feet was folded upward, like wrapping a package, and the top corner was beneath his head. Finally, the precious "package" was fastened with cloth bands wrapped around the tiny body to hold the swaddling cloth in place.*

**b.** In recent times there has been disagreement among scholars concerning the word "inn" as the place where Mary and Joseph stayed in Bethlehem. The Greek word rendered "inn" is "kataluma," and it can mean lodging place, guest chamber or inn. Its root has the meaning of "interruption," as a place where a journey is interrupted to spend the night. Some reason that because Bethlehem was a small town, not on any major trade route, that there would have been no inns there. This position, however, is based only on an assumption. Arguing for use here of "inn" is the fact that Bethlehem was the place where perfect, flawless lambs were bought to sacrifice at Passover, when huge crowds of pilgrims came to Jerusalem for the most important event of the Jewish year. Bethlehem is about 10 miles from Jerusalem, too far to walk, select and buy the lamb, and walk back in one day. It is reasonable to assume that there would have been many inns, or extra guest chambers in Bethlehem homes, with stables to lodge extra donkeys, mules and horses.

The word "inn" appears only twice in the New Testament, here and in Lk 10:34, the parable of the good Samaritan. Here the underlying Greek is "pandochieon," meaning a lodging place or inn, the place where the injured Jew was left to be cared for.

**11. Angels Bring Good News to Shepherds. (2:8-14)**

In the grassy meadows and hills outside Bethlehem shepherds are watching over their flocks while the sheep sleep. Suddenly the night is interrupted as "the angel of the Lord" appears to a group of them<sup>14</sup>. This glorious being is accompanied by brilliant light which shines on the shepherds and they are, of course, terrified. The angel tells them not to be afraid, that he is not there to harm them but rather to

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<sup>13</sup> For an important matter concerning the divinity of Mary's baby, see the explanatory *NOTE* following Highlight 7 in the Study Guide to Micah.

<sup>14</sup> Notice that the definite article is used here: not "an angel" but "the angel." If we were reading in the Old Testament this angelic being would almost certainly be the pre-incarnate Christ; but you will remember from the Introduction to the New Testament that such is not the case in the New Testament. It certainly could not be true here for Christ is pre-incarnate no longer--He has now put on human flesh.

bring them good news--glad tidings of great joy which will not only apply to them, but to people everywhere. The good news, the angel says, is that the Messiah has come--He has been born in the City of David. He tells them that they will find Him in a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes, with a manger for his bed. At this point things get even more awesome for these shepherds because, suddenly, the angel is joined by a multitude of angelic beings, singing and praising God! What awesome sights and sounds these illiterate, anonymous country boys were allowed to experience! It is interesting to remember that there is no record that such a revelation of Heavenly glory was ever given to anyone else on Earth, except to a few of God's prophets, and John the Revelator. I love the way God blesses the humble with experiences that the "great" never have.

**NOTES:**

*a. One bit of evidence that Jesus was almost certainly born in September rather than late December is that in late December the weather is too cold and rainy (sometimes with snow) for the shepherds to be "abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night," spending the nights outdoors with no shelter. In the Spring, Summer and Fall, shepherds remained in the fields with their sheep day and night, living outdoors. In the Winter, however, shepherds led their flocks out to pasture in the morning, and brought them back into the sheepfold at night (and they still do).*

*b. It is interesting to note that the fields in which the shepherds are keeping their flocks are the same fields where young King David once watched over his.*

12. So The Shepherds Go To See. (2:15-20)

The angel and the heavenly choir depart, undoubtedly leaving the shepherds staring after them, speechless, as they disappear into the heavens. The silence again descends, broken only by the natural night sounds; and in that silence those shepherds must be feeling their own hearts beating, and hearing the pulsations in their ears. When they again catch their breath, they look at one another and decide to go to town to see this baby<sup>15</sup>. Hurrying to town, they find the young family just as the angel had told them. Having seen this with their own eyes, they apparently run all over Bethlehem, excitedly telling anyone who will listen what they have seen and heard; and then they return to their flocks, praising God all the way. The people in and around Bethlehem must be discussing it all, wondering what to make of what the shepherds have told them; and surely some of the people must go to the stable to see Joseph, Mary and their baby, with questions. But Mary keeps

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<sup>15</sup> Surely they chose at least one shepherd (probably the youngest--they never get a break) to watch over all the sheep. And they did not take the sheep with them, for they "came with haste" to see Joseph, Mary and the Messiah baby.

silence, pondering all the things that she has seen and heard, and wondering at the feelings that are surging in her heart.

13. Mary and Joseph Dedicate Their Baby to the Lord. (2:21-24)

When Jesus is eight days old he is circumcised, according to the Law, and his name is declared to be JESUS<sup>16</sup>. Then, 40 days after the baby's birth, Mary's days of purification are accomplished, and Joseph and Mary take Him up to Jerusalem<sup>17</sup>. There, in the Temple, they dedicate Him to the Lord and offer the sacrifice according to the Law. Because they are poor, they cannot afford to buy a lamb for sacrifice; instead, as provided for by the Law, they offer a pair of doves or pigeons.

14. Simeon's Prophetic Prayer. (2:25-35)

There is in Jerusalem a godly old man named Simeon, and the Holy Spirit has revealed to him that he will not die until he has seen the Messiah. Led by the Holy Spirit, he comes to the Temple, takes Mary's baby in his arms, and praises God. He prays that the Lord will now allow him to leave this life, saying, "for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Thus, he declares the baby in his arms to be the Messiah, and he goes on to declare that this baby and his ministry will be not just for Israel, but also "a light to lighten the Gentiles." He also tells Mary to prepare for heartbreak concerning the child.

*NOTE: As previously noted (Introduction, "Beauty of Expression"), Simeon's prophetic prayer is the basis for the "Nunc Dimittis" in formal liturgies. Dimissio (Latin – a dismissal), the origin of the Latin "dimittis" here "[allow me to] depart," is also the origin of the word "demit" in Freemasonry, the name given to the formal document used to cease fellowship with the Lodge, i.e. to "depart" from it. For information concerning Freemasonry, and the reasons why a Christian should have no part in it, see the author's books on the subject: "33 Degrees of Deception," Bridge-Logos Foundation, Alachua, Florida.*

15. Ancient Anna Prophecies. (2:36-40)

As Simeon finishes his prophesying, an elderly prophetess named Anna joins the group. She is probably about 110 years old, has been a widow for 84 years, and her life is entirely devoted to fasting and prayer in the Temple<sup>18</sup>. Like Simeon, she

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<sup>16</sup> Leviticus 12:3. God, of course, chose the 8<sup>th</sup> day for a reason. Concerning this see the study guide to Genesis, Highlight 45, Gen 17:12, explanatory **NOTE**.

<sup>17</sup> In this journey Joseph, Mary and their baby travel "up" to Jerusalem, even though they are traveling from north to south. In Israel, people always spoke of going "up to Jerusalem" because it is higher than the surrounding countryside. In this case Jerusalem is 1,500 feet higher in elevation than Nazareth.

<sup>18</sup> This estimate of Anna's age is based upon the assumption that "a widow of about 84 years" means that she had been married for seven years, widowed for 84 years (94 years since her marriage) and that she had been 15-to-20 years old when married. That she "was of a great age" (v 36) suggests that she was much older than 84. Also, it appears from the wording of v 37 that she actually lived on the Temple grounds.

gives thanks to the Lord, and prophesies concerning the messianic identity of the baby. When all of this is finished, Joseph and Mary return "to their own city Nazareth," where young Jesus grows, physically and spiritually, with the grace of God upon Him.

***NOTE:** After the presentation of the Christ child in the Temple, with the blessing and prophesying by Simeon and Anna, Luke records nothing of the Holy Family until their return to Nazareth, their home town. He tells us nothing about the coming of the maji from the east, of the flight of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to Egypt, the slaughter of the male children ordered by Herod, the Holy Family's sojourn in Egypt until the death of Herod, and their return to their original home in Nazareth.*

***The Problem of Verse 39.** The wording of v 39, taken alone, certainly gives the impression that they went to Nazareth directly after the blessing and prophesying over the baby. In studying the Bible, however, we can almost never take a single verse to establish a fact without considering all that the Bible has to say about the matter; and, in this case, the clear and expansive treatment of these matters in Matthew's account, and omitted by Luke, cannot be ignored. Matthew's account seems to fill in a gap in Luke's account of approximately two years.*

*We must remember that Matthew's account is written primarily to the Jew, to establish that Jesus is the awaited Messiah; Luke's account, on the other hand, is directed primarily to the Gentile intellectual, and is a recitation of the events that Luke considered to be most significant.*

*Yes, v 39 does say simply that, after they had performed all things concerning the baby according to the law, they "returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth"; but it doesn't say **when** they returned. And, yes, the verse reads as an implication that they went directly from the Temple in Jerusalem to their home in Nazareth. To believe this, however, we must ignore an entire chapter (Chapt 2) in Matthew's gospel and that, I believe, would be completely illogical<sup>19</sup>.*

*For an explanation of this it may be helpful to return to the study guide to Matt 2 (Highlights 3 and 4).*

#### 16. Jesus at Age 12 Discusses Theology with the Scholars. (2:41-52)

Each year, Mary and Joseph go up to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. When Jesus is 12 years old they make the journey, in a caravan including some of their friends and relatives. At departure time they leave with the group, to return to Nazareth; unknown to Joseph and Mary, however, Jesus remains behind. They

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<sup>19</sup> The venerable Matthew Henry comes to the same conclusion, as do Henry M. Morris, Henry H. Halley, and Alfred Edersheim, although Edersheim is not specific concerning the length of the Holy Family's stay in Bethlehem after moving from the stable to "the more permanent abode of a house." Herod's decree to slaughter all male children from birth to two years of age seems to establish their stay in Bethlehem at about two years, prior to their flight into Egypt.

assume that He is somewhere in the group, with relatives or friends from Nazareth. After one day of travel, however, they realize that He is not with the group and they return to Jerusalem<sup>20</sup>. They search for three days before finding Him in the Temple. When they do, He is sitting with the learned men, listening to them, asking questions and offering his opinions. The scholars are amazed at his knowledge and understanding; but Joseph and Mary are displeased with Him. Mary rebukes Him and asks why He has been so thoughtless. It seems to me that Mary's question is entirely reasonable; but His response to her, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" seems unreasonable--in fact, very strange<sup>21</sup>. There is no record of Mary's reply. At any rate, He returns with them to Nazareth, subjects himself obediently to their authority and continues to grow up.

**NOTES:**

*a. We are told that Mary pondered all these supernatural things concerning her Holy Son and kept them in her heart. We must wonder about Joseph, and what he was thinking; but, concerning this, the Bible is silent. Even when they finally find Jesus in the Temple, discussing theology with the scholars, it is Mary who speaks to him and not Joseph. It would be interesting to know what Joseph was thinking about this unusual child of theirs.*

*b. The behavior of Jesus in all this is most unusual. In a human sense He was definitely thoughtless in subjecting his parents to such distress and trouble; they had begun to fear that He was dead. And, when asked about it by Mary, his reply seems dismissive and disrespectful. This appears to be a clear violation of the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment--and yet He was without sin. Here indeed is a point to ponder.*

*The fact that He is 12 here must be significant, or Luke would not have recorded it. In modern times, among Christians it is traditionally the age at which a boy begins to become a young man, and is the traditional age for confirmation and church membership<sup>22</sup>. It seems that, in a human sense, at this age young Jesus is beginning to become aware of his true nature and calling; and He definitely has knowledge and understanding of Scripture that is supernatural. We might say that He is beginning to transition from boyhood into his ministry as Messiah. Also,*

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<sup>20</sup> "A day's journey," a common way of expressing distance in that time and place, was 20-30 miles if traveling alone; it was 10 miles when traveling in a caravan. It is mentioned only here in the NT.

<sup>21</sup> These are the first recorded words of Jesus. "Wist ye not," is one of those archaic expressions in the AV that one would wish to replace with "Knew ye not?" However, we still use one form of that archaic word when we say "wistful" (thinking, contemplating, considering a matter).

<sup>22</sup> Until recent decades boys below the age of 12 wore shorts in the warm seasons and knickers (knee-length "knickerbockers") and knee-length sox in cold seasons. Long trousers were not worn by boys until age 12. I grew up under this unwritten protocol of propriety, and the day when a boy would reach age 12, and got his first long trousers, was looked forward to with great excitement.

*note that He is missing for three days and, perhaps feared dead, before Mary and Joseph find Him, alive. Could this be symbolic of what will happen, about 21 years later, when He appears, alive, after three days and nights in the tomb?*

17. John the Baptist Announces the Coming of the Messiah. (3:1-14)

Approximately 18 years have passed since that day in Jerusalem, when Jesus was found discoursing with the scholars in the Temple. Now the time has come for his cousin John the Baptist to step onto the stage of history. He begins to preach in the valley of the Jordan River, preparing the way for the coming Messiah<sup>23</sup>. He preaches that the people must repent, and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Growing crowds come to hear him and to be baptized in the Jordan River<sup>24</sup>. In this he is fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah about the one who would come to prepare the way for the Messiah<sup>25</sup>. It is apparent that his preaching is accepted by the multitudes for, although his preaching is definitely not “seeker friendly” (he calls them a “generation of vipers”), they are under great conviction. They ask him what they must do to demonstrate true repentance, and he gives them specific instructions.

**NOTE:** *Verse 2 here demands some explanation. How could there have been two High Priests at the same time? The answer is that Annas (whom Josephus called "Ananus") had been removed from the position as High Priest by the Romans; yet, because of his influence over the people, they continued to look to him as High Priest over religious matters, making Annas, unofficially, High Priest "de Jure divino" (High Priest ruling over religious matters). In fact, one might say that he was High Priest "de Facto" (functional High Priest, although not officially recognized). He seems to have had a working relationship with his nephew Caiphus, the official High Priest, plus five of his sons and one grandson, who would become, in succession, the official High Priests. Although officially out of office, Annas actually continued to wield much of the power of a High Priest until the Jewish revolt in 66 AD when he was assassinated for advocating peace with Rome.*

*And this is how this strange arrangement came to be. Upon the death of Festus, the Roman Procurator, and while his successor, Albinus, was still traveling to Judea, Annas as High Priest took the opportunity to assemble the Sanhedrin (illegally) and condemn James the brother of Jesus and other Christians to death*

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<sup>23</sup> As we saw in the introduction to the study of Luke, it (like its companion piece, Acts) is characterized by its great detail in recording the history of the ministry of Jesus and the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Church. The first two verses of Chapt 3 are an excellent example of this.

<sup>24</sup> Mark 1:5.

<sup>25</sup> Isaiah 40:3-5.

