



CHRISTOCENTRIC COMMENTARY SERIES

A Commentary on the Four

# GOSPELS



**JESUS  
CONFRONTS  
RELIGION**

**James A. Fowler**



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**Jesus Confronts Religion**

James A. Fowler



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GOSPELS**



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*~ Christocentric Commentary Series ~*

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## CHRISTOCENTRIC COMMENTARY SERIES

Cognizant that there are a plethora of New Testament Commentary series available on the market, the question might legitimately be asked, “Why another series of New Testament commentaries?” Although many capable commentators with varying theological perspectives have exegeted the text of the New Testament over the years, seldom do they bring with them into their studies a Christocentric understanding that the Christian gospel is solely comprised and singularly centered in the Person of the risen and living Lord Jesus Christ. The *Christocentric Commentary Series* will exegete and comment on the text of the New Testament from the perspective that the totality of what Jesus came to bring to the world of mankind is Himself – nothing more, nothing less. Having historically died on the cross and risen from the dead, He is not confined to the parameters of the “Historical Jesus,” but as the Spirit of Christ He continues to live as He spiritually indwells those who are receptive to Him by faith. This recognition of the contemporary experiential dynamic of Christ’s life in the Christian will form the distinctive of the *Christocentric Commentary Series*, bearing out Paul’s Christ-centered declaration, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20).

All legitimate exegesis of the scriptures must pay close attention to the context in which the texts were originally written. The historical context of a text's *sitz im leben*, the "setting in life" of the author and recipients, is particularly important, for otherwise the interpretation will simply read into the text the presuppositions of the commentator and become *eisegesis* instead of *exegesis*. The *CCS* will carefully consider the historical context as well as the textual context of the scriptures.

Whereas the *CCS* is not intended to be a devotional commentary series or a detailed technical commentary citing all contemporary scholarship, our intent is to steer a middle course that maintains non-technical explanation that is academically viable. Although reference will be made to words from the Hebrew and Greek languages, those words will be converted to Roman lettering, allowing those who do not know the original languages to pronounce them. Citations, quotations, and end-notes will be kept to a minimum.

A diversity of interpretive formats will be utilized in the *CCS*. Some volumes will employ a verse-by-verse exegetical format (cf. *Hebrews* and *Galatians*), whereas others will provide comment on contextual passages (cf. *The Four Gospels* and *Revelation*). Regardless of the interpretive format, the *CCS* will render a "literal interpretation" of the scripture text, that is, in accord with the intended literary genre of the author.

As most biblical commentaries are utilized by pastors and teachers, or studious Christians seeking to understand the scriptures in depth in order to share with others, we join the Apostle Paul in the desire to "entrust these to faithful men (and women) who will be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2). In so doing, may you "do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31).

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## Foreword

There is a great need today for Christians to develop a basic understanding of the general theological thrust of Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus' statements and actions have too often been taken out of historical or textual context and used for proof-texting existing presuppositions of doctrine or morality. This generalized commentary on the four gospel-records of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in harmony is an attempt to see the "big-picture" of the radically new "good news" that Jesus introduced as inherent within Himself, and the inevitable contrast and conflict encountered as He revealed Himself in the context of the prevailing religion and culture of Palestine in the first-century. Written in a non-technical, readable style, this commentary is designed to give the reader a clearer understanding and appreciation of the life and ministry, the Person and work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The harmonization utilized in this work is an adaptation of that employed in *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* by A. T. Robertson, which was a revision of the previous harmonization made by John A. Broadus. The general sequence of these foregoing harmonizations has been retained with only slight variations, but the subdivisions have been expanded to give more precision to the particular action or issue being reported.

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## Chapter One

# Jesus Confronts Religion

The purpose of Jesus' incarnational advent and His ministry here on earth as a man was not to establish a new religion, nor to inculcate a new teaching, nor to lay down a new morality system. Jesus came to bring Himself, the presence and dynamic of His own divine being, expressed in the humanity of one perfect man, so that He might be expressed as divine, eternal life in the humanity of all men. The gospel that Jesus brought was entirely Christocentric. There is no message of "good news" apart from the ontological reality of the very Being of God in Jesus Christ who is the essence of Christianity. Christianity is Christ!

In the midst of demonstrating and declaring the radical newness of all that He came to reveal in Himself, there was an inevitable conflict with the religion that prevailed in the Palestinian region in which He lived and taught. His revelation of God's grace operative in man in order to restore all men to God's intent impinged upon the practices of Jewish religion. It is not that He came primarily to confront religion, for that was not His express purpose, but the reality of who He was, and therefore what He did and said, confounded, conflicted with, and provided a confrontation with the prevalent religion of Judaism, which is arguably representative of all religious thought and practice.

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### The Gospel in a New Covenant

The written record of Jesus' historical revelation of God in man is recorded within the literature of the New Testament within the book called "The Bible." It is often overlooked that the Old and New Testaments are actually the literature of the old and new covenants of God with mankind. The English words "testament" and "covenant" are both translations of the Greek word *diatheke*, which means "to put or place through." Another Greek word for covenant, *suntheke*, meaning "to put or place together with," was usually used in reference to business or marital contracts and agreements between individuals or parties of somewhat equal status. *Diatheke* was more suited to an agreement or arrangement between a superior person with authority over those with whom he was contracting, and is therefore employed in explaining the arrangement between God and mankind.

The Old Testament, comprising the literature of the old covenant arrangement between God and man, records the inherent inadequacy of that arrangement and includes prophecies of a coming new covenant arrangement between God and man. Jeremiah speaks for God, saying,

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

The prophet Ezekiel likewise verbalizes God's intent:

"I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God and they will be My people." (Ezekiel 37:26-28).

The new covenant arrangement between God and man was brought into reality by God's grace through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the "mediator of a better covenant" (Heb. 8:6), a "new covenant" (Heb. 9:15; 12:24), wherein the divine adequacy is provided for all function within the new arrangement as "the Spirit gives life" (II Cor. 3:6). The burdensome performance required by the old covenant was replaced by the functional freedom of the new covenant (Gal. 5:1). The old covenant was from the beginning an arrangement of planned obsolescence (Heb. 8:13), which God had forever intended to be superseded and fulfilled by the new covenant reality of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The New Testament is, therefore, the literature pertaining to the new covenant reality of Jesus Christ. A Greek New Testament is entitled, *Ho Kainos Diatheke*, "the new covenant." Therein we find recorded the glorious arrangement God has made to forgive and restore mankind by His grace through Jesus Christ.

This is obviously a message of "good news" for mankind. The Greek word for such "good news" is *euangellion*, the word which we usually translate into English as "gospel." It must be remembered, though, that the "good news" of the gospel does not exist independently as a "message" or a "report" or a "teaching." The new covenant arrangement between God and man is essentially personified in Jesus Christ. The "good news" of the gospel is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the gospel! It is not accurate, therefore, to conceive of the gospel as entirely formulated in teaching or doctrine. Nor is it accurate to regard

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the message of the gospel to be fully inscribed or enscripturated within written literature. No body of literature or writing is ever referred to as “gospel” or “a gospel” within the inspired writings of the new covenant literature. “Gospel” is always reserved for the total expression of the “good news” of the new covenant reality that is inherent in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

### **The Written Records of the Gospels**

Why, then, do we refer to the first four documents in the canonized order of our New Testament as “gospels?” They are not thus referred to within the text of the documents themselves, but Greek titles utilizing the word *euangellion* were applied to these reports early within the history of their copying and transmission. The reasoning behind such was that these documents reported the “good news” of the gospel as Jesus expressed such in His earthly life and ministry.

Some regard the documents that we now call the “gospels” of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, (along with numerous apocryphal gospels written in the early Christian era), to be a unique literary form not previously existent in the writings of man. The format employed is not that of a technical biography with sequential chronology. Rather, they are personalized records with selected narratives and sayings, formulated with a particular evangelistic purpose to share the “good news” of the gospel of Jesus Christ with a target readership. These were teaching documents wherein the authors selectively employed varying scenarios and teachings to explain the significance of Jesus to their intended audience. The particular Christological perspective or “angle” of each author can be examined and studied. This explains why chronological gaps and *non-sequiturs* of time and place were not a great concern of the writers, because they were secondary to the didactic objective of the document.

If we were to attempt to explain the objective and method of the early gospel-writers in contemporary terms, we might liken them to what are called “spin doctors” today, people who take persons, events and statements, casting them into a particular perspective or “spin” to present them in a light that is conducive to their objective. Such “spin doctors” have been known to present their version of what has transpired in political and legal situations in a slanted, skewed or fallacious manner, but such is not intrinsic to the methodology of such presentation. In using the terminology of “spin doctors,” there is no intent to imply that any self-serving “spin” was applied to the gospel-records by their original authors. These men, inspired by the Holy Spirit, certainly wanted to preserve the integrity of historical veracity in presenting a picture of the One who is Truth.