*by stoning, which sentence was carried out (also illegally)<sup>26</sup>. Annas was a Sadducee, and it was the opinion of Josephus that passion for his doctrine (that there is no life after death) drove him to hate James and the other Christians (who preached life after death) with such vehemence, that he would violate Roman law in order to put them to death. When Albinus reached Jerusalem he was told what Annas had done; he was furious with Annas, and removed him from being High Priest. And this is how Annas ceased to be High Priest officially, although he continued to function as if he were, from behind the scenes, until his assassination in 66 AD. If you would like to pursue this, begin with Josephus, Antiquities, 20.9.1.*

18. Announcing Jesus, the Holy Spirit Baptizer. (3:15-17)

Because of the impact of the ministry of John the Baptist and the anointing of spiritual power that is upon him, the people naturally wonder if he could be the long-awaited Messiah. Apparently knowing their thoughts, John sets the matter straight<sup>27</sup>. He says that he baptizes them in water, but that there is One coming (and, by implication, coming soon) who is mightier than he, One whose sandals he is not worthy to tie or untie. This One, he declares, will baptize them with “the Holy Ghost and with fire.” Continuing to speak of the Greater One to come, John says that this man who is coming will “thoroughly purge his floor.” Using the metaphor of threshing grain, John says that this Greater One will judge the redeemed and the unredeemed, suggesting a final judgment. When He comes He will “separate the wheat from the chaff” (the edible grain from the worthless husks on the grain); not only that, but He will then burn up the chaff. In calling this burning fire “unquenchable” John seems to say that this fire, burning up the unusable chaff, will be an ongoing thing. This seems to be an obvious reference to the burning Hell that awaits the unredeemed. At the same time, since John makes this statement together with that about baptizing with (or in) the Holy Spirit, it may have additional meaning in terms of the life of the Spirit-baptized believer, the baptism with fire, as an ongoing process of purging, cleansing and perfecting. For a more complete summary of this see the study Guide to Matthew 3:11-12, and the article "Four New Testament Baptisms" in Part IV (Selected Topical summaries).

19. The Genealogy of Jesus through Mary. (3:23-38)

In this amazing genealogy, characteristic of Luke's meticulous thoroughness, the

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<sup>26</sup> Under Roman law the Sanhedrin was forbidden the authority to execute; only the Romans could rule and carry out the death penalty.

<sup>27</sup> There is nothing in the passage to establish that the people asked him if he were the Messiah, yet it appears that he knew what they were thinking. John's Gospel records that at some point the Sanhedrin sent priests and Levites out from Jerusalem to ask him who he was. He told them that he was not the Messiah. They asked him who, then, was he, and he referred them to the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3. (Jn 1:19-23).

ancestry of Jesus is detailed, generation by generation, all the way back to Adam! This is actually Mary's genealogy, although Joseph's name is substituted for hers because of the Hebrew custom of listing only men in genealogies. This is the **natural** genealogy of Jesus, as opposed to his **royal** genealogy, with which Matthew begins his gospel.

This amazing family record, preserved through 4,000 years, including Noah's flood, wars, famines and nearly 500 years of captivity in Egypt, 40 years of wandering in the deserts of southern Palestine, and 70 years of captivity in Mesopotamia, is unparalleled in human history.

20. Trial and Triumph in the Wilderness. (4:1-13)

After his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the Judean wilderness (desert), where He fasts for 40 days, alone<sup>28</sup>. At the end of the fast He is hungry and physically weakened; but, spiritually, He is prepared for Satan's temptations. Satan first tempts him with food ("turn these stones into bread"). Then Satan takes Him to the top of the temple and challenges Him to jump off and be unhurt. In this temptation Satan uses Scripture to encourage Jesus to jump; but he misquotes the passage, omitting four words ("in all thy ways") of Psalm 91:11-12. Finally, Satan takes Him to a high mountain and supernaturally shows Him all the great kingdoms of the World, their wealth and their glory, and says that he will give all those things to Jesus if He will only fall down and worship him. In each of the three trials Jesus answers with a passage of Scripture; and, after Satan's third failed attempt to compromise Jesus, he departs "for a season" and angels come and minister to Jesus. Jesus has triumphed.

**NOTES:**

*a. In v 1 we read that the Spirit "led" Jesus into the wilderness. In the parallel passages in the other synoptic gospels, Matthew also uses "led"; but Mark uses the stronger expression, "the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness," which seems to be a contradiction. Here, in the three synoptics, we find a most unusual and revealing thing: each of the three writers uses a different Greek verb in describing the same event<sup>29</sup>. To spare us an elaborate word study here, suffice it to say that, once again, we cannot know fully the meaning of a passage until we have read all that the Scriptures tell us of it. Each of the three verbs reveals part of what it can mean to be led by the Spirit, and the combination of their meanings gives us a richer understanding of how the Spirit led Jesus into the desert for his great trial. The leading by spiritual impulse can be subtle and gentle; it can be more*

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<sup>28</sup> Mark's account tells us that, during the 40 days of fasting, and the temptations that followed, Jesus was alone ("was with the wild beasts") (Mk 1:13). Angels ministered to Him after it was all over.

<sup>29</sup> In John's very different Gospel, the account of the temptation in the wilderness is not included.

*persistent; and it can also be so clear and strong that its urging is almost compulsive. Here, it seems, in comparing the parallel passages in the synoptic gospels, we see that the Spirit's leading included all three.*

*b. The Bible calls Satan "the god of this world" (II Cor 4:4), and "the prince [king] of this world" (Jn 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). If this were not so--if it were not possible for Satan to give Jesus all the earthly kingdoms, then what he promised in his third attempt would not have been a temptation. It seems that when Adam and Eve fell for Satan's lies and sinned, the dominion that God had previously given them over the material World passed in some way to Satan. He will retain this authority until the Day of Judgment when he and his demon spirits are thrown permanently into the bottomless pit of Hell. At the end of this age, Satan will be bound--with his power restricted or limited--for 1,000 years, but we will deal with this when we get to Rev20.*

*c. Verse 1 tells us that Jesus comes from his baptism in the Jordan "full of the Holy Ghost." This infilling with the Holy Spirit seems to have occurred when the Spirit descended and remained upon Him as he came up from the water<sup>30</sup>. The dual nature of Christ the "God-man," both human and divine, is a great mystery, but a wonderful thing to contemplate. It is important to keep in mind the extremely important fact that Jesus did all of the wonderful things that He did on Earth, not because He was (and is) God, but as a very human man, filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Like the mystery of the Holy Trinity, this foundational concept, that Jesus was both "very [truly] God and very [truly] man," is an infinite fact, beyond our finite ability to understand. It can be difficult to accept if it has never before been considered, but it is true; and it is extremely important in understanding all that follows--from Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, through his earthly ministry, and the life of the Church until his eventual return in the Second Advent.*

*There is no record in Scripture that Jesus ever performed a miracle prior to this infilling with the Holy Spirit<sup>31</sup>. In this regard, see Peter's great sermon at Pentecost in which he traces the history of "Jesus of Nazareth, a man" to culmination as "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2: 22-36), and his declaration of the anointed humanity of Jesus in Acts 10:34-38. This understanding will be an extremely important context in the study of the book of The Acts of the Apostles. For a summary of the mystery of the incarnation and divinity of Christ, see "The*

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<sup>30</sup> Only John's Gospel tells us that the Spirit not only descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove, but also "remained" upon Him (Jn 1:32-33). In this passage the Geneva Bible of 1599 renders the word, "abode" (made his permanent home there).

<sup>31</sup> There are some charming traditions and legends of miracles performed by the child Jesus, such as turning rocks into birds, but they are just that--traditions and legends--not Holy Scripture.

*Divinity of Jesus the Christ--the Mystery of the God-Man” in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

*d. Matthew’s account tells us that in each response to Satan’s temptations, Jesus began his response with the words, “It is written.” Notice that, each time, Jesus did **not** say, “Wait a minute Satan, while I go check the scrolls to see what is written about this matter.” No--He knew what was in the scrolls, and so it should be with us. The more Scripture we learn, the more it becomes an indwelling part of us, and the easier it will be for us to resist Satan’s temptations and walk in victory.*

*e. The last three words of v 13 are extremely significant. They tell us that, after being defeated in his attempt to compromise Jesus before He began his ministry as Messiah, Satan left Him “for a season.” There is a great lesson here for us: it is that, although we may defeat a temptation of Satan as Jesus did, by being filled with the Holy Spirit and declaring the Scriptures, it doesn’t mean that our conflict with Satan is over. Here we can see him, in effect, slinking away in defeat, but looking back and saying, over his drooping shoulders, “Alright, Jesus, you win this time, but you haven’t seen the last of me--I will be back.” And so, it seems, it must be with you and me. As Spirit-filled Christians we can resist a temptation, quoting Scripture; but the temptation will probably return, and we must never assume that we are permanently free from temptation. There is, however, good news concerning this. It seems that the more consistently we resist and say “No!” to a temptation, the less often that temptation will come, and the more easy it becomes, each time, to resist it.*

#### **21. An Amazing Declaration in His Home Synagogue. (4:16-21)**

Following his great victory over Satan, Jesus returns from the Judean desert restored, refreshed, and freshly filled with the Holy Spirit, and He goes to Nazareth, his home town. On the Sabbath Day, as is his custom, He goes to the weekly gathering of the local synagogue<sup>32</sup>. A man of the age of 30 years or more has the right to read passages of Scripture to the congregation and discourse on them. Jesus, at age 30, stands up at the appropriate time, calls for the scroll of Isaiah, and reads from the portion we call Chapter 61, verses 1-3, a well-known prophecy of the Messiah. Having read the passage, He rolls up the scroll, hands it back to the deacon who had gotten it for Him, and sits down to discourse on the passage<sup>33</sup>. With every eye glued on Him, He makes an amazing statement: He tells the people that the He, the hometown boy, is the fulfillment of this prophecy

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<sup>32</sup> We would do well to emulate his example with regular attendance at church or other gatherings of believers (Hebr 10:23-25), staying in close fellowship with other believers. It is the banana which is separated from the bunch that gets peeled.

<sup>33</sup> It was the custom to stand for the reading, and then to sit down to comment or teach from the passage.

("this day is this prophecy fulfilled in your ears")! As the people listened to the words that He read, they were, at that moment, being fulfilled. In effect He is saying, "If you would like to see the Messiah, here I am--Jesus, your neighbor from the carpenter shop down the street."

*NOTE: In reading the passage about the Messiah to come, and what He will accomplish, Jesus omits one part of the prophecy. He leaves out the words, "the day of vengeance of our God." This portion is apparently omitted because it will not be fulfilled until the Second Advent of the Messiah when He comes to judge and punish the wicked in the final judgment. Jesus of course cannot say here, in the present tense, that He is the fulfillment of this portion; He will fulfill these words later, when He returns.*

22. But the Hometown Crowd Is Not Pleased. (4:22-30)

The people are impressed with his eloquence, but quickly take offense at his words, which they consider to be presumptuous and blasphemous. After all, they have known Him most his life as a child, supposed son of Joseph and Mary, and as a carpenter. The people have surely heard talk of the miracles He has performed in and around Capernaum; and it seems that they are waiting for Him to perform some miracles here in Nazareth. Jesus reminds the people that a prophet is not accepted in his home area, and refers to miracles performed by Elijah and Elisha selectively--not in any place at any time. At this the people become enraged. In murderous fury they take Jesus out of town to a high bluff and attempt to throw Him off of it to kill Him. At this critical point Jesus seems to disappear, walking through the crowd unhindered and unharmed, leaving the frustrated mob at the edge of the cliff, wondering what went wrong. One wonders if they cleared their heads, went back into the synagogue and finished the service--or did they just scatter, confused and frustrated, and go home? Surely his family was there that day; I wonder what they were thinking and doing.

**(Photo here of the cliffs at Nazareth)**

*NOTE: Mark records a different occasion, much later in Jesus' ministry, when He went to the synagogue at Nazareth; and, although He spoke there, and there was no riot, because of the unbelief of the people Jesus "could do no mighty works" there (except for healing a few of them) (Mk 6:5-6). The Bible only records two occasions when Jesus "marveled": in the Mark 6 account, where He marveled at the **unbelief** of his hometown Jews; and He "marveled" at the **faith** of the pagan Roman centurion who asked healing for his sick servant (Matt 8:5-13).*

23. Fishing: A Miraculous Catch. (5:1-11)

As Jesus stands on the rocky beach of the Sea of Galilee a large crowd of

spiritually hungry people forms around Him, desiring to hear “the Word of God<sup>34</sup>.” The crowd grows so large, and so eager to get close to Him that it threatens to push Him backward into the water. He enters the boat belonging to Peter and Andrew, floating by the beach and sits down in it to teach. When he is finished with his message He tells Peter to launch out into the sea and let down his nets. Peter, a professional fisherman, objects; he points out, very reasonably, that they have been fishing all night, have caught nothing, and have already washed their nets. Nevertheless, he says, they will do as Jesus says. When they try to pull the first net in it is so full of fish that the net is tearing. They call for the other fishermen to bring their boat and help them; and so many fish are caught that both boats are filled so full that there is danger that both boats will sink<sup>35</sup>. It is always wise to do what Jesus says.

*NOTE: This event results in the calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John, an event already studied in Mark 1; however, only here in Luke are we told of the miraculous catch of fish.*

#### 24. Patching Old Cloth, New Wine, and Old Bottles. (5:27-39)

Jesus sees a publican (tax collector) sitting at his desk. Jesus simply says to the man, "Follow me," and the man (who is Levi, better known as Matthew) gets up, abandons his highly prized position which has made him wealthy, and follows this intriguing stranger. Levi's response is clearly a very great miracle, although most commentators don't seem to see it that way.

Levi (Matthew) makes a great feast with Jesus as guest of honor, and many other publicans, plus scribes and Pharisees are among the guests. The scribes and Pharisees, characteristically focusing on externals while ignoring matters of the heart, criticize Jesus and his disciples. They point out that the disciples of John the Baptist, like the Pharisees, fast often and pray much in public, while the disciples of Jesus don't fast, and even eat and drink openly with publicans and sinners. Jesus replies to them, pointing out that it is the sick who need a physician--not the healthy; and He adds that it is right for his disciples to enjoy being with Him now for He will not be there always, and there will be plenty of time for them to fast after He is gone.

And then He goes on to point out that He is bringing a totally new concept of

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<sup>34</sup> There is a great need in our churches today for expository teaching of the Word of God, the Bible. If, instead of stories that make us “feel good,” inspirational poems and quotations from philosophers, preachers would teach the plain Word of God, verse by verse, chapter by chapter and book by book, explaining it, I believe that hungry people would be crowding around them to hear it.

<sup>35</sup> The other fishermen who come to help are almost certainly James and John, who were partners in fishing with Peter and Andrew. And so, both pairs of brothers leave their families and follow Jesus; but at least they leave them with a record catch.

redemption to Israel--not just some new ideas tacked onto the old, legalistic system of self-made righteousness that already exists. The old system, declared dead by the prophet Malachi centuries before, is finished. He is bringing a totally new system of redemption: salvation by faith as a gracious gift from God. To make his point, that it is a bad idea to try to improve the old religious system by addition of a little bit of the new, He uses familiar analogies. If we patch an old garment with a piece of new cloth, He says, the new piece will shrink when washed and tear the old garment. Likewise, He says, if we put new wine (which is still fermenting) into old, brittle wineskins, the new wine will produce expanding carbon dioxide which will tear the old wineskin, losing both the wine and the container. However, He says, pointing out the obvious, if we put new wine into new wineskins (which are still somewhat elastic), the skin will stretch and neither the wine nor its container is lost.

Finally, in one verse (verse 39), and still using the old wine-new wine analogy, Jesus points out that it is natural for the Pharisees and scribes to cling to the old covenant of laws and religious ritual, because it is all that they have ever known. Old wine has ceased to ferment, has no carbon dioxide bubbles and is, in this sense, "dead" and predictable. It is difficult for them to abandon the old system to which they are accustomed, and enter into the radically new, life-changing covenant that Jesus is proclaiming. He compares the New Covenant with new wine, which is still fermenting, and is "alive" with the effervescence of carbon dioxide bubbles. As the great 17th Century commentator Matthew Henry put it, "Christ's disciples, though they had not so much of the form of godliness, [yet they] had more of the power of it."