Another explanation which may not be freighted with as many negative connotations in the minds of some people, might be to view the “gospel-writers” as portrait artists. They each paint a picture of the persons and events with different strokes, at different times, with different objectives in mind. They place the different vignettes in different places on the canvas, in order to paint the picture in such a way that it will be most appreciated by their audience. Each of the writers saw Jesus’ actions and teaching differently, from a particular perspective. Mark and Luke most likely did not physically view or hear any of Jesus’ ministry, so their perspective was probably painted on their minds by Peter and Paul respectively.

These explanations do not in any way impinge upon a proper understanding of the inspiration of the scriptures. It has long been understood that the writers of the gospel-records utilized their distinctive vocabularies in order to present selected scenarios which would best relate the gospel of Jesus Christ to their intended readers. Such does not deny the providential work of God’s Holy Spirit through the minds and bodies of these men to produce an accurate record of events.

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We do not have to, nor should we try to, justify, harmonize or superimpose one gospel-record upon another, and thus explain away the differences, dissimilarities and *non-sequiturs*, in order to make them all align with one another. Neither do we have to, nor should we, try to explain away the historical foundations and veracity of these portraits as mythical products of subsequent religious bias and tradition. There is an interpretive balance to be found between the fundamentalist extreme with its verbal, plenary inspiration theories, and the liberal skepticism of mythologization in redaction criticism theories.

There has been much speculation of how the gospel-records were formulated. New Testament scholars have engaged in form-criticism or source-criticism in order to seek a critical analysis of how they were constructed and the sources that were employed. No doubt the story of Jesus was initially passed on by oral teaching, for Christianity did not, and does not, require a written book or document to exist and function. Eventually, though, it was regarded as expedient to commit this oral teaching to written form. What was the first written gospel-record? We do not know. It is speculated that there may have been many source materials, but in particular it has been hypothesized that there may have existed a document which has been identified as “Q.” Although the early church regarded Matthew as the earliest gospel, the scholarship of the last couple of centuries has posited that Mark was the first gospel written, primarily because it is the briefest and could thus have been expanded upon. The popular “two-source theory” conjectures that Matthew and Luke both used Mark’s writing as a base from which to expand and amplify, and also used material from the “Q” source which is common to both of their documents, adapting all of such for the respective audience of readers they had in mind for their writing.

It is obvious that there are varying emphases in the various gospels, and that the authors employ different events and vocabulary to relate such to their readers. Separate study of

each of the gospel-records is beneficial, therefore, in order to emphasize the particular themes and perspective of each writer.

Matthew is the gospel of fulfilled prophecy with approximately seventy direct references to the Old Testament. This is probably why it was placed first in the order of the canon of our New Testament, because it provides a transition from the old covenant literature to the new covenant literature. Matthew is also the “gospel of the kingdom,” referring to “kingdom” fifty-five times and “kingdom of heaven” thirty-three times. It was obviously intended for a Jewish readership which was expecting God’s intervention for the establishment of a theocratic kingdom, even though their expectations were often misdirected in physical conceptions.

Mark is the briefest of the gospel-records and employs simple Greek construction. Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), and was not one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He was apparently writing for Roman Gentiles, which explains why he omits a Jewish genealogy and gives more detailed explanation of Palestinian customs. As the Romans were impressed with quick-moving action and power, Mark writes a quick-moving gospel of action often employing the transitional action-word, “immediately.”

Luke was an educated physician (Col. 4:10), who was also not one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He was a detailed researcher (Luke 1:3), employing good literary style and vocabulary in writing the longest document in the New Testament. His is the gospel for all peoples, with an emphasis on the universality of the “good news” of Jesus for all men. Luke emphasizes the humanity of Jesus as the “Son of Man,” and repeatedly mentions the human interest features of physical ailments, poverty, social situations, women and children.

John probably wrote his gospel-record as long as a half-century after the other writers. Clement of Alexandria indicates that John determined to write a “spiritual gospel.” His gospel has far more references to the Holy Spirit, with numerous

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spiritual discourses in the teaching of Jesus employing pictorial imagery of spiritual realities, such as new birth, the water of life, the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, and the vine and the branches. Ninety-two percent of the material in John's gospel-record is not found in any of the other three synoptic gospels.

Altogether the four gospel-records comprise approximately forty-five percent of the entire New Testament, a major portion of the new covenant literature. The value of this literature has been both affirmed and denied to the extreme. Certain forms of hyper-dispensationalist theology have regarded the teaching of the gospels to be in the context of the old covenant, and therefore of little or no value for understanding the Christian gospel. From their perspective it is Paul who properly articulates the gospel. On the other hand, there are those extremists who believe that Paul was a male-chauvinist mystic who perverted the gospel, and that the genuine gospel can only be ascertained from the lips of Jesus Himself as recorded in the four gospel accounts. Their opinion is that only the *ipsissima verba*, the direct words from the mouth of Jesus, are of any value for understanding Christianity. Between these two extremes we must recognize the value of these gospel-records for understanding what Jesus came to bring in Himself, and their consistency with the rest of the new covenant literature.

Attempts to harmonize the four gospel-records have been attempted since the second century A.D. when Tatian compiled his *Diatessaron*. After the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation and the increased availability of printed scriptures, there have been hundreds of attempts to combine and harmonize the gospels. These endeavors take two primary forms: (1) the combined continuous narrative wherein all four accounts are interwoven, and (2) the placement of each of the four gospels in parallel columns. Such harmonizing of the gospel-accounts can be beneficial, as details in other gospel-records amplify and enhance one another. There are also limitations to the value of

harmonization, not least of which is the subjective determination of chronology and parallels.

### **The Confrontation of the Gospel and Religion**

In the harmonization of the gospel-records we can perhaps most clearly perceive that in the course of His ministry and the revelation of Himself, Jesus is found to be in constant conflict and confrontation with the prevailing religion of the Palestinian region. Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, has noted most explicitly that “the revelation of God is the abolition of religion.”<sup>1</sup> Is it any wonder, then, that the presentation of God in man in Jesus Christ should contrast with the message and methods of the Jewish religion in the first century?

Christianity is not religion! The most accepted etymological derivation of the English word “religion” recognizes the root of the word in the Latin word *religare*, which means “to bind again” or “to tie back.” Jesus did not come to bind, fasten, tie, or attach us to anything or anyone. He came to set us free to be functional humanity in the fullest sense, saying, “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32), for “if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). Paul likewise indicates that “it was for freedom that Christ set us free” (Gal. 5:1), for “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (II Cor. 3:17).

Jesus Christ did not come to be the founder of another religion. He came that we might have His life, and experience such in abundant human expression (John 10:10). The Christian gospel is the presence and dynamic of the life of the risen Lord Jesus being manifested in the behavior of receptive believers to the glory of God.

Such freedom of life and worship was alien and foreign to the strictures and structures of Jewish religion that existed in the first century. It can be reasonably argued that Judaism in the first century was representative of religious perversion at

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its worst. Various forms of legalism, exclusivism, moralism, racism, nationalism, etc. were rampant in their religion. This provided, though, a perfect environment to exhibit the radical antithesis and ultimate contrast to what Jesus came to reveal in Himself – the “good news” of Christianity.

By way of introducing the fractured and factious religious environment into which Jesus came, it will be instructive to briefly review the religious parties which existed in the first century, most of whom became antagonists of Jesus:

The Pharisees were the most visible and vociferous. Their origins traced back to the *Hasidim*, or “Pious Ones,” who fought with Judas Maccabeus to liberate the Jewish people from oppression. Their name most likely means “separated ones,” for they separated themselves from the *amhahares*, the “people of the land,” by their strict and legalistic rules of purity, tithing, Sabbath observance, etc. Ironically the Pharisees were still the grass-roots “people’s party” during the early decades of the first century, because the common people could identify more with such strict religious observance than with the rich, politically-connected Sadducees.

The “scribes” are often mentioned in conjunction with the Pharisees. That is because most of the scribes had Pharisaic affiliation, and spent most of their time devising additional laws to interpret the Mosaic Law, which all of the Pharisees could then try to conform to and strictly obey. Later these additional laws and traditions were collected in the *Talmud*.

The Zealots may have been a right-wing political movement within the parameters of Pharisaism. They advocated the deliverance of Israel from Roman rule by militaristic might. A.M. Hunter indicates that they were “fonder of the sword than the phylactery.”<sup>2</sup> Splinter groups of the Zealots engaged in occasional guerrilla warfare which included the assassination of Roman officials. Their *cause celebre* became so popular after the middle of the first century that they actually took con-

trol of Judea in A.D. 66, but the Romans responded by massacring the Jews in A.D. 70.

The Sadducees took their name from Zadok, the high priest under Solomon (I Kings 2:35). They were the chief priests and elders, responsible for the administration of the temple in Jerusalem. The majority of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court which was given some latitude for self-rule in Palestine, was comprised of Sadducees. Most of them were wealthy aristocrats who were large landowners. Culturally they were Hellenists, and politically they were pragmatists who found it expedient to co-exist with Roman rule. They did not accept all the additional interpretations of the Pharisees, and did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.

The Herodians, who are mentioned only twice in Mark's gospel-record (3:6; 12:13), may have been connected in some way with the Sadducees. Their expectations for Israel seem to have been tied to the fortunes of the Herodian family.

The Essenes are not mentioned in the new covenant literature, but we know of their existence from the writings of Josephus, and possibly from their involvement in the Qumran community. They seem to have lived celibate and ascetic lives in communal desert camps, regarding themselves to be the only faithful remnant of Israel. They had an intense expectation for the coming of the Messiah, but not in the same militaristic sense as the Zealots.

Since the Pharisees enjoyed the most popular support among the Palestinian people of the early first century, it is they who reacted most strongly to Jesus' presentation of Himself. When Jesus called upon all Israel to repent, the Pharisees were offended because they did not believe that they or their people needed such. Goppelt notes that "the path of Jesus' ministry became a critical encounter with Pharisaism."<sup>3</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, himself no stranger to conflict with the prevailing religion, explained that,

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“It is in Jesus’ meeting with the Pharisees that the old and the new are most clearly contrasted. The correct understanding of this meeting is of the greatest significance for the understanding of the gospel as a whole.”<sup>4</sup>

“Jesus speaks with a complete freedom which is not bound by the law of logical alternatives. To the Pharisees this freedom necessarily appears as the negation of all order, all piety and all belief. Jesus casts aside all the distinctions which the Pharisee so laboriously maintains. For the Pharisee, Jesus is a nihilist, a man who knows and respects only his own law, an egoist and a blasphemer of God.”<sup>5</sup>

In identifying the Jewish religion with its various representatives as the original point of historical confrontation between Jesus and religion, there is a certain risk that some readers will surmise that the Jewish people and religion are being singled out as particularly blameworthy. Such is not the case! The inevitable notation of the obduracy and deficiency of the Jewish scribes, Pharisees, *et al*, is not, either on Jesus’ part, or ours, a deprecation of that race or religion above others. The particular Palestinian religion of the period and place in which Jesus lived, and therefore the one which He confronted, was Judaism. The context of the historical and geographical settings in which the advent of Jesus Christ was enacted necessitates our noting the Judaic religion that existed in Judea in the early part of the first century, and its conflict with Jesus. This cannot legitimately be regarded as a denigration of one religion over another, and certainly not as a form of racist anti-semitism. What we want to point out is that the Jewish religion was generally indicative of all religious tendencies to be antithetical to the gospel of Christ.

The contrast and conflict of the gospel of Jesus Christ with religion was originally found in the confrontation of Jesus with the Pharisees, but can be noted throughout the entirety of the new covenant literature. This series of studies will proceed

to document Jesus' confrontation with religion in the gospel-records, but it should be recognized in every book of the New Testament. The book of *Acts* records the progressive awareness of the early Christian leaders of how Christianity had to be unhindered and unencumbered by any identification with the Judaic religion. *Romans* rejects righteousness by religious rites of the Law, but posits righteousness in Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, alone. *First Corinthians* counters the religious excesses that were developing in the young church at Corinth. *Second Corinthians* differentiates between gospel ministry and the manipulations of religious method. *Galatians* denies that legalistic religion is "another gospel," and regards such as damnable. *Ephesians* rejects religious exclusivism, claiming a new humanity for all men in Jesus Christ. *Colossians* combats the regional religionism of Asia, emphasizing the preeminence of Jesus Christ as our life. *Hebrews* shows the dichotomy of the old covenant of Judaic religion and the new covenant life of Jesus Christ. *James* repudiates the rituals of "worthless religion," arguing for the outworking of the life of Jesus in faith. In the *Revelation*, John saw in pictorial imagery the defeat of all religion by Jesus Christ, the Victor. The confrontation of the gospel and religion is a major theme of the entire New Testament.

### **Interpreting the Gospels Apart From Religion**

The dynamic of the life of Jesus Christ lived out by His Spirit in Christian believers, which is the essence of Christianity, was soon perverted by the natural tendencies of man to revert to religious forms. Even within the first century the grace vitality of Christianity was being suppressed by those who called themselves "Christians," as they fell back into standardized forms and moralistically regulated behavior. Paul chided the Galatians for being so foolishly mesmerized by the reli-

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gious tendency to revert to legalistic works (Gal. 3:1-3), and encouraged them not to “be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1) in religion. John recognized that the seven churches of Asia were being encroached upon by religious tendencies (Rev. 2,3).

Since the religionizing tendency is so pervasive among men, the question must be asked, “To what extent, if any, had religious thinking and perspective already pervaded the thought processes of the writers of the New Testament documents, and did this affect what they wrote?” The theological inquiry of “redaction criticism” attempts to ascertain whether any of the writers of the new covenant documents imposed a particular religious bias into their writings. Fundamentalist theology closes its eyes to such questions by positing a direct, divine dictatorial theory of scripture inspiration. On the other hand, the skepticism of liberal theology often runs off into subjective flights of fanciful speculation concerning source and redaction, weighted and freighted with intellectual snobbery. Surely there is a balanced position wherein we can attempt to interpret the gospel-records apart from religious bias.

Without a doubt much of the exegetical and theological interpretation of the gospel-records has been infected by religiously biased understanding. Throughout the centuries of Christian history, the preponderance of Biblical interpretation has been performed by commentators and theologians thoroughly inundated in the system of “Christian religion.” Even if they had the spiritual discernment to recognize the difference between Christianity and religion, and the exposé of such throughout the new covenant literature, as few have had, it is questionable whether they would have sacrificed their livelihoods in applying such to their own religious situations. What we have is a tragic history of inadequate and misconstrued Biblical interpretation, especially of the gospel-records, throughout the history of the “Christian religion.” Any and all interpretations of religious commentators and theologians

should be treated with a degree of healthy skepticism due to the inevitable baggage of religious bias that they carry with them into their interpretive task. We must constantly examine our own baggage of religious understanding, refusing to accept at face-value the common and popular explanations of the meaning of the text.

In order to do so, we must first determine what we perceive to be the overriding purpose and meaning of Christ's advent and work. As much as we hate to admit such, the interpreter will inevitably take with him, as he studies the text of scripture, certain personal presuppositions, a certain understanding of what he regards to be the "big picture" that comprises Christianity. This particular study of the gospel-records, for example, is undeniably and unashamedly undertaken with a macro-view of theology which posits that Christianity is the ontological reality of Christ's function in man by His Spirit. Such a Christocentric theology denies that Jesus came to bring some "thing," be it a teaching or behavioral code, etc. or that He came to dispense some commodity, be it justification, salvation, etc. Rather, Jesus came to manifest Himself, and to function as God in man – Christ in the Christian – comprising Christianity. Such an understanding will always be antithetical to religious understanding, for "the revelation of God is the abolition of religion."<sup>6</sup> So there is a secondary presuppositional attitude of anti-religionism that will color the approach that is taken to understanding these gospel-records.

As we approach the study of the written record of the gospel narratives, we seek to get "behind the scene" of the events and statements. We want to find what the Germans have called the *sitz im leben* of the recorded situation, the "setting in life" in which Jesus acted and spoke. We strive to ascertain the historical, political, cultural, racial, social, geographical and religious settings, apart from traditional religious accretions and interpretations. We are desirous of discovering the original direction and intent of Jesus' thinking and purpose, even

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the divine mind, as it were. But, in the process we must ever remember the limitations of historical research into the original settings after almost two millennia of time, as well as the limitations of finite human understanding. We will never understand all the complexities and intricacies of what took place.

As we commence these studies in the four gospel-records, we are desirous of understanding to the best of our ability how Jesus' self-revelation of Himself led to confrontation with religion, and continues to do so. We must consider Jesus' confrontation with the prevailing Jewish religion of His day, seeking to understand the religious environment in which He lived, and the dichotomy of that ideology and methodology with the reality and character of God in Christ. From that understanding we shall note that the Judaism of the first century was indicative of the general religious tendencies of all religion, which are still confronted by the reality of Jesus' life. Not wanting to perpetuate traditional religious interpretations, we shall consider the religious interpretations that have long been imposed upon the various texts of the gospel-records throughout Christian history, the fallacies of which continue to be confronted and exposed by the reality of Christianity. Above all else, though, we want to see and understand Jesus' revelation of Himself, the divine reality of Christianity that conflicts, confounds and confronts all religion. Thus we will seek to interpret the gospels apart from religion.