**NOTES:**

*a. Grape juice (or any other fruit juice) becomes wine by the natural process of fermentation, in which some of the sugar in the juice is broken down to produce alcohol and carbon dioxide. Fermentation is caused by tiny, single-cell organisms called "yeast." Yeast cells live and reproduce in liquids (or any substance where water and sugar are present, such as bread dough). Yeast survives when dry by producing very tiny particles called "spores," which are comparable to the seeds of larger, seed-bearing plants. Yeast spores are suspended in the air like tiny dust particles and, in most environments, they are literally everywhere. Any uncovered liquid or moist substance containing sugar will soon contain yeast spores producing living yeast cells, which then reproduce and multiply rapidly, bringing about fermentation. In a small cake of commercially prepared yeast there are literally billions of yeast spores.*

*Fermentation occurs because yeast cells feed on sugar molecules, breaking them down to produce alcohol and carbon dioxide. This bubble-producing process is*

*what causes unbaked bread dough to expand ("rise"); and this is how grape juice becomes wine, and cider becomes "hard" cider. The fermentation process is unavoidable in normal circumstances, and in the 1st Century there was no way to keep grape juice from fermenting and becoming wine without boiling it (something apparently never done).*

*In baking bread the fermentation process in the dough ceases because the heat kills the yeast cells; and there is no alcohol in bread because it is volatile and is driven off by the heat of the baking process. In wine-making, the process of fermentation is self-limiting because when the alcohol content of the fermenting juice reaches a certain level it kills the yeast cells. Thus, naturally made wine will have an alcohol content of no more than 10-12%. This is the wine that was in every household in 1st Century Palestine, and the wine that Paul recommended for Timothy, in place of unsafe drinking water, for his "stomach's sake" and his "often infirmities"<sup>36</sup>. Wines with a higher alcohol content, such as sherry or port, are not natural wines; they are called "fortified" wines because they have had alcohol added.*

*b. In the 1st Century Orient, Wine was stored and carried in leather bottles made from tanned hides (usually goat skin); in many places, this is still done today. When newly made, these leather bottles have some flexibility and elasticity and can stretch. In the old ones, however, the leather becomes stiff and brittle. Still-fermenting wine, placed in such an old leather bottle and sealed, will produce carbon dioxide, an expanding gas, which will often tear the brittle skin, thus losing the wine and ruining the old bottle. Because people in early 17th Century Britain used glass bottles instead of animal skins, the AV translators used the word "bottles" here, although the underlying Greek word is "askos" which means a leather bottle or wineskin. The AV translators, of course, wished to use a contemporary term that they believed would be more relevant to their "modern" readers. However, in doing so, the force of the analogy is lost, because fermenting wine can blow the cork out of a glass bottle, but will not break the bottle. I wish the AV translators had used "leather bottles" or "wineskins" here, instead of "bottles"; had they done so, I would not have had to write this explanation, and you would not have had to read it.*

#### **25. The Sermon on the Plain. (6:12-49)**

After leading his disciples up into a mountain, Jesus prays all night for guidance, calls the disciples together, and chooses the 12 who will become his closest friends: the apostles. They descend onto the plain below, and a great multitude,

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<sup>36</sup> I Timothy 5:23. Apparently Timothy suffered from frequent sickness in his stomach, resulting from drinking unsafe water.

from as far away as Jerusalem, Tyre and Sidon, gathers to hear Him teach and to be healed and delivered from demonic bondage<sup>37</sup>. He heals a great many, and then begins to teach.

a. Blessings and Woes. (6:13-26)

In a comprehensive message similar to the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded by Matthew, Jesus begins by enumerating three beatitudes (blessings). But then, unlike the Sermon on the Mount, here He enumerates a balancing list of three woes.

b. He Continues to Teach. (6:27-49)

With this beginning, He launches into a masterful summary of timeless teaching points, much like the Sermon on the Mount. As usual, it is profound, and yet delivered in terms easily understandable by the crowd. Like the Sermon on the Mount, his message on the plain is a masterpiece of expository teaching.

**NOTES:**

*a. Critical scholars usually teach that Luke's Sermon on the Plain is just an imperfect rendering of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, and cite it as an example of what they believe about errors that have crept into the text over time, and that the synoptic gospel writers copied from one another's work. This is part of the basis for their general approach to modern translations of the Bible which is usually called "dynamic equivalence." By this they mean that, since we can't take the words of Scripture literally, it is better to abandon word-for-word translation and use, instead, what we may fairly call "idea-for-idea" or "thought-for-thought" translation<sup>38</sup>. Thus, they produce at times what might be more accurately called a paraphrase, at times expressing their private opinions, and not a literal translation of the underlying text.*

*But are they right about Luke's "imperfect version of the Sermon on the Mount"? No.*

*First, the Sermon on the Mount was delivered to his **disciples** (not to a huge, mixed crowd of listeners), as He **sat** on "a **mountain**," (Matt 5:1-20); here, in Luke, Jesus descends with his disciples **from** a mountain and "**stood in the plain**" where **a great crowd** has already gathered, including people from as far away as what is today the Lebanese coast, before He begins to teach. Second, here his beatitudes are followed by woes not found in Matthew. Finally, the Golden Rule,*

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<sup>37</sup> Although there were Jewish communities in Tyre and Sidon, there were undoubtedly many pagans from there in the crowd.

<sup>38</sup> The translators of the New International Version state, in the Preface, that they "have striven for more than a word-for-word translation." This means that they chose to omit words that are there in the Greek text, and add words that are not there. Thus, their work becomes, in a sense, a paraphrase, expressing their ideas, rather than a literal translation.

*although included in both, is in a different context in Luke. In Matt 7:12 Jesus ties it to the principle of "ask, seek and knock" in receiving things from God. In Luke it is tied to the concept of generous giving to others.*

*And, finally, **we must remember**, at risk of my irritating you by reminding you too many times, that these teaching points must have been made over and over, in varying combinations and in various places, for the obvious reason that all of it was done person-to-person. Gutenberg would not invent the printing press for another 1,400 years; and even if there had been printing in the 1st Century it would have mattered little, because the vast majority of the people who heard Jesus teach these things could not read. Likewise, there were no recordings, radio or television. What the Gospel writers recorded of the teachings of Jesus are examples selected from messages undoubtedly delivered many times in many places. It is foolish to think of the Sermon on the Mount as if it were something like Lincoln's Gettysburg Address--delivered once, recorded and then reproduced for posterity to be memorized by school children.*

*b. They even insist that some of the gospel accounts are copied from assumed documents that have never been seen, nor have they been referred to by any of the canonical writers, the Ante-Nicene Fathers, or the writers of the Apocrypha. In mulling over which gospel was copied from which, they reason that there "must have been" some that haven't survived, it would explain things if it had existed, and they then have installed an inference as a "fact" in their reasoning about manuscripts. If you would like to see the most commonly held theories among critical scholars concerning this, see "The Synoptic 'Problem'" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

#### 26. A Widow, a Funeral, and a Miracle. (7:11-16)

The day after the healing of the centurion's servant, Jesus and his disciples travel to a village called Nain, southwest of Capernaum, and a crowd of people follows Him<sup>39</sup>. As He arrives at the gate of the town he encounters a funeral procession; a young man, son of a widow, has died and is being carried out for burial. As Jesus looks upon this bereaved woman he is filled with compassion for her (one of his most endearing traits), and He says to her, "Weep not." Then He touches the bier on which the dead man is carried, those carrying him stop walking, and Jesus commands the dead young man to rise. Immediately the man is restored to life; he sits up and begins to speak. He is restored to his mother, and the crowd, seeing this miracle, glorifies God. After all, who wouldn't glorify God? This is the only appropriate response; and all such miracles should glorify God--not the person God

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<sup>39</sup> This healing of the centurion's servant and other fascinating things about the centurion are dealt with in the study guide to Matthew, Highlight 11 ("Speak the Word Only").

uses to perform the miracle<sup>40</sup>.

27. Addendum to the Gadarene Matter--What and Where is the Abyss? (8:26-31)

We have already dealt with the deliverance of the Gadarene demoniac, in the study of Mark 5. Because it is a highlight in the study guide to Mark, it will not be repeated here; however, here in Luke's account there is a significant detail not found in Mark. This detail, like more than half of Luke's gospel, is unique to Luke's account; is the plea of the demons that Jesus not send them to "the deep." Here is another example of the principle that we don't have the complete picture of any passage in the Bible until we consider all that the Bible has to say about it. What could the demons have meant by "the deep," and why were they so anxious to avoid going there? Once more, the underlying Greek word helps us to understand a passage; it is *abussos*, the word from which we get our English word "abyss." In Greek this word carries the meaning of "bottomless" or "of immeasurable depth." Here in Luke 8:31, and in Romans 10:7, it is translated "the deep." The same word is used seven times in Revelation, where it is always translated "bottomless pit." So, in this way, we can know that the demons here are not speaking of deep water in the Sea of Galilee (they are about to go there anyway). Rather, they are speaking of a place much worse--the spiritual prison where they will one day be confined, awaiting their final doom in the Lake of Fire. In the simplest terms we may think of it as "Hell."

**NOTES:**

*a. In v 26 the use of the word "against" can be confusing to our modern minds, because it suggests the meaning "next to," as in "put the table against the wall." However, the word also carries the valid meaning of "opposite" as is its meaning here; if we are "against" something, we are "opposed" to it. Obviously, they have crossed the Sea of Galilee, from the region of Galilee to the opposite (eastern) shore. In this regard, see Matthew 8:28, Mk 5:1, 21.*

*b. In the healing (deliverance) of the demoniac it appears that Jesus went ashore alone, and ministered to the man alone, while his disciples waited at the beach with the boat (note the use of "he" in vv 27 and 37). Matthew and Luke likewise use the singular, "he," and it seems most clear in Lk 8:27 and 37.*

*c. It is revealing, and fascinating, to realize that, before John wrote the Book of Revelation, evil spirits already knew what awaits them in the final judgment. They know that, eventually, they and their evil prince will be cast into the bottomless pit to await their final, horrible fate; and they want to postpone that awful event as long as possible. They also know that Jesus, who will be their final Judge, could send them there now if He chose to; and the thought terrifies them.*

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<sup>40</sup> See John 16:14.

28. No Half-Hearted Disciples Wanted. (9:57-62)

Jesus is approached by a man who declares that he will follow Him, no matter where He goes. The Lord responds by making it clear that, for those who do follow Him, life will be neither easy nor pleasant. Jesus says that He doesn't even have a home where He can find shelter and rest (clearly implying that those who follow him should expect the same)<sup>41</sup>. He also announces that He will accept no half-hearted disciples, and uses the analogy of a plowman. He says that a plowman, once he has begun to plow, must not look back at where he has been; rather, he must keep plowing with his eyes straight ahead, on a distant point to which he is heading.

**NOTES:**

*a. The Lord's response to the would-be disciple whose father had died is fascinating. First, it seems that Jesus knew what the man would say, and set him up to make a teaching point (I absolutely love the way the Lord's mind worked, and I did when I only knew **about** Him). Second, the Lord's reply, "Let the dead bury their dead..." seems harsh; but, as usual, He is making an important point: that our commitment to Him must be without reservations. Finally, we must wonder how it could be possible for dead people to do anything in the way of burying other dead ones. In this Jesus was apparently speaking of the spiritually dead--those who had not acknowledged Him as Messiah and had not sought to know and follow him.*

*b. To plow a straight furrow, whether done by one man walking behind a mule, horse or ox, or by a modern man driving a tractor, it is necessary to keep the eyes on a distant reference point--not on what is immediately before him; and a straight furrow definitely cannot be plowed by looking back where he has been. I learned this age-old principle from my father when I was plowing in our huge Victory Garden during World War II (see Philippians 3:13-14).*

29. Sending the "Other Seventy" Disciples. (10:1-12)

As He had earlier sent out the 12 apostles to minister in teams of two, Jesus selects and sends out 70 other, unnamed, disciples to minister in teams of two in towns to which he will be going, later, Himself. They are to present the gospel, heal the sick, and tell the people that the Kingdom of God has come near to them. In sending them He uses an expression which has become familiar to us and is often quoted by preachers and teachers: He tells them that "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few."

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<sup>41</sup> It does appear that Jesus and The Twelve had a house in Capernaum to which they returned from time to time; but they did not own it. It may have belonged to Matthew, who was a wealthy citizen of Capernaum, or some other Christian who made it available to them. But Jesus owned nothing in the way of earthly goods but the clothes He wore.

Jesus then directs them to live by faith on their journey, taking with them nothing but the clothes they wear. He also tells them that when they enter a town they are to say to owners of homes that they enter, "Peace be to this house"; if the owner is a man of peace and grace they are to stay there until they leave that town, rather than move from house to house. If they enter a town and are not received, they are to tell those people also that the Kingdom of God has come near them (even though they rejected it, they have been exposed to the truth of it). The disciples are then to shake off the dust of that town from their feet and garments, an ancient expression of disapproval and rejection, and leave.

**NOTES:**

*a. We are indebted to Luke for this account of sending out the "other seventy" disciples; none of the other gospel writers included it.*

*b. It is interesting to compare the sending out of the "other seventy" with the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, Mk 16:15-20, and Jn 20:21. It begins to appear, more and more clearly, that these instructions apply to all of us.*

*c. In giving the 70 un-named disciples their instructions, Jesus makes a rather startling statement that demands explanation: He tells them to "salute (greet) no man by the way." At first glance this sounds wrong. It sounds as if they are to be silent, mysterious and rude to those whom they meet in their travels, when common courtesy, then and now, would require at least a pleasant "Good morning" for those they will meet. In fact, in the ancient Orient, to fail to do so would be a grievous insult, one that could lead to conflict. What could Jesus have meant? It seems to me that He is warning them to stay single-minded on their mission; they are not to be side-tracked by stopping and taking time for normal socializing. In this sense, they might greet a passing stranger with, "Good morning to you. I can't stop now, but I wish you safety and success."*

*d. In recent decades the modern versions have 72 for the number of the un-named disciples sent out by Jesus in pairs to minister. This is because the Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament, on which modern versions are based, gives the number as 72, although the vast majority of ancient manuscripts have 70 as the number. For more on the Westcott-Hort Greek NT and its impact on modern Bible versions, see "The Mystery of the Missing Verses" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

**30. Bad News for Capernaum, Bethsaida and Other Places. (10:13-16)**

Having finished his instructions to the 70 men, Jesus then makes a rather radical declaration! He says that in the final judgment the fate of any city that rejects them and their message will be worse than that of Sodom. This is a serious statement, for things can't get much worse for a wicked city than what happened to

Sodom and Gomorrah<sup>42</sup>! But the message becomes even stronger. Jesus pronounces doom for Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin for having seen and received so much, yet rejecting Him and his message. This is interesting because these are the towns where most of his recorded miracles were performed. Bethsaida ("place of fishing") was the home town of Peter, Andrew and Phillip. Capernaum was the center of Jesus' ministry. It was Matthew's home town, it was the place they repeatedly returned to, and they apparently had use of a house there. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these three towns were familiar haunts to Jesus and his disciples, and that Capernaum was their home base. Chorazin is mentioned in only two places in the Bible: here, and in Matthew 11:21, the account of this event by Matthew. Of the three, the pronouncement of the future of Capernaum is the most severe (if there can be degrees of doom); He says that although it has been "exalted to Heaven," it shall be "thrust down to Hell." It seems to be a matter of "to whom much is given, much is required." These three towns were close together on the northwest bank of the Sea of Galilee; in fact, many scholars believe that Bethsaida was actually a suburb of Capernaum--that the two were actually one city. Perhaps the same is true of Chorazin. Like Sodom and Gomorrah, all three towns have ceased to exist and their locations are uncertain.