Writing to Timothy, Paul indicated that there is "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5). It is important to remember that although Jesus was inherently and essentially God, He "emptied Himself" (Phil. 2:7) of independent divine function, and functioned as a man who allowed the Spirit of God to function within His humanity for every moment in time for thirty-three years. Throughout the study of the gospel-records we repeatedly see the human side of "the man, Christ Jesus," who was never less than God, but never more than man.

Pointing out the singular uniqueness of Jesus Christ, South African author, Albert Nolan, explains that,

“It is difficult for us to imagine what it must have been like to differ radically from everybody else, past and present, in an age when group conformity was the only measure of truth and virtue. The immense learning of the scribes did not impress Jesus. No tradition was too sacred to be questioned. No authority was too great to be contradicted. No assumption was too fundamental to be changed.

“There were no traces of fear in Jesus. He was not afraid of creating a scandal or losing his reputation or even losing his life. All the men of religion were scandalized by the way he mixed socially with sinners, by his permissiveness with regard to the laws. He soon acquired what we would call a bad reputation: ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard.’<sup>7</sup>

“Jesus did nothing and compromised on nothing for the sake of even a modicum of prestige in the eyes of others. He did not seek anyone’s approval. His family thought he was out of his mind (Mk 3:21); the Pharisees thought he was possessed by the devil (Mk 3:22).<sup>8</sup>

“Jesus proclaimed the truth without hesitation, whether he was using the persuasive methods of the parable or the more forthright pronouncements of the sayings. There was never any place for ‘maybe’ and ‘perhaps’; there were no ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’. This is the truth about life; can’t you see it?”<sup>9</sup>

Jesus was straightforward in exhibiting and explaining the life of God that He came to bring in Himself. The primary contextual setting in which the gospel-narratives must be read is that of constant awareness of the confrontation that Jesus’ life had with all religion. In every recorded incident in the life of Jesus, we must ask ourselves, “What were the religious concepts that came into play in this situation?” “How is it that Jesus is contrasting the message of the gospel, His own func-

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tional dynamic of grace, with the natural religious tendencies of mankind?”

Ernst Kasemann notes that,

“Jesus broke through the piety and theology of his contemporaries, and brought God’s promise and love in place of the Mosaic law, his own endowment with the Spirit in place of the Jewish tradition, clarity about God’s will in place of casuistry, and grace in place of good works.”<sup>10</sup>

Throughout this study of the gospel-narratives, we shall discover how Jesus presents Himself and the provision of God’s grace in contrast to, and therefore in confrontation with, the Jewish religion in particular, and all religion in general.

## Chapter Two

# Jesus' Birth and Boyhood

“In the fulness of time” (Gal. 4:4) God chose to act in accord with His character in grace and thereby to reveal Himself in His actions toward mankind by His Son, Jesus Christ. Whenever God acts out of Who He is, *ek theos*, such a revelation necessarily confronts religion, for it negates and abolishes all religious enterprise which is incapable of acting *ek theos*. Religious enterprise is always derived *ek anthropos* which is essentially and spiritually *ek diabolos*. The revelation of God wherein He acts and provides for mankind out of His own Being, *ek theos*, necessarily exposes all religion to be a misrepresentative manufacture of deceived mankind.

God's revealing of Himself in His Son, “born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4), “made in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man” (Phil. 2:7,8), is an action that serves as a refutation of religion. Inherent in the incarnation is the reality of God's action that can never be separate from His Being. The incarnation is representative and inclusive of the totality of God's Being in action and action by Being. The very Being of God is involved in everything He does, in contrast to all religion, and His Being incarnated in a man, born as a baby, serves to confront religion with an antithesis that fatally exposes its religious foundations of humanistic activism. The birth and boyhood of Jesus therefore confronts religion.

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## Section 1

### Luke's Introduction - Luke 1:1-4

Luke was not one of the twelve original disciples of Jesus. He was a physician (Col. 4:14) who later accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys (II Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24). Luke admits that he was not an “eyewitness” (1:2), but that “servants of the word,” i.e., Christians who have subordinated themselves to Jesus Christ, the “Word” (John 1:1,14), have passed on accounts, perhaps both orally and written, and that he has investigated such and written them down. So Luke admits that he is but a compiler of the information available to him, but indicates that he has “investigated everything carefully,” so as to produce an account “in consecutive order” that conveys “the exact truth” about the events of the life of Jesus that the readers have previously been taught. From the sequel document of the *Acts of the Apostles* it is apparent that Luke does not record Jesus as merely an historical figure, for though he records in his gospel account what “Jesus began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1), the implication is that Jesus continues to act and teach as the living Lord by the Spirit after Pentecost.

Luke did his homework as a meticulous researcher, and compiled this document to give a perspective of Jesus that would relate to all men universally. The addressee of the document, who is also addressed in the sequel (Acts 1:1), may be an individual, or may be a generic name representative of all Christians. The meaning of the name *Theophilus* is “lover of God,” which may be a literary device to address the document to all “lovers of God,” i.e., all Christians.

## Section 2

### The Word of God - John 1:1-3

Writing as he did, toward the end of the first century, John had perhaps half of a century after the synoptic authors had

written, in order to reflect on the theological implications of the life of Jesus Christ. Living as he did, in a predominantly Greek world in Asia Minor, he sought existing Greek words and concepts which would relate the gospel to the world in which he lived. John begins his gospel-narrative by articulating his theology in terminology that had long been employed in Greek philosophy, as he also does in the prologue of his epistle (I John 1:1), and within the account of the Revelation (Rev. 19:13). Connecting the Hebrew theology of creation and the Greek concept of *logos*, John commences by writing, "In the beginning was the Word (*logos*)" (John 1:1). From the Greek word *logos* we derive the English words "logic" and the latter part of the word "theology," which is "the study or reasoning about God." The Greek philosophers had essentially deified *logos*, or logic and reasoning, as the supreme virtue whereby one contacts and projects cosmic reason or the divine mind. John does not allow for the deification of abstract rationality and intellect, but rather specifically personifies the concept of *logos* in the person of Jesus Christ. The Person of Jesus is explained by using the metaphor of the *logos*, indicating that Jesus is the "expression" of God, but more than just a separated and disassociated "expression" or "expresser" of God, Jesus as the "Word" is God. Such a concept boggles all religious thought.

The Jews could also relate to the concept of *logos* for they made constant reference to the account of creation in the *Torah* which records God's speaking things into existence; "God said, 'Let there be...'" (Gen. 1:3,6). The Psalmist explains that "by the word of the Lord the heavens were made" (Ps. 33:6). "The worlds were prepared by the word of God" (Heb. 11:3), affirms the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews. The concept of the "word of God" being employed "in the beginning" was familiar to Hebrew thought, as well as the "word of God" being spoken by the prophets such as Abraham (Gen. 15:1), Moses (Exod. 20:1), Isaiah (Isa. 1:10) and Jeremiah (Jere. 1:2). What

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the Jewish religion could not conceive of was an incarnated “Word of God” who would be the “exact representation” (Heb. 1:3) of God, allowing God to be made visible. Believing that “no man can see God and live” (Exod. 33:20), Jewish religion rejected Jesus as the “Word” or “image of God” (II Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) Who could express visibly the Being and character of the invisible God, as God.

John asserts unequivocally that Jesus preexisted as God, and was in His incarnate form essentially the expression of the very Being of God. Later he will record Jesus’ declarations to the Jewish leaders saying, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58), and “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). The unique Christological affirmation of Christianity by the self-revelation and self-expression of God in Jesus Christ, as the God-man, is opposed to the dichotomous dualism inherent in all religion, which inevitably disassociates the action and benefits of God toward man from the very Being of God within those actions. Jesus Christ, the “Word,” was and is God in action.

Religion will do anything to avoid and deny this ontological reality of the gospel in Jesus Christ. From the Arians to the Jehovah Witnesses there have been those who would insert an indefinite article into John’s statement, to make it read, “the Word was a god,” thus denying the deity of Jesus as well as the Being of God in the activity of Jesus. Protestantism, and now more particularly Evangelicalism, has tended to interpret *logos* and all references to “word” throughout the new covenant literature as referring to a book, the Bible as the “word of God,” conferring upon such compilation of literature the very power and activity of God. Such “Christian religion” becomes a “book-religion” guilty of bibliolatry. The “word of faith” movement among Charismatic neo-pentecostals has surmised that God created all things by the procedure of “speaking the word of faith” in order to bring them into being, both creatively and redemptively. The “word” of God thereby becomes a disassociated procedure whereby religious men can utilize the same

technique and allegedly bring things into being creatively and redemptively, speaking things into reality. What these religious tenets all have in common is the premise of God acting apart from His Being in Jesus Christ, which is why all religion is confronted by the incarnation of the God-man.