**NOTES:**

*a. For a more complete treatment of Jesus' pronouncement of doom on Capernaum, see Matt 12:23-24. His prophecy was fulfilled so completely that even the exact location of Capernaum is a matter of dispute today.*

*b. The identities of Capernaum and Bethsaida appear to be in conflict in two places in the NT:*

*(1) Following the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus told his disciples to get into the boat and go back to the west bank of the Sea of Galilee. In Mark's account the destination is Bethsaida (Mk 6:45); yet in John's account of the same event the destination is Capernaum (Jn 6:17).*

*(2) Mark seems to identify the home town of Peter and Andrew as Capernaum (Mk 1:16-21), while John clearly identifies their home town as Bethsaida (Jn 7:44).*

*So, what do we make of this? Some authorities, such as Merrill Unger (Unger's Bible Dictionary) and Alfred Edersheim ("Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah") take this to mean that Bethsaida was a fishing community very close to, or a portion of, Capernaum, as we might think of Beverly Hills as part of "greater Los Angeles." And so, the two place names could easily be interchangeable--*

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<sup>42</sup> Genesis 19.

*especially to fishermen and their friends. This seems perfectly reasonable to me.*

31. Success, Priorities, and a Glimpse into the Cosmic Past. (10:17-20)

The 70 unnamed disciples return from their mission, successful and joyful, saying in effect, "Halleluiah! We did it--it worked--even the demons obeyed us when we spoke in your name!" Jesus is pleased, of course, but issues a word of caution. To keep things in proper perspective, He tells them that he was present when Satan himself was cast out of Heaven like a lightning bolt. He says that He gives them authority and power over all of Satan's evil power, and promises that they will be unharmed and victorious.

Healing the sick and casting out demons, however, can be exciting, and can make us vulnerable to pride. So Jesus reminds them of what really counts: that what is most important is that their names are written in Heaven--that they are already identified as redeemed children of God.

***NOTE:** In a human sense, in the limited sense of the World of time and space in which we now live, these 70 men, and the 12 apostles, are not yet redeemed, i.e. reborn by the blood of the Lamb, for Jesus the Lamb of God has not yet died to pay the sin debt of mankind. Yet, in the mind of God and the economy of Heaven, where there is neither past nor future, but only one enormous present, their names are already recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 13:8, 20:15, et al).*

32. Jesus Rejoices! (10:21-22)

In his humanity, Jesus rejoices, and thanks the Heavenly Father, that these disciples are learning--that they followed his instructions and succeeded in their first ministry outing. Now, not only have the 12 apostles succeeded in ministry on their own, but 70 more disciples have also succeeded in ministry, two-by-two. He praises and thanks his Heavenly Father for this; it must have been wonderful to see Him so filled with joy!

33. You Are Uniquely Blessed! (10:23-24)

After his time of rejoicing, Jesus turns to his disciples and declares that their eyes and ears are blessed. He tells them that they have seen and heard things that many prophets of God and godly kings of Israel in the past have longed to see and hear but were never so privileged. These followers of Jesus--not just the twelve apostles, but at least 70 more disciples--have seen, lived with, and ministered with the Messiah! Three of them were with Him on the mount of transfiguration where they saw and heard Moses and Elijah, and saw Jesus transfigured. They have seen so many miracles that it must have become commonplace for them. And Jesus has given them glimpses into the cosmic past that no other person had seen and heard (as in verse 18 above). And they will get a heavy dose of more verbal

revelation on the night of preparation for the Passover, as recorded in John 14-17<sup>43</sup>.  
34. Who Is My Neighbor? (10:25-29)

An expert in the law asks--insincerely--what he must do to inherit eternal life. In answer Jesus, as He often did, responds to the question with a question, asking the man what **he** believes to be the answer. The man answers, correctly, that he must love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5), and love his neighbor as himself (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus could then have said to the man, "Then why did you ask me? You already know the answer." Instead, He is polite to the man, telling him that he has answered correctly, and says that if he does these things he shall live. But the conversation doesn't end there.

The lawyer, still wishing to outsmart Jesus and to justify his own sinful neglect of the poor and needy around him, asks who qualifies as his neighbor. This is probably where he was going with this conversation from the beginning, because many, if not most, of the scribes, Pharisees and legalists did not take care of the needy around them. Many, if not most, of them lived in lofty, haughty isolation from the masses of common people, and believed that they had no moral or religious responsibility to help anyone beneath their social and economic level. This was their attitude toward poor, uneducated Jews; but they viewed Samaritans as foreigners, much lower than the masses of poor Jews, and unworthy even of any notice. In response to the man's question, Jesus tells a story that is familiar to most of us, choosing his characters well.

**NOTES:**

*a. It is important to realize that in ancient Palestine there were no scattered farmhouses as there are in this country. People gathered in towns and cities where they lived in very close proximity to one another. Each day they went out to their fields, orchards and vineyards and worked, returning to their homes in the town or city to eat and sleep. In fact, this is largely true in Israel today, as seen in the kibbutz farming system. Living together in towns and cities provided a measure of safety that would not have existed for a single farm family living alone in the countryside. Cities large enough and wealthy enough were also walled, and the gates were closed at sundown.*

*b. Dr. John Lightfoot was a greatly respected 17th Century Cambridge scholar and theologian, and was the principal author of the Westminster Confession of Faith. In his day he was considered to be the world's preeminent Hebrew scholar and authority concerning ancient Hebrew customs. After studying the works of the ancient rabbis as no Christian had ever done before, he concluded that*

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<sup>43</sup> In his gospel, John specializes in this sort of cosmic revelation not found to the same degree in the synoptic gospels; and, always, John specializes in making clear the divinity of Christ.

*Samaritans were so despised that a Jew could even murder a Samaritan without fear of being charged with a crime.*

*c. Here, again, the underlying Greek word is revealing, for there are three Greek words in the NT translated with our single English word "neighbor"; and all three have a wider range of meaning than our English word, going beyond simple location, to include implied relationship and responsibility. Based upon the context in which it appears in the NT, the meaning of this word ("plesion") includes being helpful, being intimate (actually knowing one another) and sincerity. Because our culture has been, from the beginning, Bible-based, this English word has, in our thinking, taken on some of the meaning of the Greek. This is seen in our words "neighborly" and "neighborliness."*

35. The Good Samaritan. (10:30-37)

Jesus immediately tells a story of a man (presumably a Jew) who goes down from Jerusalem on the road leading to Jericho. He is attacked by thieves who take everything he has; they also beat the man nearly to death and leave him lying on the road. A priest, also traveling toward Jericho, comes upon the bloody man, crosses over to the other side of the road and goes on his way. Then a Levite comes upon the helpless, wounded man and stops to look at him; yet, like the priest, he crossed over to the other side and walked on without doing anything to help. Finally a Samaritan, traveling on the road, comes upon the beaten man. Like the two before him, he looked upon the wounded man; unlike the other two, he has compassion for the man. He stops, pours olive oil and wine into the open wounds, and binds up the wounds (probably tearing the cloth from his own garments, for the wounded man has none). He sets the man on his own mount (probably a mule or donkey) and walks, leading his mount, to the nearest inn. There the Samaritan spends the night, taking further care of him. Before leaving the next morning the Samaritan pays the bill and leaves additional money to allow the man to remain while he heals, and to pay for the dressing changes and other care he will receive. He promises to return and, if there is additional cost, he promises that he will pay it.

Having told the story Jesus asks the legalist which of the three was a neighbor to the wounded man. The legalist answers that the one who was merciful to the man was his neighbor (it must have been hard for him just to admit this--it appears that he couldn't bring himself also to speak the word "Samaritan."). Jesus, having made his point, tells him to "Go and do thou likewise." I wonder if the legalist did that?

**NOTES:**

*a. Pouring wine and olive oil into and over the wounds was much better wound care than most people in undeveloped countries receive, even today. The alcohol*

*in the wine (10-12%) was a disinfectant. The olive oil is rich in antioxidants and vitamin E, and is itself to some extent an antiseptic and astringent (which causes shrinking in soft tissue, which assists in stopping bleeding). It also softens tissue which has dried in the heat of the road. Mixed with the wine it would be even more effective. A missionary surgeon known to me treats that kind of trauma almost every day, in Third World dirt, contamination, and indifference. He observes, "Altogether I find it interesting and heartening that, while Jesus' primary point [in the parable] was not about the nature of the wound care, it was, all the same, very good wound care."*

*b. Matthew Henry and other commentators have expressed the belief that this parable may have been based upon an actual event, because of the mention of specific place names (Jerusalem, Jericho, and the Jericho Road).*

*c. Dr. John Lightfoot (Highlight 35, NOTE b. above) has written that many courses of the priests had their residences in Jericho and traveled, with their Levite assistants, up to Jerusalem to assume their duties, and back to their homes in Jericho when going off duty. Thus, it was normal to see priests and Levites walking (or riding) along that much-traveled road.*

*d. This parable is one of three unique to Luke's account; the other two are the parables of The Lost Sheep and The Prodigal Son, which we shall see.*

### 36. The Lord's Prayer (Luke's Version). (11:1-4)

What we have come to call the Lord's Prayer is fully treated in the study guide to Matthew (Highlight 9, h) and that material will not be repeated here. There is, however, an interesting thing in Mark's account that does not appear in Matthew: it is the reference to John the Baptist. In Luke's account we see that John the Baptist has taught his disciples to pray, and the disciples of Jesus are aware of this. Perhaps they are aware of it because at least two of them were formerly disciples of John the Baptist (John 1:35-37). At any rate, the disciples here ask Jesus to teach them to pray "as John also taught his disciples [to pray]." The wording of the prayer is slightly different here; for example: in v 3, "give us day by day" (rather than "give us this day"); and, in v 4, "forgive us our sins 'for' [because] we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us." Luke's account also lacks the closing benediction which is included in Matthew's account. By this time we have seen repeatedly that this does not indicate error in either version; rather, it is but one more example of an important principle in the study of the Bible: that in order to get the complete meaning of anything in Scripture we must consider everything the Bible has to say about it--not just one passage.

**NOTE:** *Those who squabble about which version is "the correct" version should stop it, for they are both the correct version. Jesus may even have taught this little lesson more than once: (1) to just his "inner circle" (Peter, James and John); (2) to*

*the twelve apostles; or(3) to crowds of his disciples. The question-response feature ("Lord, teach us to pray...") would apply to all three possibilities.*

37. Ask, Seek and Knock: Jesus Continues on Prayer. (11:5-13)

Without interruption, or a pause for a change of subject, Jesus continues with his teaching on prayer, and what follows is extremely important. He teaches his disciples (and, thus, He teaches us) two important principles concerning prayer:

a. First is the principle of importunity in prayer, i.e. to pray persistently and not be discouraged<sup>44</sup>. He assures us that if we ask we will receive, if we seek sincerely and don't give up we will find, and that if we knock on a door persistently it will eventually be opened to us<sup>45</sup>.

b. Second is the assurance that if we ask the Lord for a good thing, we will not, instead, open ourselves up to receiving something evil or demonic.

To illustrate the point He reminds us that if we are hungry and ask our human father for bread he will not give us a rock in a bread wrapper. Likewise, if we ask him for a fish he will not give us a snake (by implication a poisonous one) instead. And, if we ask him for an egg, he will not play a cruel joke on us and give us a poisonous scorpion. Then He reminds us that if our imperfect ("evil," by comparison with God's perfect goodness) human fathers will not treat us cruelly if we ask them for something, we must consider how much more we can trust our Heavenly Father to give us the Holy Spirit if we ask Him<sup>46</sup>.

**NOTES:**

*a. In Matthew's version of this teaching (Matt 7:7-11) Jesus promises, "how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give 'good things' [as opposed to 'the Holy Spirit'] to them that ask Him." Is the correct wording then "good things" or "the Holy Spirit"? The answer, I believe, is both. As usual, we must combine the two versions to arrive at the full meaning:*

*(1) We must trust the Heavenly Father to give us good things when we ask--the general meaning. Consider the facts that the fish was the earliest symbol of the things of Christ; and that the serpent, since the Book of Genesis, has been a symbol of the things of Satan.*

*(2) But we must also trust the Father, specifically, to give us gift of the Holy Spirit if we ask-- and not allow us to receive, innocently, some other (evil) spirit.*

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<sup>44</sup> We shall see a parable about an importunate widow who would not be denied in Chapt 18.

<sup>45</sup> This is a valid principle only if what we ask and what we seek and the door on which we knock are within the will of God (see I Jn 5:14-15).

<sup>46</sup> The Greek word rendered "evil" in this verse is a form of the adjective *kakos*. It has a fairly wide range of meaning, from "evil" as in evil spirits, to imperfect or worthless. Here it is useful to think of it as meaning sinful or capable of wickedness and evil; and, as noted above, it describes us, even the redeemed, as compared with the perfection and pure goodness of our utterly trustworthy Heavenly Father.

(3) And, in both cases, notice that **we must ask**. I am convinced that He will **never** force us to receive a blessing (or to do anything else). Many Christians, for various reasons (usually fear or indifference), will say something like "Well, if He wants me to have it [whatever is being discussed], He will give it to me." No, it seems clear that to receive any good thing, including salvation and the things of the Holy Spirit, we must ask--and mean it.

**b.** Why am I convinced that God will never force us to do anything? Consider the following:

(1) He is not willing that any should perish (Ezek 18:31-32; 33:11; II Pet 3:9); it is clearly God's will that all men be redeemed and join Him in Heaven.

(2) And, yet, Ezekiel made it clear that **some** will perish; and Jesus took it a step farther by saying that **most** will perish and be lost (Matt 7:14; Lk 13:24).

Conclusion: if God will not force us to receive the unspeakable gift of redemption, how much less would He force us to receive lesser good things, including the gift of the Holy Spirit?

**c.** At this point we are skating dangerously close to the thin ice of doctrinal matters; and, short of the foundational Christian doctrines, that is something I try to avoid. You may already notice that we are brushing up against such things as free will and the gift of the Holy Spirit, things over which sincere Christians are divided. However, we cannot escape the wording of this passage (or that of the similar Matthew passage), nor can we ignore the apparent meaning of the wording. What the reader makes of it is a personal matter between himself and the Lord; but the obvious, central, message of both passages is that we must trust Him to give us only good things, that we must ask, and that we must not only ask, but we are to seek the answer fervently and not abandon the seeking.

38. What is "The Finger of God"? (11:14-20)

In Matthew 12, where the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons with the power of Satan, He corrects them, pointing out their faulty logic, and says "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God then the Kingdom of God has come unto you."

Here in Luke 11, where Luke describes a similar event in which Jesus is accused of doing the same thing, his response is interestingly different. Jesus says to them, "But if I with the **finger** of God cast out devils, no doubt the Kingdom of God is come upon you." This appears to mean that "the finger of God" is a synonym for "the Spirit of God."

Luke's use of this expression as a synonym for the Spirit of God is not without precedent. In Exodus 8:16-19 Moses and Aaron, by the Spirit of God, turn dust in Egypt into lice. Pharaoh's magicians attempt to do the same thing and fail, declaring that when Moses and Aaron did it, "This is the finger of God." Also, in Exodus 31:18 and Deuteronomy 9:10 it is written that the LORD gave Moses the

two stone tables of the Law, “written with the finger of God.” And one possible example, in Daniel 5, when the miraculous message of final judgment was famously written on Belshazzar's wall, the message was written by what appeared to be “fingers of a man’s hand” (Daniel 5:5).

It would be foolish to assume that the enemies of Jesus accused him of having demonic power only once; and it would likewise be foolish to assume that He answered them in the same way each time. On this occasion, it appears that He was deliberately taking them back to the plagues of the Exodus, the giving of the Law to Moses and, perhaps, Daniel’s record of the end of Belshazzar, to give them something to think about.

39. It Is a Sad Thing. (Lk 11:52)

It is a sad thing, I believe, that many preachers and Bible teachers are so convinced of a favorite doctrine that they put hungry, God-seeking Christians in fear--the fear that if they ask the Lord for some part of his provision (something of which the preacher/teacher disapproves) the seeker may open himself up to demonic invasion and receive a counterfeit, satanic gift (or worse). Those leaders not only rob themselves of some of God's blessing and provision, but they put those others who trust them in fear, so that they also fail to receive things for which they hunger, things God wants to give them. I have seen it many times, and these leaders are perfectly described by what Jesus said to the legalistic rabbis in the home of a Pharisee: "Woe unto you lawyers! For ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered."

40. No Secrets in the Church. (12:1-3)

A huge crowd forms around Jesus; but, instead of addressing the entire crowd, He speaks to his disciples, telling them to beware of the sin of hypocrisy ("the leaven of the Pharisees"). Then He makes a sobering statement: He says that all sinful things done in secret will be revealed. In Matthew's account of this principle (Matthew 10:26-27), the wording takes on an added dimension: that whatever we learn in secret we should proclaim it publicly. After all, Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed, declared to the corrupt high priest, "I spake openly to the world...in secret have I said nothing<sup>47</sup>."

**NOTE:** *This seems to establish an important principle: that there are to be no secrets in the Church. Although there are some things God reserves to Himself, such as the day and hour of the return of Jesus, there is no such thing (outside the wicked, occult world) as "hidden truth" or "hidden wisdom." No, although there are mysteries in the Church, there are no secrets; what God reveals to one of us*

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<sup>47</sup> John 18:20.

*should be proclaimed to all of us--and to the world.*

41. Sparrows, Hairs and the Free Market. (12:4-7)

In Matthew 10 we saw that Jesus, in teaching that we should fear God and not man, spoke of the way God watches over us. He says that God knows the number of our hairs, and knows when a sparrow falls. In doing this, He compares the value of sparrows with our value before God. He says that two sparrows may be bought for one farthing; this makes each sparrow worth 1/2 farthing. Here, in Luke's account of this same teaching point, he quotes Jesus as saying that five sparrows may be bought for two farthings; thus each sparrow is worth only 2/5 of a farthing. Is this an error in the telling, or a copyist's error in the hand-written manuscript? No. Rather, it seems that it is only illustrating the free market principle that buying in quantity makes it possible to pay less for each unit of merchandise. It appears that this economic principle has not changed in 2,000 years!

42. Healing Again on the Sabbath. (13:10-17)

Jesus is teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, and there is a woman there with a spirit of infirmity who has been bent over, unable to stand straight for 18 years. Jesus, of course, lays his hands on her, sets her free, and the woman glorifies God. The ruler of the synagogue, however, is indignant and rebukes Jesus for healing on the Sabbath day. Jesus reminds him that on every Sabbath day he leads his ass or ox to water. The man (along with his like-minded friends) is ashamed; but the people rejoice.

***NOTE:** This woman was crippled, not **primarily** by arthritis or a deformity of bone, muscle or nerve; she was crippled in this way by an evil "spirit of infirmity." Jesus clearly says that it is Satan who has bound her for 18 years. To be precise, Jesus did not only heal her; he set her free to stand upright by commanding the evil spirit to release her and flee. We may have difficulty in understanding exactly what took place here; but it is clear that some pathological physical conditions are caused by evil spirits. After being in that unnatural posture for such a long time, in addition to this miracle of deliverance<sup>48</sup>, she would also need miraculous healing of muscles, blood vessels, nerves, vertebrae, intervertebral discs, and connective tissue. It appears that Jesus took care of all those things.*

43. The Ox in the Pit. (14:1-6)

On another Sabbath, Jesus is dining in the home of a chief Pharisee when a man with dropsey appears<sup>49</sup>. Knowing the thoughts of the Pharisees in the room, Jesus

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<sup>48</sup> The Bible classifies deliverance from evil spirits as a miracle (see Acts 8:6-8).

<sup>49</sup> Dropsy is edema, a symptom of one or more diseases, such as congestive heart failure or kidney failure, which cause accumulation of fluids, often in the feet and lower legs.

asks them if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath day. They do not reply, and Jesus heals the man. Then he reminds them that if their ass or ox should fall into a pit on the Sabbath, they would pull the animal out. They are wise enough not to pursue this conversation.

44. Parable of the Lost Sheep. (15:1-7)

A large crowd of publicans and sinners gathers around Jesus to hear Him, and the scribes and Pharisees (as usual) are offended that He would have any dealings with them. Knowing this, Jesus speaks to the religious snobs in a parable. He asks which of them, having 100 sheep, if one wanders away and is lost, would not leave the 99 sheep and go searching for the one that is lost? Furthermore, he says, that man, when he has found the lost sheep, will put the lost sheep on his shoulder, carry it back to the sheepfold, and celebrate the recovery. The scribes and Pharisees are silent, and Jesus goes on to say that there is more joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 "just persons, which need no repentance."

**NOTE:** *In v 7, when Jesus speaks of the 99 "just" persons who need no repentance, the Greek word rendered "just" is "dikaios," which can also be rendered "righteous." In the context of the parable, Jesus is speaking of the 99 as those who have **already repented** of their sinful state, and have been redeemed. No one can be "righteous" (good) enough as not to need redemption, for **all** have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23, et al)<sup>50</sup>.*

45. Parable of the Lost Coin. (15:8-10)

Without pause, Jesus speaks of a woman who has 10 silver coins, but has lost one of them. She will drop everything, He says, light a candle to illuminate the dark places in the house, and search until she finds the lost coin. When she has found it she will celebrate the recovery. And then Jesus says an extremely interesting thing: He says that, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God when one sinner repents." Isn't it nice to know that there are ongoing celebrations in Heaven? What a wonderful place it must be!

**NOTES:**

*a. There is a common misconception among Christians to the effect that angels in Heaven rejoice when a sinner repents and is redeemed. But what did Jesus say? Notice that He tells us that this rejoicing is not done **by** the angels, but "**in [their] presence**"<sup>51</sup>. It seems that angels can't really rejoice over such a thing because*

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<sup>50</sup> For examples of the use of the word "just" in this sense see Matt 5:45 and I Pet 3:18.

<sup>51</sup> The Greek word rendered "in the presence of" is *enopion*, and it means "before (as in 'standing before an audience')," "in the presence of," or "in sight of."

*they have never experienced sin and forgiveness. Who, then, in Heaven does this rejoicing? I think it must be Christ Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, for He alone truly knows the cost of redemption, and the joy of victory over sin<sup>52</sup>.*

*b. Many Christians (and those who have some knowledge of the Bible but are not redeemed) believe that those who have died and are with the Lord in Heaven can look down on those of us who are still alive on Earth. If this were true, then they would be joining our Redeemer in the rejoicing over another lost soul.*

*But I can't believe this, and for two reasons:*

*(1) If our loved ones who have gone before us could know what is happening with those of us who are alive and remain in this life on Earth, they would be distressed over our sins, mistakes, sufferings and tragedies, including the ultimate tragedy: the death of their loved ones who die unredeemed. Thus Heaven would not be perfect, a place of perfect peace and joy.*

*(2) The Bible doesn't tell us much about Heaven (in fact, it tells us more about Hell than it tells us about Heaven, and Jesus preached much more about Hell than He did about Heaven). However, what the Bible does tell us is that Heaven is perfect, a place with no tears, no heartaches and no sadness; and if those in Heaven could see the sin, trouble, struggles and tragedy in our lives, their existence in Heaven would not be perfect.*

*Perhaps the redeemed in Heaven join our Redeemer in the rejoicing over one sinner who repents, but only in a nameless, generic way; for otherwise they would also know which of their loved ones **do not repent**, thus die unredeemed, and they would grieve.*

*c. Misconceptions bother me--especially widely held ones. If I have overworked this concept, or have engaged in splitting theological hairs, please forgive me, shake your head over it, and move on.*

46. Parable of The Prodigal Son. (15:11-32)

Continuing to teach the crowd (and to offend the un-teachable scribes and Pharisees), Jesus tells the story of a wealthy man with two sons. The younger son asks his father to give him what would be his inheritance if he had waited until his father's death. His father consents, the younger son takes the money to a far country and wastes it all in sinful living. When his money is gone he finds a job as a swineherd<sup>53</sup>, but does not even make enough money to feed himself. Finally, hungry, sadder and wiser, he returns to his home. In one of the most beautiful scenes in the Bible, the father sees the boy while he is still far away, runs to him, embraces and kisses him. The boy confesses that he was wrong, has sinned

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<sup>52</sup> Hebrews 12:2.

<sup>53</sup> This is probably the lowest, most demeaning job a Jew could have!

against God and shamed and disappointed his father; he doesn't ask to be restored as a son--he only asks for a job as a servant. Instead of rebuking the repentant boy, his father commands that he be given sandals (the boy has been apparently been reduced to being shoeless), the best clothes, and a gold ring. He also orders the killing of a fatted calf and that there be a celebration.

The older brother, coming from work in the field, is greatly offended, and refuses to take part in the celebration. He resents the fact that the young son, who has left home and wasted his inheritance on sinful, irresponsible living, is being feted, when he, the faithful one, has never been treated that way. But his father reminds him that he will now inherit everything the father has (the young son has already received all that he will ever get); and, he says, what matters is that the boy has come to his senses and repented. He says, metaphorically, that he was lost and is found, was dead to his family and is now alive.

Jesus doesn't tell us whether or not that the older brother's attitude ever improved; it seems that He is just making important teaching points about sin, forgiveness, grace and redemption<sup>54</sup>.

**NOTES:**

*a. The wording of v 12 can be a little troublesome, for the last sentence says, "And he [the father] divided unto them his living." Note that "his" is in italics, meaning that the word is not included in the Greek text, but was added by the translators. The sentence seems to mix plural with singular; but it doesn't. The "his" refers to the father's estate, which he (singular) is dividing between his sons (plural), and giving the value of half to the younger son, while the older son remains with his father, working as before. All that is left will now be inherited by the older brother (v 31).*

*To further clarify this somewhat difficult sentence, the Greek word rendered "living" is a primitive Greek word, "bios," meaning "life" and, by extension, livelihood, or the means of living, i.e. one's possessions. The same word is used in the account of the widow whose two "widow's mites" (leptons) were all that she had (Mk 12:44), and in the account of the woman with the issue of blood, who had spent "all her living" on physicians, but in vain (Lk 12:43)<sup>55</sup>.*

*b. In verses 18 and 21 many of the modern versions have the prodigal son confessing that he has "sinned" against both God and his father. This is an error, for we can sin only against God and only God can forgive sin. We can offend or do wrong to another person, who may, or may not, forgive us; but we can sin only against God,*

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<sup>54</sup> This parable, perhaps the most familiar of all the parables of Jesus, is found only here, in Luke's Gospel.

<sup>55</sup> This same Greek word, *bios*, is also the basis for many English words, such as "biology," "biohazard," and "biodegradable."

*and only God can forgive sin<sup>56</sup>. The son has shamed and disappointed his father; but he has sinned only against God. The AV (KJV) translators carefully made this distinction (as did Mrs. Siewert in her "Amplified Bible").*

47. Parable of the Unjust Steward. (16:1-13)

Jesus, speaking to his disciples (but overheard by the Pharisees), tells a story of a man, a steward or manager of the business affairs of his master. The man has apparently been wasting, or stealing from, his master's money and merchandise. The steward's wrongdoing is reported to his master, who confronts him; he tells the steward to give him up-to-date accounts and leave. He is fired. Pondering the situation, the steward thinks of his alternatives. What shall he do? He is not strong enough to labor (or perhaps he is too lazy), and he is ashamed to beg<sup>57</sup>. He decides to write new (false) contracts for those who are indebted to his master, greatly reducing their debts. They, of course, agree, and become indebted (figuratively) to the crooked steward; they will undoubtedly be inclined to help him after he leaves the master's employ.

At this point the parable becomes difficult to understand, for the "lord" (lower case l) commends the steward for being shrewd and forward-looking (if dishonest) in providing for his future<sup>58</sup>. This doesn't sound realistic; but the master is commending him for his ingenuity--not for his dishonesty. We must also remember that Jesus is telling a story--making teaching points--not speaking of facts.

Jesus goes on, saying that the children of this world (unbelievers) are wiser in their doings than are the children of light (believers).

**NOTE:** *A terribly important, multifaceted, fact is expressed here--one that is often over-looked. In half a sentence (v 8b) Jesus points out that "the children of this world" [unbelievers] are wiser in their generation than are the children of light [believers].* What does He mean by this? *It seems that we, the children of the Kingdom, often take the unspeakable riches of redemption too lightly; if we valued our spiritual riches as the unbeliever values his material riches, it would change the way we live and would revolutionize the Church for the good. We, in a sense, have everything, but take it for granted and fail to value and use it as we should; the lost have nothing that matters, but they greatly value their material wealth, guard it diligently, and multiply it at every opportunity. This is indeed a point to ponder.*

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<sup>56</sup> Many modern versions make this same error in Jas 5:16. See also in this regard Lk 5:21.

<sup>57</sup> Finis Jennings Dake (Dake Annotated Reference Bible) artfully observed that he was "ashamed to beg, but not to embezzle."

<sup>58</sup> The Greek word for "lord" is *kurios*, which can mean our divine Lord, but it can also, in lower case, refer to a human master or person of higher rank.

That Problematic Verse 9. With his story apparently finished, Jesus says to his disciples something that Christians have wrestled with for centuries: He tells them (and us) to make friends of (or by) the mammon (money or wealth) of unrighteousness, in order that, when we fail, "they may receive [us] into everlasting habitations." What could he mean by this? He can't mean that friends of the unrighteous mammon can give us entrance into Heaven! Then what? It seems that He is saying that we should be wise and diligent in accumulating worldly possessions, using them unselfishly for good in such a way that when they become worthless to us, there will still be angels to escort us to the true riches of our home in Heaven.

On the other hand, it may mean that if we use our earthly riches wisely, helping others and making friends, they (Christian friends) will be at the gate to welcome us to Heaven<sup>59</sup>. As is often the case with such puzzling statements of Jesus, both interpretations may be correct.

*NOTE: In this passage, the teachings of Jesus are as rich as they are in what we call the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the plain; we must watch carefully, or we will miss some small jewels of precious Truth.*

At this point the disciples' heads must have been swimming (ours surely are at times), so Jesus explains. If we aren't faithful in the way we handle unrighteous mammon (earthly riches), how can we think that we will ultimately be trusted with the true riches of righteousness as children of God? In passing (verse 12), he drops in a timeless proverb: that if we can't be trusted to handle honestly the riches of someone else, why should we expect to be given riches of our own? When handling the possessions of someone else there is an element of trust involved; we should be even more careful with the other man's possessions than we are with our own.