John continues to tie *genesis* and *re-gensis* together in the continuation of his prologue. Asserting that Jesus as God “was in the beginning with God” (1:2), and “all things came into being by Him” (1:3), John is setting up the connection between the physical creation “coming into being” and the spiritual creation of “coming into being” by the very Being of God restored to man through Jesus Christ. Behind his thinking is undoubtedly the idea of Christians being “new creatures in Christ” (II Cor. 5:17) with the whole community of Christians being the “new creation” (Gal. 6:15), sharing “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4) in Christ who has become their identity.

### Section 3

#### Light and Life - John 1:3-11

Continuing to key off of the Genesis narrative of God's creating light and life (Gen. 1:3), John then alludes to the spiritual realities of light and life in Jesus Christ (1:4). Though religion promotes enlightenment by rationalistic acceptance of propositional truth-statements and the consequent inculcation of moralistic living, such is confronted as antithetical to the divine and spiritual light and life of God in Jesus Christ exclusively. Christ is life (John 11:25; 14:6; Col. 3:4). Christ is the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). As the very Being of God's life in Jesus Christ becomes spiritually operative within the Christian, true spiritual enlightenment shines forth in the genuine self-disclosure of God. “The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord” (Prov. 20:27). The light goes on in the lamp of man's spirit when Jesus Christ, the life and the light, comes to dwell therein.

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The spiritual light of the life of Jesus Christ shines in the spiritual darkness (1:5) of the world-system (John 3:19; 8:12; 12:35,46; I John 1:5,6; 2:8,9,11), the system governed by “the god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4). Religion is part of that system of darkness. Fred Craddock notes that “this evangelist understands worldliness to assume its ugliest shapes in the entrenchments of religion.”<sup>1</sup> Without spiritual understanding religion cannot comprehend what God is doing in His Son, Jesus Christ.

As the life and light of God, Jesus came into the physical world which He created, and the world of mankind as well as the world of religion did not know Him, recognize Him, or receive Him (1:9,10). He came among His own race and people, the Jews, but because of the misperceptions of their religious ideology, they did not receive Him (1:11). He experienced national and religious rejection, because religion refuses to accept Jesus on His own terms, the activity of His divine Being.

### Section 4

#### Children of God - John 1:12,13

Only by the receptivity of faith can “as many” as receive Him, be they Jew or Gentile, male or female, become “children of God” believing into His name – His person – into spiritual union with His Being (1:12). Once again Jesus confronts the exclusivity of religion, extending God’s life to all men in the universality of the gospel, which was God’s intent from the very beginning. Jewish religion had the opinion that they alone were the “children of God” by physical birth and national privilege. They could not conceive of the need for spiritual birth, as is exemplified by the response of Nicodemus (John 3:1-6). The spiritual commencement of God’s functional life in man is not extended on the basis of racial and genetic heredity, nor on the basis of personal resolve to perform by self-effort in “bootstrap religion,” nor on the basis of man’s determination to acquire

such, but can only be given by the living God (1:13). God is the progenitor of His life which is extended in His Son, and as “like begets like” the receptive Christian believer partakes of the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### **Section 5**

#### **Incarnation - John 1:14-18**

The Trinitarian understanding of God is intrinsic to the understanding of the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the God-man, and is fundamental to an understanding of the relational reconciliation of men with God through Jesus Christ. If God is a singular monad, He would be incapable of extended relational expression in His Son or in the “many sons” (Heb. 2:10) identified with Him. As the triune God by means of the incarnation, God could, in His self-revelation through the Son, reconcile all men to Himself (II Cor. 5:18,19).

“The Word became flesh” (1:14). The divine became embodied in the incarnation of the God-man. The life of the Son did not begin at His birth, for “in the beginning the Word was with God, and was God” (1:4). His incarnate life was an “advent” wherein God descended and arrived in the form of man.

Such an incarnational advent confronted the thinking of Greek religion. Greek dualism considered the abstract and spiritual as the realm of the divine and the “good,” whereas the physical realm was corrupt and evil. That God should become flesh was inconceivable to the Greek. This is why the earliest philosophical perversion of the Christian gospel came in the docetic concept of Greek Gnosticism in the second and third centuries. Docetism is derived from the Greek word *dokein*, meaning “to appear.” To avoid that which was inconceivable in their Greek dualistic thinking, they posited that Jesus only “appeared” to be human and enfleshed as a man. In addition, they developed Gnosticized interpretations of how a long

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sequence of angelic emanations or aeons would allow Jesus to partake of humanity, only if he were far enough separated from God. Paul counters such in his letter to the Colossians by writing that “the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col. 2:9). The incarnation of Jesus Christ confronted Greek religious thought at its most basic presuppositions.

The Jewish religion had an equally difficult time accepting the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Their conception of God as a monad deity disallowed the extension of divine expression by the incarnate Son as the Word of God. Their belief that “no man has seen God at any time” (1:18) mitigated against the acceptance of the invisible God being made visible as a man. That God should come in the form of a baby born in Bethlehem grated against their attitude of infants and children being contemptible nuisances, and their expectations of the Messiah being a masculine military conqueror who would liberate God’s people from the oppressors and establish a nationalistic kingdom for the Jews. The incarnation of Jesus Christ confronted Jewish religious thought at the very core of its theology and Messianic expectations.

John continues to explain that the all-glorious character of God was expressed visibly in the person and behavior of Jesus Christ as He “set up His tent” and “tabernacled” among men (1:14). The *Shekinah* glory of God was seen in the tabernacle of Jesus’ embodiment. This manifestation of God’s glory in man, by which God is glorified, is far different from the religion that “receives glory from one another” (John 5:44), and seeks to glorify God by human performance.

That Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (1:14), and “grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (1:17) whereby those identified with Him might participate in “grace upon grace (1:16), is a confrontation of all religious thought and methodology. The distinctive of Christianity is that Jesus Christ is the personified truth and reality of God. “I AM the truth” (John 14:6), Jesus said, “and the truth shall make you free”

(John 8:32) to be all that God intends man to be. Grace is the dynamic activity of God whereby He effects all that He does in Jesus Christ. The whole of Christianity is the activity of God's grace.

The Jewish religion was a law-based religion. The character of God was expressed in legal demands for human performance. The Law was thus a separated entity from God Himself, which expressed "words" about God and His character. There was no ontological connection between God and the Law, nor was there any inherency of divine empowering in order to keep the demands of the Law, thereby evidencing the inadequacy of man apart from God. Religious men engaged in the performance of self-effort to keep the demands of the Law, the performance of which could make no man righteous (Gal. 2:21; 3:21). "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4). The distinctive of grace in the Christian gospel is that the activity of God is expressed in the ontological reality of the "Word," Jesus Christ, providing all divine empowering for all that God desires in man. Grace and truth must never be disassociated from Jesus Christ. Yet "Christian religion" has done so repeatedly by cheapening these concepts into epistemological propositions and explanations.

Christians are those who have received the fulness of God in Christ (1:16). "All things belong to them in Christ" (I Cor. 3:20-23), and they are "complete in Christ" (Col. 2:10). Those who are "in Christ" have the privilege of operating in the continuity of God's ontological adequacy and empowering, "grace upon grace" (1:16).

Though the Jewish religion repudiated the visibility of God, they were repetitively caught up in idolatrous pursuits of visibility. Jesus revealed, explained and "exegeted" God (1:18), as "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Jesus could say, "He who has seen Me, has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Christ's continued function as the living Lord in the Christian

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allows the all-glorious character of the invisible God to be visibly expressed in the behavior of man to the glory of God, the purpose for which we were created (Isa. 43:7). Such is the continuing ontological self-revelation of God in man which confronts all religious practice.

### Section 6

#### **Genealogies of Jesus - Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38**

The genealogies included in the gospel-narratives of Matthew and Luke, provide the link of God's activity back through the history of man leading up to Jesus Christ. Matthew, writing to Jewish readers, traces the roots of God's activity in Jesus Christ back to Abraham, who the Jews regarded as their father (John 8:39), worshipping "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Luke, on the other hand, was writing to all men universally and traces the roots of God's activity in Jesus Christ all the way back to Adam. Mark, writing to pragmatic, action-oriented Roman Gentiles, apparently did not figure it would serve any purpose to his readers to provide the link of preceding divine activity and preparation, since his readers were only interested in the "right now" of present activity.

Matthew and Luke's genealogies do establish a foundation of historicity which is foundational to the gospel. They do provide a link with Hebrew history and the preparatory religion of Judaism, connecting God's activity especially to Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1), the patriarch and the king of Jewish history. The primary purpose of these genealogies is not to provide precise accuracy of physical, hereditary and racial ties, which was the preoccupation of Jewish religion. Christianity confronts such physical connection, presenting instead the spiritual union that all men might have in Jesus Christ.

It is interesting that Matthew, writing to Jewish readers, should have confronted their religious prejudices by including four women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, as women

were not customarily included in Jewish genealogies. Additionally, three of these women were guilty of sexual sin, and two of them were foreigners. Their very inclusion may be a confronting of the religious attitudes of self-righteousness and sexual discrimination, in order to reveal that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for sinful people of every race and gender.

These genealogies have subsequently been misused by “Christian religion” in attempts to establish Jewish connections and create a Christianized Judaism. Speculative interpretations have been offered to explain the meaning of the inverted order of one genealogical list versus the other, and the inclusion or exclusion of various names. Many have misused these lists in attempts to calculate and measure time back to creation, failing to recognize that the Hebrew mind-set of generational begetting was not precise (cf. Heb. 7:9,10). There is no reason to try to justify, integrate or harmonize these genealogies. Their purpose was to provide historical linkage, not minute details which religion always delights and dabbles in.

### **Section 7**

#### **Birth of John the Baptist Foretold - Luke 1:5-25**

Zacharias, the priest, was informed by the angel Gabriel that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a child even though they were “advanced in years” (Luke 1:18). Skeptical of such an announcement, Zacharias was struck with muteness until the time of the child’s birth.

Gabriel indicates that this child who was to be named John (1:13), meaning the “graciousness of God,” would “turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God” (1:16). The “sons of Israel” in the Jewish religion were separated and alienated from God in their Judaic religion. They needed to be “turned back,” converted and reconciled with God, which could only happen through Jesus Christ and His redemptive and restorative work.

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### Section 8

#### Jesus' Birth Foretold to Mary - Luke 1:26-38

Gabriel also came to a virgin named Mary announcing that she was going to conceive and bear a son, whom she should name "Jesus," meaning "Jehovah saves." This son would be called "the Son of the Most High" (1:32), the Son of God. He would assume "the throne of His father David" (1:32), "reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end" (1:33). This announcement definitely identified this child with the expectations of the Messiah's royal descent from the line of David to reign in an everlasting kingdom. The prophet Nathan had spoken for God to David, saying, "I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (II Samuel 7:12,13,16). Though misconstrued by Jewish religion as a promise of nationalistic and racial perpetuity in a physical and political kingdom, such was not the intent of God in His Son, Jesus Christ, and these fallacious religious concepts would have to be confronted. The "house of Jacob" became the "house of Israel" at the "house of God," Bethel (Gen. 35:7-15). The house of Israel finds its fruition in Jesus Christ, wherein all who are identified with Jesus become the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16; Rom. 9:6), having striven with God and surrendered to God. Christians participate in the promised fulfillment of a "spiritual house" (I Peter 2:5) of God, and in the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ which will have no end (II Peter 1:11). The reign of Christ as Lord and King (Rev. 19:16) is the reign of the Eternal One (I Tim. 1:17), fulfilling the prophecies of an "everlasting kingdom" of God (Ps. 89:29; Isa. 9:6; Dan. 7:14).

Mary inquired how she could conceive a child since she was a virgin (1:34), and Gabriel explained that, "The Holy

Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God” (1:35). The supernatural conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary by the activity of the Holy Spirit is the only explanation of how God could again dwell in a man without participating in the same spiritual condition of all fallen men “in Adam,” wherein the satanic “spirit works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). If Jesus had not been supernaturally conceived so as to have spiritual solidarity with God, rather than Satan, He could not have saved Himself, much less mankind. The supernatural conception is essential to His perfection of Being expressed in a man, which allowed Him to be perfect in behavior and benefit for mankind. Yet, this is usually the first tenet of Christianity that is jettisoned as “impossible” by religious thought. The angel declared, “Nothing will be impossible with God” (1:37). On the other hand, we do not want to make the doctrine which is often called “virgin birth” such a theological focal-point, that we detract from the greater revelation of the incarnation of the God-man and the divine intent to indwell all men by the Son.

### **Section 9**

#### **Mary Visits Elizabeth - Luke 1:39-45**

Young Mary went to visit her older relative, Elizabeth, sharing with her what the angel, Gabriel, had announced. Elizabeth’s response of, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (1:42), has been amplified into undue worship of Mary in the religion of Roman Catholicism. Mary is worthy of honor only because of the importance of the One she bore, who alone, as God, is worthy of our worship. Genuine Christianity must confront all forms of Mariolatry, which mistakenly identifies her as “the mother of God” (cf. 1:43).

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### Section 10

#### The Magnificat of Mary - Luke 1:46-56

Mary extols God for His activity in the past and within her. Part of her expression of the magnificence of God seems to prophetically indicate what God was going to accomplish in Jesus Christ. She said, “He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones. And has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things: And sent away the rich empty-handed” (1:51-53). These statements seem to portend the manner in which Christianity would upset the apple-cart of traditional religious thinking. In the activity of Jesus Christ the exalted are humbled and the humbled exalted; the rich are poor and hungry, and the poor are rich and filled. God’s ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8,9), nor are His ways the ways of religion.

Despite her traditional religious perspective concerning God’s help for Israel, Mary accurately indicates that God’s mercy is displayed toward “Abraham and his seed forever” (Gen. 17:7; Micah 7:20), perhaps unknowingly foretelling the spiritual and eternal fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham in the Christian kingdom.

### Section 11

#### Birth of John and Zacharias’ Prophecy - Luke 1:57-80

When the baby was born to Elizabeth, and Zacharias confirmed that his name should be John, despite the fact that there was no one in the family with that name, the voice of Zacharias was restored. His subsequent prophecy sees ahead to the work of Jesus Christ, for whom his son, John, would serve as a forerunner.

Zacharias rejoices that “God will visit and accomplish redemption for His people” (1:68) in Jesus Christ. The divine “visit” of God in the incarnation, and the redemptive price paid

for sin in death by crucifixion, are far more than an amnesty which forgets and pardons by amnesia. Zacharias saw the distinctiveness of the Christian gospel. Jesus would be “the horn of salvation in the house of David” (1:69), the instrument of strength in God’s saving activity in effecting the promised Davidic kingdom of Christ’s rule. Such salvation is not just deliverance from political and national enemies, as was the expectation of Jewish religion, but being made safe from spiritual enemies in the diabolic forces of evil, and being made safe from dysfunctional humanity by their activity in man.

“God will remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father” (1:72,73), declares Zacharias. Indeed, the promises of God to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-5; 17:1-8; 22:17,18) are fulfilled in the redemptive and saving activity of Jesus Christ. The promises of God are all affirmed in Jesus Christ (II Cor. 1:20). Predicated upon such we can “serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days” (1:74,75). Here again Christianity confronts all religion (which can only offer a pseudo-righteousness and holiness based on moralistic performance and behavior modification), by offering holiness and righteousness, both in spiritual condition and behavioral expression, by the presence and activity of Jesus, “the Holy and Righteous One” (Acts 3:14).

Zacharias continues to prophesy that “the Sunrise from on high shall visit us” (1:78), as has been fulfilled in the Son, Jesus Christ, in His incarnational “visit,” which fulfills the prophecy of “the sun of righteousness rising with healing in its wings” (Mal. 4:2), being “the morning star arising in our hearts” (II Peter 1:19). He will “shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death” (1:79), says Zacharias, fulfilled in the fact that Jesus is “the light of the world” (John 8:12), “shining in the darkness” (John 1:5), and delivering men from the “fear of death” (Heb. 2:15). As the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6), Jesus is indeed the “way of peace” (1:79), bringing peace with God and peace among men.

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### Section 12

#### **Announcement to Joseph - Matthew 1:18-25**

Joseph also receives an explanation from an angelic visitor that the child Mary was carrying “had been conceived in her by the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:20), so he need not put her away discreetly. Religion, with its selective judgmentalism, has severe criticism for such apparent sexual impropriety as pregnancy prior to marriage. No proper religion would want to commence on such a basis – only the reality of what God would do in Jesus Christ.

The angel also tells Joseph that the son shall be named “Jesus,” continuing to explain that “it is He who will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21), for such is the meaning of the name Jesus, “Jehovah saves.” Even after relativizing sin as religion often does, it cannot relieve man from the dire death-consequences of their sins, nor from the power of sinful indulgence (Col. 2:23). Only Jesus Christ can save people from their sins.

Matthew notes that the supernatural conception of the God-man in the womb of Mary was a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that “a virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). Immanuel means “God with us” or “God in one,” and though it is not used as a proper name of Jesus, it is certainly a titular expression of His Being and ministry.

### Section 13

#### **The Birth of Jesus - Luke 2:1-7**

Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem because Caesar Augustus had decreed that a census be taken of all persons in the Roman Empire. While in Bethlehem the full-term of Mary’s pregnancy was complete, and “she gave birth to her first-born son” (2:7). That Luke should call Jesus her “first-born son,”

may be an indication that she later bore other children, contrary to the Roman view of the perpetual virginity of Mary. Mary wrapped the baby in cloths and laid Him in a feeding-trough in the stable where they were camping. Presentation is everything for religion, and it was particularly difficult for those in the Jewish religion to believe that their King, the Messiah, the Son of God, should be born as a despised baby in a wooden manger stall. Once again we note that the activity of Jesus Christ elevates the lowly and humble, and rejects the proud and mighty.