In closing, He warns us of the deceitfulness of riches: it is difficult not to love and trust in them; and if we make this mistake, it can cost us our relationship with God. It can cost us (and God), to varying degrees, the riches of a loving relationship; ultimately, it seems, we can become so devoted to our possessions that we fail to establish the relationship with God, robbing ourselves of eternity with Him. Jesus says it all in six simple words: "Ye cannot serve [both] God and mammon."

#### 48. Rebuking the Pharisees. (16:14-18)

The Pharisees, who are covetous, have overheard what Jesus has been saying to his disciples, and they ridicule Him. In response Jesus, apparently without taking a

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<sup>59</sup> "Mammon" is derived an Aramaic word, *mamona*, meaning money or wealth. Since the love of money is the root of all evil (I Tim 6:10), and it is easy to love it, Jesus may have been using "mammon of unrighteousness" to mean simply all money or wealth. If true, this would argue for my second possible interpretation of v 9.

breath, rips off a rapid-fire succession of concentrated truth: from the fact that the unrighteous riches that they so love are an abomination to God, to the Old and New Covenants, to the immutability of the Law, and finally their practice of discarding their wives<sup>60</sup>. Their minds must be staggered, for they make no response.

**NOTE:** *Luke, a Gentile historian, and not a Jewish theologian, devotes only one verse (v 18) to the thorny matter of divorce and remarriage.*

49. Lazarus and the Rich Man (a Glimpse into Heaven and Hell). (16:19-31)

Having silenced the Pharisees (temporarily), and while they are trying to sort out the theological barrage which Jesus has just fired at them, He speaks again to his disciples. He tells a story of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus<sup>61</sup>. The rich man is clothed in purple and fine linen, and eats sumptuously every day. Lazarus has led an entirely miserable life of abject poverty, begging for even the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. At the end of his life, lying in the dirt by the rich man's gate, he is so sick and helpless that street dogs lick at his open sores. Lazarus dies, redeemed, and angels carry him into "Abraham's bosom"<sup>62</sup>." The rich man also dies, and arrives in Hell. In fiery torment, the rich man is able to see Abraham (far away), comforting Lazarus. The rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus that he might dip his finger in water and cool the (formerly) rich man's tongue, saying that he is "tormented in this flame"<sup>63</sup>." Abraham reminds the (formerly) rich man that he has led a life of luxury while Lazarus suffered (and, by implication, the rich man had taken no pity on Lazarus). Besides, Abraham says, there is a permanent, un-crossable separation between the two locations. Realizing that his situation is hopeless, the rich man then begs Abraham to send Lazarus to the rich man's home to tell his five brothers of their need of redemption, so that they can avoid the torments that he is suffering in Hell. Abraham replies that the brothers have all the truth that they need in the Scriptures. The rich man responds, saying that if Lazarus, risen from the dead, would go to them they would repent. Again Abraham refuses, stating in his classic reply that if they don't

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<sup>60</sup> In v 17 the Greek word rendered "tittle" is *keraiá*. It is a small pen stroke used by Greek grammarians as accent (diacritical) marks. In Hebrew it is a tiny mark placed over a letter that is, otherwise, so similar to a different Hebrew letter as to need to be distinguished from it. In short, it means "the tiniest detail." See also in this regard Matt 5:18, where "jot" is the Greek letter *iota*, smallest letter in the Greek alphabet, i.e. a small thing or tiny detail.

<sup>61</sup> Tradition has even given the rich man a name, "Dives"; but this is merely the Latin word for "rich," the adjective which Saint Jerome used to describe the man in his Latin Vulgate Bible.

<sup>62</sup> "Abraham's Bosom" is generally believed to be a spiritual place, symbolic here of Heaven. In addition to being in that protected, entirely pleasant place, v 23 suggests that Lazarus is also being comforted in some way by Abraham.

<sup>63</sup> This request, and the statement about eating the crumbs from the rich man's table, suggest that in the past Lazarus has been a servant of the rich man, having been abandoned to the street when he could no longer work.

believe the Scriptures, they will persist in their unbelief, even if one is risen from the dead<sup>64</sup>.

**NOTES:**

**a.** *In the NT there are two Greek words rendered "Hell": they are "hades" and "gehenna." In both Greek and English the distinction and clear meanings can be confusing.*

**Hades.** *In simplest terms (the way I like to keep things), Hades is the resting, or waiting, place of the dead, awaiting final judgment. In the OT it is called Sheol. It is generally believed that during the three days and nights that the body of Jesus was in the tomb, He descended in spirit to Hades. There He presented Himself as Messiah to the waiting dead, and gave the gift of redemption to those who accepted Him (I can't imagine how any of the waiting dead would reject his offer, but it apparently was, and is today, a matter of choice). According to this belief Jesus then led the redeemed spirits from Hades to Heaven. Those, if any, who rejected Him were sent permanently to Gehenna, described below.*

**Gehenna.** *The name is derived from the Hebrew, "hinnom," a deep, narrow glen south of Jerusalem, where apostate Jews offered their children to the fiery pagan god, Moloch. In later times it was the place where unclean things were burned in its ever-burning fires. Thus the words of Jesus, "...where the fire is not quenched<sup>65</sup>." We may think of Gehenna as the place of eternal torment in burning fire.*

*Jesus used this word many times in speaking of Hell as the eternal destination of the unredeemed. We may think of Gehenna as synonymous with the Lake of Fire and Outer Darkness (alone). Hades of the NT, and Sheol of the OT, were temporary waiting places of the dead; Gehenna is the permanent address of the unredeemed. For more on the matter of Hell see "What and Where Is Hell?" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

**b.** *In vv 27-31 Jesus seems to be speaking prophetically about Himself, and his coming death, burial and resurrection. Although He will rise from the dead the Pharisees will still not believe, even though it is foretold in Scripture, for they will be blinded by their preconceived theological and political opinions and their pride.*

50. What Is an Unprofitable Servant? (17:1-10)

Chapter 17 opens with Jesus making a succession of abbreviated teaching points (covered more thoroughly elsewhere) about the basically sinful nature of man, child abuse, and forgiveness. Then the apostles, who seem not to be listening, ask Jesus to increase their faith. Their request seems to have nothing to do with what

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<sup>64</sup> Ephesians 4:8-10.

<sup>65</sup> Mark 9:43-48. The NIV and most other modern versions omit vv 44 and 46.

He has been saying; and his response seems to have little to do with their request. He responds, saying that if they had faith even as small as a mustard seed, they could command a sycamine tree to be uprooted and thrown into the sea, and it would obey<sup>66</sup>.

He then, in what seems to me to be a non sequitur (an abrupt change of subject, not following logically what has just been said), tells a story made up of rhetorical questions, about doing our duty, but then doing no more than is literally required of us. If we do our duty, but no more, we are unprofitable servants. His meaning (implied but not clearly stated) seems to be that if we would be profitable servants (the kind we should be), we must do what is required of us, and then go on and do more.

**NOTES:**

*a. In this short passage there are two words that appear nowhere else in the entire Bible: trow and sycamine. Trow (“I trow not”) is an archaic word meaning “think.” The meaning is easily understood from the context; however, among the translators of the AV there must have been someone who really loved very old words. “Sycamine” is explained below.*

*b. The sycamine tree is common in the Middle East and is deep-rooted. Commanding any tree--or a shallow-rooted weed for that matter--to uproot itself and leap into the sea, and have it obey, would be an amazing miracle. Yet Jesus, perhaps for emphasis, uses the sycamine tree in his illustration, thinking of its deep root system. Some commentators go beyond this to infer that the apostles were thinking of how difficult it is to overcome man’s deep-rooted disinclination to forgive, and that Jesus, knowing their thoughts, says that (even) the sycamine tree, with its deep root system, would uproot itself and leap into the sea if they had only a little faith. It can be interesting to speculate about such things; but to infer that they were thinking of how difficult it is to forgive, and that Jesus, knowing their thoughts, used this illustration to make an unstated point, is more inferring of possible meanings than we need here. So I take the words of Jesus at face value, look for no hidden meanings, and try to stay on solid ground.*

**51. The Ten Lepers: a Lesson in Faith and Gratitude. (17:11-19)**

On his final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples pass (necessarily) through Galilee and Samaria. Approaching a village He meets 10 lepers, keeping their required distance from both village and travelers. Seeing Him, they lift up their voices, asking Him to have mercy upon them, apparently meaning that they

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<sup>66</sup> Sycamine is another name for the black mulberry tree (*Morus nigra*), a close relative of our common red mulberry tree (*Morus rubra*). The Greek word is *sukaminos* (remember that when a Greek word is transliterated into English, the “u” becomes a “y” in sound, thus it is “sycaminos”); Martin Luther simply translated the word “mulberry.”

recognize Him, and they plead for Him to heal them. Getting events out of their normal sequence, Jesus tells them, still unhealed, to go show themselves to the priests at the Temple (to show them that they are healed and to be “cleared” for normal life). Moving out in faith, they are healed as they go. Nine of the former lepers keep walking toward Jerusalem, undoubtedly rejoicing as they go. One, however, a Samaritan, turns back, runs to Jesus and falls on his face, thanking Him for his healing. Jesus asks, rhetorically, where the other nine are, making the point that of the 10, only one, a hated Samaritan, returned to thank Him. He tells the man to go, that his faith has brought about his healing.

This story would make a great parable, rich with teaching points; but it is recorded as an actual event.

*NOTE: This passage illustrates what Jesus was teaching about faith in the passage just before (vv1-10). The faith of the 10 lepers made it possible to receive their healing<sup>67</sup>. And perhaps the one, a lowly Samaritan, who came back to thank Jesus for his healing, represents a profitable servant who did more than he was told to do. And I love the fact that this one was a lowly Samaritan, despised by Jews (but not by Jesus the Jew).*

#### 52. The Kingdom of God Is Within You. (17:20-24)

Some Pharisees, who have been hearing Jesus talk about the Kingdom of God, ask Him when this kingdom will come. He replies that the arrival of this kingdom will not be like the rise of an earthly kingdom, for it is “within you.” Then Jesus turns and tells his disciples that they will soon miss being with Him; but, He says, they must not be deceived by people who will falsely say that He has returned. When He does return, says Jesus, it won’t go un-noticed, nor will it be a local event. No one will fail to see it, He assures them, for his return will be as obvious and un-mistakable as sheet lightning that fills the entire visible sky.

Cultists and others, who want to humanize God and deify man, pounce upon the word “within” in verse 21 to “prove” that no one is lost and in need of redemption. Because the Kingdom of God is inside all of us, they reason, we are ourselves divine. Thus, they conclude, with this bit of God within us, along with our “basically good” human nature, everyone is OK (even divine), and no one needs to be redeemed.

All of the rest of Scripture, of course, denies this; but we don’t have to settle for that fact, pass it by and leave questions lingering in our minds. The Greek word here is *entos*, and its literal meaning is “within or in the midst of you.” Thus, the Kingdom of God, which Jesus will soon assure Pilate is “not of this world,” is an invisible kingdom, within the spirit of each believer, and in the midst of the human

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<sup>67</sup> See also in this regard Matt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8:43-48.

race (because we live in the midst of the human race). The Greek word has this dual meaning, and in this case both meanings apply. Most scholars, both conservative and liberal, apply both meanings of “within” to this statement of Jesus.

*NOTE: Remember that in the Elizabethan English of the AV (KJV), "you" is plural (you all) as opposed to "thee" which is singular. Except in the American South, modern English does not make this useful distinction. In the Reina-Valera 1960 Spanish language version of the Bible, the Greek "entos" is rendered, "entre vosotros," clearly meaning "among you all"<sup>68</sup>.*

### 53. The Earth Isn't Flat! (17:34-37)

Continuing to speak to his disciples about his Second Advent, Jesus reveals something that the Church seems to have failed to notice for 2,000 years. I may be wrong; but, in the thousands of hours during which I have listened to the teaching and preaching of others, I have never once heard it mentioned--not even as a casual comment in passing. And, with the single exception of a brief footnote by Dr. Henry Morris, founder of the Institute for Creation Research (which I only saw after teaching this for 20 years, and as far away as to university students in Chile), I can say that I have never seen it in anything that I have ever read.

In illustrating the fact that the exact day and time of his return will be without warning (at “an hour when ye think not”), Jesus speaks of what we have come to call “the rapture.” In this event, accompanying his return, it seems that the redeemed will be caught up to meet Him in the air, and the un-redeemed will be left behind<sup>69</sup>. He says that “in that night” two men shall be sleeping, one will be taken and the other left (not napping in the heat of the day, but asleep in the **night** time). Two women shall be grinding meal (a daylight activity) He says, and one will be taken but the other left. Finally, He says, two men shall be working in a field, and one will be taken while the other is left behind. Consider the fact that, if the Earth were flat, the Sun would rise over the mountains beyond Persia, and it would set over the horizon, far out on the Atlantic Ocean, beyond Gibraltar and the Atlas Mountains. It would be day at the same time, all over the World, and it would be night at the same time all over the World. Here, however, two men will be sleeping (night time) at the same time that two women are grinding meal and two men working in a field (day time). The only way this could be possible is if the Earth were a sphere--which, of course, it is. Thus Jesus, in this cryptic way, and perhaps with a wink and a smile at us concerning the smallness of man's knowledge and wisdom, reveals that the Earth is not flat, a matter that man will not

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<sup>68</sup> Like the AV (KJV), the NT of the Reina-Valera 1960 version of the Bible is based upon the Textus Receptus.

<sup>69</sup> See in this regard see also Matthew 24:36-44 and I Thes 4:13-18.

settle until 1,500 years later when Magellan's expedition will circumnavigate the Globe.

**NOTES:**

*a. Matthew's Gospel includes this event when Jesus illustrates the unknown time of his return, and it is dealt with in the Study Guide to Matthew 24:36-42. Only Luke, however, includes the two men in bed, and the words, "in that night," the keys to this revelation. Perhaps it is another example of Luke's desire to tell the entire story, meticulously and completely.*

*b. Verse 37 is something of a mystery to me. The gathering of "eagles" (vultures) wherever there is a dead carcass may be a reference to the tremendous number of dead following the great battle described in Revelation 19, although it would seem out of place here. On the other hand, He seems to be speaking in the context of sudden tribulation (let him on the house top flee immediately, not even waiting to take his possessions, etc). In Matthew's account of this conversation (it is not mentioned at all in Mark or John), Jesus is speaking about recognizing signs of the times. Today, when we see vultures circling we know that they have found a dead animal below them; perhaps v 37 is a reference to watching for the signs of the times leading up to his Second Advent*

54. The Widow Who Wouldn't Give Up. (18:1-8)

Still speaking to the Pharisees, Jesus uses a parable to teach that we should be persistent in prayer, and not give up. He tells a story of a widow and a judge. The judge is an unjust man, one who honors neither God nor man; and the widow has been treated unjustly. The judge, who cares nothing for the woman and her being wronged, refuses to help her; yet the widow persists in coming before him to ask for justice. She just won't give up and quit. Finally the judge helps her, not because he cares about the justice of the case, but so she will leave him alone.

Thus, says Jesus, we ought always to pray and not give up, for sometimes our timing is not the same as God's timing. He ends the story with a rhetorical question about his own Second Advent: when He returns, He asks, will He find the believers praying in faith?