The “Christian religion” that developed as a perversion of the reality of God in Jesus Christ, has trivialized the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke and misled society into thinking that God wants to make a “big deal” out of the “birthday of Jesus.” The birth narratives have become sentimental favorites full of idyllic charm. The production and re-enactment of nativity scenes has become a big business, complete with lawsuits to allow such in public places. The inclusion of the birth narratives in the gospel-records serves to establish historicity, but historicity is not the issue of prime importance in the birth of Jesus. It must be made clear that Son of God became a man in the birth of Jesus Christ, which was to be prototypical of the birth of God’s life in all Christians. As the poet John Scheffler wrote, “Though Christ a thousand times, in Bethlehem be born; If He’s not born in you, your soul is still forlorn.”

It cannot be ascertained that the birth of Jesus was ever celebrated by Christians in the earliest centuries of Christian history. The day, the month, and the year of Jesus’ birth cannot be fixed with any certainty. Only centuries later did religion make a “big deal” out of celebrating the birth of Jesus, making it into a holy day selected to correspond with the Roman feast of Saturnalia, and later advocating pilgrimages to Bethlehem on the alleged date of the occasion. Such times and places are important to religious veneration, but not to the reality of Christianity.

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### Section 14

#### The Angels and Shepherds Praise Jesus - Luke 2:8-20

Angels advised some local shepherds of the phenomenon of the birth of “Christ the Lord” (2:11). The first to hear of the birth of Jesus were shepherds, who were regarded as the “low-life” of agricultural workers. This is pertinent for it illustrates that Jesus came for the lowly, the “have-nots,” the needy, and those who could recognize their inadequacy.

Understandably frightened by the presence of the angels, an angel says to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all people” (2:10). To “bring good news” is to evangelize, so the shepherds were the first to be evangelized in order to see Jesus Christ. The good news is of “a great joy which shall be for all people.” Such joy (*chara*) is not an emotional high, but is realized only in the participation of the grace (*charis*) of God in Jesus Christ, available universally to all men regardless of race, age, sex, nationality, or any other distinction.

In “the city of David” (2:11), the very city where David had been born, is now born the Messiah of Davidic descent, “Christ the Lord.” “Christ” is not a mantle of responsibility bestowed upon Jesus, nor a spark of divinity that exists within every man. “Christ” becomes identified as the proper name of Jesus, for it explains His Being and function as the divine Messiah, the “Anointed One” who intercedes in man’s situation in order to restore God’s reign and function. Later, by His resurrection, the functionality of Jesus as “Lord and Christ” becomes fully operative (Acts 2:36; Rom. 1:4). Indeed, He is the “Savior” (2:11), who makes us safe from dysfunctional humanity when we allow Him to function dynamically as “Savior” in our lives, and not because He dispenses a commodity called “salvation” as religion so often projects.

## **Section 15**

### **Circumcision of Jesus - Luke 2:21**

Jesus was circumcised in accord with the Jewish old covenant regulations for all young boys (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3). “Born under the law” (Gal. 4:3), as Paul notes, there was an important historical connection with the old covenant activity of God which prefigured what God was going to do in His Son, Jesus, the “Jehovah-Savior.”

## **Section 16**

### **Jesus Presented at the Temple - Luke 2:22-38**

In accordance with the old covenant Law, Jesus' family presented Him at the temple in Jerusalem and brought an animal sacrifice. The usual offering was a lamb and a dove (Lev. 12:8), but Joseph and Mary brought two doves or pigeons, which may indicate a poverty of material resources.

A devout old man named Simeon was in Jerusalem, and he had been promised by God that he would see “the Lord's Christ” (2:26), the Messiah of God, before he died. When he saw the baby Jesus, he took Him in his arms and exclaimed to God, “My eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel” (2:30-32). Christ is salvation, and Simeon had seen with spiritual foresight the salvation and restoration of mankind in Jesus Christ. The universality of such salvation for “all people” has always confronted the exclusivism of religion, but God had prophesied that the Messiah would be “a light to the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:6; 49:6), not limited by nationality, race, sex, economic status, hereditary privilege, etc.

Simeon told Mary that her son was “appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed” (2:34). Jesus was a stone of stumbling for many in Israel (Rom. 9:33;

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11:9; I Peter 2:8), and they “fell” over the manner in which God presented His Messiah and the necessity of receiving Him by faith alone. Others of Jewish heritage, primarily the humble and the poor, found resurrection in Jesus Christ. Overall the Jewish religion rejected Jesus (John 1:11; Luke 11:29-32) as “a sign to be opposed.” Religion in general opposes the activity of God in Jesus Christ, for the grace of God in Jesus is antithetical to all religion.

### **Section 17**

#### **The Visit of the Wise Men - Matt. 2:1-12**

Matthew records the visit of wise men from the East, probably arriving a considerable time after Jesus’ birth. The number of these men and their country of origin is not mentioned. They were probably Gentile priests, men wise in the study of the stars as philosopher-astrologers. There is no mention of their being kings. The inclusion of this scenario in Matthew’s gospel again serves as a confrontation of the exclusivistic religion of Judaism, evidencing God’s universal intent for all men to worship Him through Jesus Christ.

The Jewish priests and scribes who Herod consulted were quite aware that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of the prophecy of Micah 5:2. Bethlehem was the birthplace of David, and the name meant “house of bread,” indicating the location of a granary. Jesus later claimed to be “the Bread of Life” (John 6:35,48). Micah had predicted that “out of Bethlehem would come a ruler, who would shepherd God’s people, Israel” (Micah 5:2). Jesus is that “good shepherd” (John 10:11,14) who rules over the “people of God” (I Peter 2:10), the new Israel (Gal. 6:16), the Christian community.

## **Section 18**

### **The Flight to Egypt - Matt. 2:13-18**

An angel advised Joseph to take his young son into exile in Egypt. Matthew explains that this was in fulfillment of the prophecy of God through Hosea, saying, “Out of Egypt did I call My Son” (Hosea 11:1). The slaughter of Jewish children in Judea under the age of two years old by Herod was also a fulfillment of prophecy from Jeremiah. “Rachel,” representing all Jewish women, “was weeping for her children, and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more” (Jere. 31:15), just as the Judean Jewish women were weeping for their slaughtered children. The hope and consolation for such loss is recorded in the same chapter of Jeremiah, in the establishment of a new covenant in Jesus Christ (Jere. 31:31-34; cf. Heb. 8:8-12; 10:16).

## **Section 19**

### **Joseph and Mary Return to Nazareth with Jesus - Matt. 2:19-23; Luke 2:39**

While in Egypt Joseph was advised by an angel that Herod had died, and that he should return to Israel with his wife and child. Hearing that Herod's son, Archelaus, was ruling in Judea where Bethlehem was located, he determined to go to Nazareth in Galilee. Matthew indicates that this was a prophetic fulfillment that “He shall be called a Nazarene” (2:23). There is no direct statement of such a prophecy in the Old Testament, so we do not know what he was referring to.

Jesus was often referred to contemptuously and derisively as “the Nazarene” (Mk. 10:47; 14:67; John 19:19), and the early Christians were identified as “the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” was a common contemptuous question voiced by Nathaniel (John 1:46). The Pharisees pointed out that no prophet was expected

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to arise “out of Galilee” (John 7:52), seeking to discredit His Messiahship. In general, the Galileans were looked down upon as *amharses*, “people of the land,” commoners. Nazareth was an obscure “no-name” place of lowliness and simplicity, not known for producing prophets, leaders and thinkers. It was a community of tradesmen, blue-collar workers. Jesus grew up as a carpenter’s son, and did not have access to an elite scribal education tutored by the people of renown which means so much to religion. Religion is always concerned about where a person comes from, where he studied, who he studied under, and the degrees he has achieved. Jesus lived out the reality that God takes the ordinary, and illustrated that the issue is what God does in the man, not what man does for God. Jesus confronted the prevailing religion even by the location of His upbringing and the manner by which he was reared as a boy.

### **Section 20**

#### **Jesus Grew up in Nazareth - Luke 2:40, 51,52**

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, raised like all the other little Jewish boys, educated in the *Torah*. God’s enabling grace empowered His behavior in order that He might be an obedient young man without sin.

### **Section 21**

#### **Jesus Visits Jerusalem at Age Twelve - Luke 2:41-50**

As was the custom, Jesus was taken by His parents to Jerusalem at age twelve for the Feast of the Passover. When they departed they did not realize that he was not in their caravan, so once this was discovered they returned to Jerusalem looking for their son. They found Him in the “Jerusalem Theological Academy” conversing with the theological doctors who were “amazed at His understanding and His answers” (2:47). Such is indicative of Jesus confounding the religious academia, for

they are without spiritual understanding. “The natural man cannot understand spiritual things” (I Cor. 2:14). The wisdom of the natural man is “demonic” (James 3:15), and such is the wisdom of religion.