**NOTE:** *Some commentators believe that the judge in this parable represents God, and the widow represents the Church. Those who reject this interpretation point out that the judge is unjust--neither caring about what is right, nor having any compassion for the widow--the very opposite of the nature of God.*

*Instead, it seems that here Jesus is merely using an earthly example to illustrate a heavenly principle: that we must not be weary in well doing, but that we should continue to pray, even when we cannot see the answer we seek.*

55. The Proud Pharisee and the Contrite Sinner. (18:9-14)

Jesus then presents a parable concerning those who trust their own righteousness

and view others, whom they consider to be inferior, with contempt. He tells of a proud Pharisee who stands in the Temple and thanks God that he is religious, and not a sinner like a publican who is standing nearby. This man recites his religious performance in fasting and tithing, pleased with himself, and certain that he is pleasing to God. The hated publican, on the other hand, is so convicted of his sinfulness that he will not even look up toward Heaven<sup>70</sup>. He beats himself on the chest in anguish, calls himself a sinner, and asks God to be merciful to him. Jesus then declares that the publican will leave the Temple and go home forgiven and rightly related to God, while the proud Pharisee will leave just as sinful as he was when he arrived. Then Jesus states a vital, fundamental principle: that everyone who exalts himself shall be abased, while all who humble themselves shall be exalted. The importance of this principle cannot be over-stated<sup>71</sup>.

56. The Rich Young Ruler. (18:18-27)

A ruler of the synagogue (Matthew's account tells us that he is young) approaches Jesus with flattery ("Good Master"), and asks Him what a man must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus begins his response with a correction, asking why the ruler calls Him "good," and reminding him that only God is good (actually, the ruler is speaking to God but he doesn't know it and, if told this, he would not believe it). Jesus says that this is an unnecessary question, for the man knows that he must keep the Ten Commandments. The ruler replies that he has kept the commandments since he was a child. And then Jesus delivers a stunning new requirement: He tells the man that the only thing remaining to be done in order to have salvation is to sell all he has, give it to the poor, and then come and follow Him. Hearing this requirement the man goes away, very sad, for he has great wealth<sup>72</sup>.

As the man turns and walks away, Jesus seizes the opportunity to make a teaching point for his disciples. He tells them that having riches is an obstacle to being redeemed. Using one of the most familiar metaphors in the English language, he says that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven<sup>73</sup>. His disciples are aghast! They ask, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replies, saying that things which are impossible with man

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<sup>70</sup> As noted before, publicans were tax collectors, appointed by Rome. They were despised by the Jewish people because, with few or no exceptions, they routinely over-charged the people, kept the excess collected, and became rich. Matthew the apostle was a publican before he met Jesus and was transformed.

<sup>71</sup> This vital principle is so important that it is also expressed in Matt 23:12; Lk 14:11; Jas 4:6-8; and I Pet 5:5-6.

<sup>72</sup> Unlike most such exchanges that Jesus had with religious leaders, this young man seems to have been sincere; if he weren't, he would not have been sad.

<sup>73</sup> For an interesting thought about the camel passing through the eye of a needle, see the explanatory *NOTE* following Highlight 20 in the study guide to Mark's gospel.

are possible with God. His answer seems cryptic and incomplete; yet he has reduced all things to the common denominator: in the final analysis we can only surrender to God, do our best, and trust Him with the outcome.

*NOTE: It is probably always a mistake to try to reduce our relationship with God to a legalistic formula. Here it would seem that Jesus is saying that if we keep the commandments (which we cannot do), plus sell all we have and give to the poor, the result will be our admission into Heaven. And yet, as we are about to see, He was satisfied with Zacchaeus, who promised to sell only half of his things and give the money to the poor, plus making restitution to any he has cheated.*

57. The Redemption of Zacchaeus. (19:1-10)

On his way to Jerusalem for the final time Jesus and his disciples pass through Jericho, the home town of a high-ranking publican named Zacchaeus; he is very rich and very small of stature. Hearing that Jesus is coming his way, and unable to see above the crowd, Zacchaeus runs ahead and climbs up in a roadside sycamore tree<sup>74</sup>. Reaching that point on the road, Jesus looks up into the tree and, speaking to him by name (a miracle), and tells him to come down, for He will be staying at his house. Zacchaeus climbs down hastily, and with joy receives Jesus into his home<sup>75</sup>. The crowd murmurs with disapproval of his going to be a guest at the home of a sinner.

Zacchaeus, apparently convicted of his sinful state by the mere presence of Jesus, declares that he will give half of his wealth to the poor and make restitution to those he has cheated, repaying them four-fold<sup>76</sup>. Jesus then declares that salvation has come to Zacchaeus and, apparently for the benefit of the holier-than-thou crowd, also declares that he has come “to seek and to save that which was lost.”

*NOTE: Jesus hung around with fisherman; He knew that you have to catch a fish before you can clean it.*

58. The Parable of the Pounds. (19:11-27)

Jesus continues, taking the occasion to present a parable about spiritual hunger. In the parable a nobleman travels into a far country to be crowned as king. Before he leaves he entrusts the servants with one pound each<sup>77</sup>. He leaves them with the responsibility of investing the money for him. His servants rebel, send a message after him that they do not want him as their king. He does become king, and when

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<sup>74</sup> The tree was actually a type of fig, *Ficus sycamorus*, the Egyptian fig, often planted along roadsides. It was a relatively large tree, whose wood was used for building, especially the making of coffins. Some Egyptian coffins made of this wood have been found, intact, after 3,000 years.

<sup>75</sup> Zacchaeus almost certainly received at least 12 of the disciples as guests also.

<sup>76</sup> See in this regard Exodus 22:1.

<sup>77</sup> The traditional value of a British pound for many years has been about \$5.00; currently the pound is worth much less.

he returns he requires an accounting of what the servants have done with the money. One says that he has invested his one pound and made 10 pounds. Another has invested one pound and made five. The third returns the master's pound saying that he had protected it, but had failed to invest it because he feared losing it. The master is angry with the third servant and orders that his one pound be given to the servant with the 10 pounds. When the servants complain that it seems unfair, the master, and new king, states a fundamental spiritual principle: that he who has much shall receive more; and he that has little will lose what little he has. Then the new king orders that those who have despised him, and rejected him as king, be brought forth and executed before him.

***NOTE:** This is the same lesson as the parable of the talents in Matt. 25, except that in Matt. 25 Jesus is in Jerusalem, and here He is at the home of Zacchaeus in Jericho, on his way to Jerusalem. Also, in this parable the consequences are much more serious, for the rebellious are put to death. It seems to speak of the spiritual Kingdom of God, eventual redemption of the righteous, and condemnation of the wicked. There is much symbolism here, and a great spiritual principle: that the spiritually hungry will always want more and will therefore receive more, ever growing in the Spirit. Those, however, who have little spiritually and are satisfied with little, are in danger of growing cold and indifferent and, ultimately, of losing the little that they have. For those troubled by this, in terms of "eternal security," notice that this principle is expressed by Jesus in a single verse; in Lk 8:18. There he says, "...whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he **seemeth to have** (emphasis mine)."*

*To illustrate this principle in our lives I like to use the analogy of an automobile, in a long, gradual uphill climb; the car is in perfect condition and has plenty of power; but it has no brakes. As long as we continue to climb, going higher and higher, everything is fine. However, if we reach a certain height, decide that we are satisfied there and stop climbing, we can't stay at that level; we begin to roll, inexorably, back down the hill. The lesson is that if we keep wanting more, we will get more and more, will want still more, and will grow ever stronger in our faith; if, on the other hand, we are satisfied with religion, or a little of life in the Spirit and cease to grow, ungodly influences and temptations that surround us will continue unabated, we will grow cold, lose our first love, and slip backward.*

59. A Dire Prophecy Concerning Jerusalem. (19:41-44)

Leaving Jericho, Jesus and his disciples travel up to Jerusalem. As He comes near to the city He looks into the future and weeps over what will happen to Jerusalem. He prophesies that the day will come when an enemy shall surround and besiege the city and, ultimately, destroy it. This prophecy will be fulfilled about 40 years later when Titus and his Roman legions will lay siege to Jerusalem

and destroy it, with its Temple, and the Jews will be driven out of the land.

60. The Baptism of John: of God, or of Man? (20:1-8)

Having entered Jerusalem, Jesus is teaching in the Temple when He is approached by the chief priests and scribes. They demand to know by what authority He is teaching, and Jesus replies that if they will answer his question He will tell them. Then He asks them if the baptism of John the Baptist was a thing of God or a thing of man. Knowing that if they say it was of God they will validate the ministry of John and Jesus will ask why they did not believe him; and, if they say it was of man (which they believe to be the case), they fear the people, for the people recognize John as a prophet. They are on the horns of a dilemma; He has them at checkmate. They say that they cannot answer the question. Then, Jesus says to them, He will not tell them of his authority.

61. The Vineyard and the Wicked Husbandmen: a Cosmic Parable. (20:9-18)

After silencing the chief priests and scribes, Jesus presents another parable, one which seems to tell the story of mankind, from the Garden of Eden to the final judgment. A man plants a vineyard, assigns the care of it to husbandmen, who had done nothing to create it, and goes to a far country for a long time. When time is come for the harvest, the owner sends a servant to the vineyard to collect the fruit--i.e. what is due. The wicked husbandmen beat the servant and send him back to the master with nothing. The master, giving the husbandmen another chance to do the right thing, sends another servant; again the husbandmen beat him, treat him shamefully and send him away with nothing. A third servant is sent with the same result. The master then sends his beloved son, reasoning that surely the wicked men will respect him and do the right thing. Instead, the wicked husbandmen decide to kill the son, thinking that then they will become the owners of the vineyard. They do just that, and throw his body out of the vineyard. What, Jesus asks rhetorically, will the master do about this? He answers his own question, saying that the master will come himself, destroy the wicked husbandmen and give the opportunity to others. Then He refers the listeners to Psalm 118:22, which speaks of the stone, rejected by the builders, which becomes the cornerstone, and the key to final judgment.

62. Coming Persecution and a Classic Word of Comfort. (21:5-28)

In these verses Jesus responds to the question of his disciples in verse 7 about the time of his return to the Earth. Jesus speaks of coming persecution, betrayal by friends and family members, wars, famines and the need for faith, patience and perseverance. He answers their question about when these things will come to pass in verse 20: when they see (or hear of) the Roman army surrounding Jerusalem, they will know that terrible persecution has begun and that they should then flee into the wilderness and the hills of Judaea. Although this account is

included in Matthew 24 and Mark 13, only here in verse 20 is this key question clearly answered.

Jesus goes on, speaking to the disciples of strange signs in the Sun, Moon and stars, distress of nations, great waves in the sea, men's hearts failing them for fear, and the powers of the heavens being shaken. But then follows a classic word of comfort; He tells them that when these things are happening He will return in great glory in the sky, and that they should "look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh."

*NOTE: Other events during Jesus' final week in Jerusalem leading up to the Passover meal and his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, have already been dealt with in the study guides to Matthew and Mark, or will be dealt with in the study guide to John. One detail in Luke's account, however, demands our attention: in 22: 15 Jesus says "with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you...." Why the unusual repetition here? The answer is that among the Jewish people repetition was used for emphasis. The most common use of this by Jesus was "verily verily" when He wanted to make a point strongly. Here He is saying in effect, "I have really looked forward to this--it means a lot to me." We move now to the scene in the Garden.*

63. Agony in the Garden. (22:39-46)

Jesus and eleven of the apostles (Judas has left to make a deal to betray Him) go out of Jerusalem, across the Brook Cedron, up to the Mount of Olives, and into the Garden of Gethsemane. This is a place where Jesus has often gone to pray, and Judas knows this<sup>78</sup>. Instructing his disciples to pray, Jesus goes a little beyond them to pray alone. He asks that, if it be the Father's will, to let Him be spared "this cup"<sup>79</sup>. Nevertheless, He submits, asking only that the Father's will be done. An angel comes to Him to strengthen Him. He prays in emotional agony--so much so that He sweats blood<sup>80</sup>. Returning to his disciples, Jesus finds them sleeping "for sorrow."

**NOTES:**

*a. Mark's account tells us more about this final time of prayer. He tells us that Jesus left eight of the apostles near the entrance of the garden with instructions to pray. He then took Peter, James and John with Him, farther into the garden,*

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<sup>78</sup> The chief priests wanted to arrest Jesus in a private place, for they feared a riot if they took Him in the presence of the people.

<sup>79</sup> In the traditional Passover meal there are four symbolic cups of red wine drunk at appropriate times. The fourth and final cup is called the "Cup of Redemption"; this seems to be the cup of which Jesus speaks, both symbolically and literally.

<sup>80</sup> Only Luke tells us of this agony, of his sweating blood, of the ministering angel, and the apostles' sleeping "for sorrow."

where He told them that He was terribly distressed and instructed them to support Him in prayer. He then went still farther into the garden, where He prayed alone his famous prayer, asking that, if it be the will of the Father, to let this cup pass from him. After a while He came back to his three closest friends and found them asleep. He rebuked them for it, again asked them to pray, and returned to his own place of prayer, where He submitted to the Father's will. Returning to his apostles and finding them sleeping again, "for sorrow," He told them to get up, for his betrayer had arrived. The words "for sorrow" are not explained, but probably mean that Peter, James and John had finally realized what was soon going to happen, were emotionally exhausted from grieving and profoundly depressed<sup>81</sup>. This is my best effort at an explanation; I have found no other commentator who attempts to explain it.

**b.** The sweating of Jesus could not have been natural sweating, for it was Springtime, in the cool of the evening. He was under stress which we cannot imagine. Our word "agony" is derived from the Greek word "agonia," which is in turn derived from "agon," meaning an arena, a gathering place where athletic contests were held, striving to the utmost and, later, where gladiatorial battles were fought to the death. This rare phenomenon, called "hematidrosis" in medical terms, can occur when extreme stress causes small amounts of blood to be forced through capillary walls and escape to the surface of the skin via the sweat glands.

**c.** In the garden the agonizing of Jesus was two-fold. In his humanity, He dreaded the physical torture of flogging and the agony of the cross. But he also, in his divinity, dreaded the sin-bearing moment when He would become sin on the cross and his Heavenly Father would look away from Him. It was this, I believe, to which he referred when He asked that He be spared "this cup."

When Jesus faced Satan's temptations in the wilderness, He faced them as the Son of God. In the Garden, He faced the coming horrors of crucifixion as both Son of God and Son of Man, making his sacrificial death full and complete<sup>82</sup>.

#### 64. The Judas Kiss and the Lord's Last Miracle of Healing. (22:47-53)

As Jesus wakes his sleeping apostles Judas arrives, followed by Roman soldiers and a mob of miscreants. He has already told the leaders of the group that he will identify Jesus by kissing Him, and he does so. Jesus asks, rhetorically, if Judas is betraying Him with a kiss (an ironic combination of betrayal and affection, to say the least). The other apostles prepare to fight and Peter, ever the impulsive man of action, swings his sword and cuts the right ear off one who is apparently the leader,

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<sup>81</sup> One aspect of profound depression is the desire to sleep.

<sup>82</sup> Mark 14:41

representing the high priest<sup>83</sup>. Jesus tells his friends to put away their swords, picks up the ear and, in his last recorded miracle of healing, restores the man's ear<sup>84</sup>. He then submits to the mob, acknowledging that the time has come for the powers of darkness to have their day.

65. Peter's Vehement Denial of Jesus. (22:54-62)

Jesus is taken away to the palace of Annas, a former high priest, with Peter following at a safe distance<sup>85</sup>. Annas listens to the accusations against Jesus and sends Him, bound, to Caiphas, the reigning high priest. Another disciple, personally known to Caiphus, also follows<sup>86</sup>. In the palace of Caiphus the leaders of the mob gather around a fire and Peter joins them. A girl (according to John she is the door-keeper), who had apparently seen Peter in the garden, announces that he was with Jesus at his arrest; Peter denies it. Soon one of the men makes the same accusation and, with increasing vehemence, again Peter denies it; but the matter isn't settled. About an hour later another man declares that Peter is a friend of Jesus because he recognizes Peter's Galilean accent<sup>87</sup>. For the third time Peter denies that he is a friend of Jesus and, as he does, a cock crows. In this unimaginably emotional moment Jesus, who has been there all along, hearing Peter's denials, turns and looks at Peter. Peter remembers the prophecy, turns, goes outside, and weeps "bitterly."

**NOTE:** Mark tells us that, with the third denial, Peter exploded and began "to curse and to swear." He was not only swearing, as a solemn oath that he was not a friend of Jesus, but he expressed it with vulgar cursing. Today it would go something like, "I swear on the Holy Temple that I never heard of this bleep bleep guy!" Only Luke tells us that Peter's vehement and vulgar denials were made with Jesus standing there, seeing and hearing it all, and that with the third denial Jesus turned and looked into Peter's eyes. What a moment! We can only imagine what Peter saw in those eyes, but it had to be infinite, aching compassion--for what Jesus knew that Peter was feeling, and would feel. It is difficult to imagine the magnitude of Peter's self-loathing, feelings of failure, and heartbreak when Jesus

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<sup>83</sup> The fact that it was the right ear that Peter cut off suggests that Peter was left-handed.

<sup>84</sup> We shall see more about this in John's account, including the man's name and relationship to the high priest. If the wicked man appreciated the healing, or was touched in any way by it, there is no indication of it in the record.

<sup>85</sup> Annas was a former high priest, but was still highly respected and people continued to relate to him as high priest. The actual high priest was his nephew, Caiphus, whom Annas had used his influence to place him in that position. As a result there were, in effect, two high priests at that time (and later)

<sup>86</sup> See John 18:15. Some commentators believe that this second disciple, personally acquainted with the high priest, was Joseph of Arimathea, in whose tomb Jesus was buried. Others believe that he was John the Beloved, for John's account is the only one which names Malchus, and John was apparently a man of means (Mark 1:20; Jn 19:26-27).

<sup>87</sup> John's account tells us that this third accuser is Malchus, relative of the high priest, whose ear Peter had cut off.

looked at him. *The Greek helps us here, for both Matthew and Luke tell us that he went out and wept “bitterly.” The underlying Greek word here is “pikros” meaning extremely bitter; from it we derive the name for picric acid, an intensely bitter acid. Surely, only the love and grace of God, what Peter saw in the eyes of Jesus, and the fact that Jesus had warned him that he would do this, kept Peter from going out and killing himself, as Judas would soon do.*

66. Jesus before Pilate and Herod. (23:1-25)

Bound, Jesus is taken to Pilate, the Roman governor, with the chief priests and a growing mob following. Pilate finds no fault in him, but in their screaming accusations he hears that Jesus is a Galilean. Herod, ruler (tetrarch) of Galilee is in Jerusalem (apparently for the feast of Passover) so Pilate refers the case to him<sup>88</sup>. Jesus is taken to Herod who is pleased and excited to see Jesus, for he has heard of his miracles and has hoped to see Him perform one. Jesus, however, refuses to speak and Herod has Him arrayed in a fine robe, mocked, and sends Him back to Pilate<sup>89</sup>. Pilate calls the chief priests and elders before him and tells them that both he, and Herod, find no guilt in Jesus. Three times he declares that Jesus is innocent, and offers to release Him<sup>90</sup>. The accusers, unmoved, demand that a notorious criminal, Barabbas, be released and that Jesus be crucified. Fearing the mob, Pilate reluctantly consents to the crucifixion.

**NOTES:**

*a. Mark's account tells us that it was a custom to release one prisoner without punishment at Passover, apparently as a symbolic act of good will at the most joyful time of the Jewish year. With this in mind Pilate suggests that Jesus be released. Also awaiting punishment is a notorious criminal, Barabbas, an insurrectionist and murderer. The high priests and their followers, however, like wicked cheerleaders, stir up the mob to demand that Barabbas be released; the mob's reaction was **not** spontaneous.*

*b. Only Matthew records what has been a chilling thing to me ever since I first read it with understanding. In reaction to Pilate's three-time declaration that Jesus was innocent, the crowd (led by the religious leaders), still demanding his crucifixion, shouted "Let [the guilt for] his blood be on us, and on our children!" For a thought concerning this, see the Study Guide to Matthew, Highlight 77,*

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<sup>88</sup> This is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. It was he who had John the Baptist beheaded; he ruled from 4 BC-39 AD. For help in sorting out the Herods see “The Powerful but Highly Dysfunctional Herodian Family” in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

<sup>89</sup> Luke, ever the historian striving to tell the complete story, records that prior to this Pilate and Herod had been alienated, but on this occasion were reconciled (23:12).

<sup>90</sup> In the Bible, numbers are always significant. Three is a particularly significant number, beginning with the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

*explanatory NOTE.*

67. The Crucifixion. (23:26-34)

Jesus is led, bound, to a hill called Calvary, outside the walls of Jerusalem, to be crucified. A man named Simon from Cyrene, a city in North Africa, is forced to carry the cross (only the last part part of the way, probably after the Roman guards feared that Jesus, if He continued to carry it, would die before being crucified)<sup>91</sup>. On Calvary Jesus is crucified, with two convicted criminals; as He is being nailed to the cross he prays for the soldiers who are doing it, asking the Father to forgive them, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 53:12). He is stripped of his clothes, and the soldiers cast lots for them.

*NOTE: Until this day Jesus has forgiven sins Himself. Now, however, it seems that He is paying the sin debt for mankind in his full humanity, not his divinity. He asks the Father to forgive his cruel executioners.*

68. A Crucified Thief is Redeemed. (23:35-44)

In agony on the cross, Jesus is mocked by the crowd and the rulers of the Temple saying, "He saved others, let him save himself." and offered vinegar to drink<sup>92</sup>. On either side of Jesus are two criminals, one of whom "rails on Him" in derision, saying that if Jesus is the Christ, why doesn't He get himself and the two criminals off their crosses. The other criminal, however, rebukes the first one saying that the two of them are guilty, but Jesus is innocent. Then he calls Jesus "Lord" and asks Him to remember him with mercy when He comes to receive his kingdom. Jesus responds to the man with comforting grace, declaring to him that "today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." It is the sixth hour (noon) and supernatural darkness descends upon the Earth until the ninth hour (3:00 PM).

**NOTES:**

*a. In v 36 the drink translated "vinegar" (Greek, "oxos") was actually sour wine, the common drink of the laborer and common soldier; it was often mixed with water and was much more palatable than the apple cider vinegar we know today, which no one would drink. The "vinegar" offered to Jesus was the sour wine that the soldiers drank with every meal. What is often interpreted as an act of cruelty was actually, it seems to me, one of kindness.*

*b. Verse 43 presents a problem: how do we reconcile the declaration that "this day" the repentant thief would be with Him in Paradise, when Jesus, in spirit, will descend into Sheol (or Hades) to declare Himself and release the waiting spirits of those who receive Him as Messiah? This seems to contradict the statement of the*

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<sup>91</sup> See also in this regard Matthew 27:32; Mk 15:21 and Jn 19:17. Only Mark tells us that Simon was "the father of Alexander and Rufus," which is interesting because Mark was the man of few words, and it was Luke who usually gave us such details.

<sup>92</sup> Psalm 22:7-8, 69:20-21.

*risen Christ to Mary Magdalene, early on Resurrection Day, that she must not cling to Him "for I am not yet ascended to my Father" (Jn 20:17). And what and where is "Paradise"<sup>93</sup>?*

*What do we make of this? It may mean that immediately after the death of Jesus on the cross, followed soon by the death of the repentant thief with his legs broken, Jesus, in spirit, would take the redeemed spirit of the thief with him to Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades (Greek), the waiting place of the dead before Christ's redeeming death, declare Himself as Messiah and take the spirits of those who accepted him, along with the repentant thief, to Paradise (called by Jesus in one of his parables, "Abraham's bosom") while those who rejected Him would remain in Sheol (Hades) to await final judgment. This place (Abraham's bosom" or "Paradise") seems to be the waiting, or resting, place of the faithful Old Testament dead, perhaps a pleasant compartment of Sheol, separated by an un-crossable "great gap" from the decidedly unpleasant part, inhabited by the unfaithful dead).*

*Yet, when Jesus revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene that early Resurrection Morning and told her not to touch Him, He appeared in order to reassure and comfort her, but had not yet completed the redeeming process by leading the redeemed from Paradise to Heaven, the ultimate destination of the redeemed.*

*Later, as we have just seen in Lk 24, and will see more expansively in John 21, the resurrected Christ will **invite** the disciples to touch Him. According to this hypothetical explanation, by the time He invites the disciples to touch Him he will have fully completed his redemptive actions by leading the redeemed multitudes (from Adam to the repentant thief) from Abraham's bosom (Paradise) to the Father's presence in Heaven. For the next 40 days, with his redemptive work completed, He will appear to them, enjoy food with them, and give them final instructions, before returning to Heaven.*

*Am I stating facts here? Only in those places actually recorded in the gospels and Acts 1. The rest is only a possible explanation of an apparent conflict in the gospel accounts; but it is the best that I can offer.*

*c. As we have seen, in the accounts of Matthew and Mark, after three hours of supernatural darkness Jesus cries with a loud voice, "It is finished," and gives up his human spirit. He is taken from the cross and hastily buried in a nearby, unused, expensive tomb, belonging to a wealthy and influential disciple. Early on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week the disciples find the tomb open and empty, and an angel tells them that Jesus is risen from the dead and will meet them in Galilee.*

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<sup>93</sup> The word "paradise" occurs three times in the Bible: here in Lk 23:43; in II Cor 12:4 where Paul mentions being caught up into the heavenly places; and in Rev 2:7 where the angel refers to "the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

69. The Walk to Emmaus. (24:13-32)

Later, on that unique, pivotal, 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week, two of the disciples are walking toward Emmaus, a village about 7 ½ miles (“three score furlongs”), a two-hour walk from Jerusalem<sup>94</sup>. One of them is identified by Luke as being named Cleopas<sup>95</sup>. As they talk about the events of the past 3 or 4 days Jesus appears and walks along with them; but they do not recognize Him<sup>96</sup>. Jesus asks them what it is that they are talking about, and why they are so sad. They are amazed that He does not know what has been happening in Jerusalem the past few days, and they tell Him the story (actually, Jesus is the only person in the World who **does** know what took place). Jesus then explains it all to them, citing the Old Testament Scriptures, but they still don’t recognize him. Arriving at Emmaus the two disciples urge Jesus to stay there with them, pointing out that it will soon be dark when no one can travel safely. So Jesus stops with them at Emmaus and as they begin to eat supper He breaks the bread and blesses it, and immediately they recognize Him. And, as soon as they recognize Him, He vanishes before their eyes!

***NOTE:** The "two of them" who encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus may have been Mary (Greek "Maria"), sister of Mary (Greek "Mariam," from Hebrew "mir-yam"), the mother of Jesus, and her husband Cleopas. On the surface it seems odd that there should be two sisters with the same name, "Mary" (as is recorded in Jn 19:25); but this only occurs because in English both names are rendered "Mary." Thus **this** Mary (Greek "Maria") was Jesus' aunt, and Cleopas was his uncle by marriage. This Cleopas is the same man as Cleophas in Jn 19:25.*

70. Back to Jerusalem. (24:33-48)

Excited now, they get back on the road and, abandoning caution concerning the coming darkness and its danger, head back to Jerusalem. Arriving in Jerusalem they find the disciples gathered (probably in the home of Mary, mother of John Mark), discussing the amazing events of the day. As the two are excitedly sharing news about their having been with Jesus, He appears--as suddenly as He had disappeared in Emmaus (it must have been unnerving to live with that man)! Understandably, the Lord’s first words to them are “Peace be unto you”; this is comparable to the first words spoken by angels when they appear, “Fear not.” The disciples think He is a ghost, and He invites them to touch him, and to observe the

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<sup>94</sup> Emmaus no longer exists and its location is unknown; there are several proposed sites, but only God knows the correct one.

<sup>95</sup> This Cleopas, is the same man as Cleophas in Jn 19:25. He was the brother-in-law of Mary, mother of Jesus.

<sup>96</sup> Mark’s account tells us that He appeared there “in another form,” thus they didn't recognize Him. (Mk 16:12).

wounds in his hands and feet, to prove that it really is He<sup>97</sup>. They still aren't convinced--perhaps too happy and excited to take it in--and He asks them for some food. He eats a broiled fish and some honey, and then explains how He has fulfilled all the OT Scriptures, opening their understanding<sup>98</sup>.

71. Don't Leave Town Without the Power. (24:49-53)

Jesus instructs the assembled disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the "promise of the father," the infilling with the Holy Spirit, imparting supernatural power. He then leads them out to Bethany, blesses them and, as they watch, He is taken up into Heaven<sup>99</sup>. With joy they return to Jerusalem where they will wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. As we shall see in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> chapters of Acts, they will wait, praying, for about 50 days-- until Pentecost.

**NOTES:**

*a. At least 81 of these disciples have already ministered in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit: the 11 surviving apostles, and the "other 70" un-named disciples whom Jesus had sent out, two-by-two, to preach, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils (Matt 10:1f; Mk 6:7f; Lk 9:1f, 10:1f). Why, then, would He tell all of the disciples--no exceptions--to tarry in Jerusalem until they are endued with power from on high<sup>100</sup>? It appears that, when Jesus sent those 81 disciples out to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit, He sent them out with a temporary anointing. Thus they were able to preach with power and perform attendant miracles as Jesus had been doing, but only for those particular assignments. He is telling them here, in effect, "I know that you have been with me for these three years; and you even have had some experience of preaching and performing miracles; but you are still not ready. Wait in Jerusalem until you receive the baptism of power that will equip you permanently for ministry.*

*b. There seems to be a principle revealed here, one which will not unfold completely until well into the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Many Christians believe that the power to perform miracles was given only to the original 12 apostles and, since the death of the last one (John the Beloved), the Church has been established and such things ceased, since there was no longer any need for miracles in the Church. But there are problems with this idea from the outset: for instance, what about these "other 70" un-named disciples? And then there is the*

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<sup>97</sup> "Doubting" Thomas wasn't the only one who needed some proof of the bodily resurrection; I think that he has been so-called unfairly.

<sup>98</sup> It seems that they will not fully understand until the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

<sup>99</sup> Bethany was the village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives where Jesus' close friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. It is now called Lazariyeh ("the place of Lazarus"); the truth of his being raised still resonates there.

<sup>100</sup> There were by this time approximately 120 of them (Acts 1:15).

*fact that the 120 disciples, including the 11 apostles (Judas is dead), will receive the Holy Spirit baptism on the day of Pentecost; at least 81 of them had already experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, in Acts we shall see other, new, believers receiving this miraculous baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire (e.g. Acts 8:1-17; 10:34-47; 19:1-7). In addition to this, there are others in the New Testament identified as “apostles” (e.g. Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:14). Also, in Acts 2:38 we will see Peter announcing that the gift of the Holy Ghost has become a gift for future believers, “...as many as the Lord our God shall call.” It seems that the baptism with (in) the Holy Ghost and fire, for which the Lord is here instructing the disciples to wait, will be available to many more (apparently all) Christians in the years to come.*