## Chapter Three

# Jesus Begins to Reveal Himself

During His upbringing in Nazareth Jesus probably became progressively aware of His identity and the work to which He was called. Having served His apprenticeship under Joseph and fulfilled the customary expectations of a Jewish son, He was then ready to assume the responsibilities for which He had been sent by God.

### **Section 22**

#### **John Begins to Preach - Mark 1:1; Luke 3:1,2**

Mark simply indicates the commencement of his gospel-account of the “good news” of Jesus Christ by introducing the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist. Luke, being the more meticulous researcher, gives us political and religious markers by which to ascertain the historical context of what was transpiring as John began to preach in the wilderness down in the Jordan river valley.

The political environment is identified beginning with the Roman Emperor, Tiberius, who was in the fifteenth year of his reign. Tiberius became co-regent with Augustus in A.D. 11 or 12, and sole emperor in A.D. 19 when Augustus died. Luke is apparently calculating from the beginning of his co-regency which would make the date when John began to preach approximately A.D. 26 or 27.

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A brief history of the previous three decades will assist in understanding the other historical markers that Luke provides. After Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. (requiring Jesus' birth to be prior to such), the Palestinian region was divided into three districts, to be ruled by his three sons. One of his sons, Archelaus, was given authority over Judea, Samaria and Idumea, but he proved to be such an inefficient ruler that he had to be replaced after about ten years. In his place the Romans implemented direct-rule by a Roman governor or procurator, which the Jewish people found detestable since they regarded themselves as "God's People" who should be ruled by God through a Jewish leader. At least the Herodian family had some Jewish blood in it, but now a Roman Gentile was in authority over them, which they found quite unacceptable. From A.D. 26 to 36. Pontius Pilate served as the Roman governor over Judea, Samaria and Idumea. Another of Herod's sons, known as Herod Antipas, was given authority over the northern region of Galilee and down the Jordan valley in the region of Perea. He continued to rule during the active ministries of John and Jesus. It is this "Herod" that Jesus called an "old fox" (Luke 13:32), the same one who ordered John's execution by decapitation. He was a crafty politician who had built a new capital for himself in A.D. 22 on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, calling it Tiberias after Emperor Tiberius. Luke proceeds to inform us that the third brother, Philip, was tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis farther to the northeast, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene.

The religious situation is described by Luke as being during the "high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas." The Jews considered the high priest to be a lifetime position, but the Roman procurators in Judea had arbitrarily changed high priests several times. Annas had served as high priest for nine years, from A.D. 6 to 15. After several appointments by the procurator, his son-in-law, Caiaphas became high priest in A.D. 18, and survived because he was willing to be a puppet to Roman author-

ity. Annas, however, was still the power-broker in high-priestly circles, and still presided over the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:6), and was still called “high priest” (John 18:19).

### **Section 23**

#### **John Preaches Repentance - Matt. 3:1-6; Mark 1:2-6; Luke 3:3-6**

The Jews of Palestine were restless. They were increasingly convinced that God was going to intervene in their situation and make things right. The process by which they expected this to happen varied greatly. There were apocalypticists who believed that God was going to judge with doom and destruction. The Essenes advocated and expected a nonviolent restoration of theocracy. The Zealots were the activists who were convinced that “might makes right,” and a large part of the population was sympathetic to their subversive resistance against the Roman authorities. Their motives were not just theological but also economic, for they were particularly irritated at the exorbitant taxation collected by unscrupulous mercenaries. The Romans regarded these resistance fighters as rebels and terrorists, and sought to suppress them, but the Jewish people called them “zealots” in their zeal to restore Israel.

In the midst of this anticipatory situation comes John the Baptist with a prophetic announcement and proclamation. It had been a long time since the Jewish people had seen a true prophet of God. There had been a four hundred year “dry spell” wherein God had not sent a prophet. All they could do was look back and remember and interpret what God had done in the past. Had they done so more carefully they might have seen the abundance of signposts that God had given, prefiguring what He was going to do in His Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Instead they bogged down in meticulous and myopic interpretations of external applications of the law, in legalistic scrupu-

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losity and religiosity. The rules and regulations, rites and rituals of their religion blinded them to what God was doing.

The core of John's preaching was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). The Jews had long employed the word "heaven" as a way of avoiding using the name of *Yahweh* (cf. Mk. 8:11; Lk. 15:18). "Heaven" was used as an equivalent for "God." The "kingdom of heaven" and the "kingdom of God" are used as identical terms throughout the gospels and are to be regarded as synonymous. The "kingdom of heaven" is the kingdom of the One who is in heaven, not necessarily the kingdom that is in heaven or comes from heaven. God's intent for His people was a theocratic kingdom whereby He would rule as King and Lord in the lives of His people, individually and collectively. The "kingdom of God," even as typified in the Davidic kingdom, always indicated divine rule and reign. The religious expectations of the Jews in the first century, however, was infected by the zealotism that longed for a nationalistic, racist, militaristic Jewish kingdom. John does not seem to have sympathized or identified with that contemporary kingdom expectation, but recognized to some extent that the kingdom would be a spiritual kingdom inaugurated by the Messiah, actuating an internal, spiritual change in the subjects of the kingdom. It was to be a kingdom that was ontologically connected to the Person and work of the King, Christ Jesus.

Repentance was required of all people, John declared. Every person needed "a change of mind that leads to a change of action and conduct," a conversion of their orientation in life. Earlier prophets in the old covenant had demanded that the nation of Israel as a whole needed to repent and change their ways, but John was calling on all individuals to repent, confess their sins, and avoid the judgment of God which was to come. Many of the haughty, self-righteous, Pharisaical Jews were not convinced that they needed such an individual repentance and confession of sin. Pagan Gentile foreigners needed such a

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“baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3), but not them, since they regarded themselves as the “people of God.” How humiliating to individually and publicly submit to baptism, confessing and repenting of sin. To call for such was a reproach of their religion.

Theologically we might ask whether John was advocating that a decision to confess sins, repent, and be baptized in water could result in forgiveness of sins before God. Such does not appear to be what he was offering. He was “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mk. 1:4). The preposition “for” is translated from the Greek word *eis*, meaning “unto” or “towards” the forgiveness of sins, and does not necessarily mean “for the effecting of” the forgiveness of sins. The baptism indicated the person was willing to confess their sins and repent, with a desire for the forgiveness of their sins. The candidate willingly submitted to be overwhelmed in water in identification with the repudiation of sin and the need for a Messiah/Savior, identifying in prospect with what God was going to do in His Son, whose work would make forgiveness of sins available to all men.

All four of the writers of the gospel-records explain that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 40, as he, himself, apparently declared. Metaphorical language is employed as John is likened to the “heralds” or “forerunners” who would go before the Roman emperor when he was coming to visit a region, telling the people to repair the roads, fill up the ruts, smooth out the rough places in preparation for the coming king. In like manner, John the Baptist serves as the “herald” or “forerunner” of the divine King, Jesus. Luke, writing the gospel of universal application, cites the extended passage from Isaiah which includes the statement that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6; cf. Isa. 40:5) in the One whom John the Baptist was heralding. Such a declaration confronted the contemporary exclusivism of Jewish religion.

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There was no doubt that the people who saw and heard John regarded him as a prophet from God. He spoke like a prophet, warning of divine judgment and calling people to repentance. In appearance and style he was like the prophet Elijah, “a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins” (II Kings 1:8). He survived by eating locusts and honey collected from the rocks in the desert country.

His appearance and preaching became quite a phenomenon in Palestine at the end of the third decade of the first century. He was attracting great crowds who were coming in droves from Jerusalem and Judea to hear this austere desert preacher. Some thought he might be the Messiah. The impact of his ministry is recognized by the fact that followers of John still existed a quarter century later in Asia Minor (Acts 19:1-7).

### **Section 24**

#### **John Denounces Religionists - Matt. 3:7-10; Luke 3:7-14**

When John saw the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees, coming for baptism, he unleashed a severe denunciation about their being a “brood of vipers,” the offspring of snakes! John was the son of a priest, and may have seen firsthand the hypocrisy and corruption of the religious parties of his day. He knew the sinister and ulterior motives of these religious leaders; they were not coming to repent of their sins. John portrays them as low-down, poisonous snakes, just as Jesus does later (Matt. 12:34; 23:33), and inherent in that designation is the Jewish understanding of the serpent identified with Satan (Gen. 3:1; Rev. 12:9; 20:2), with whom Jesus identifies the activities of such religious leaders (John 8:44).

John goes on to ask these religious leaders, “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Matt. 3:7). “Are you just trying to save your own skins, and get off the hook?” “The wrath of God is coming,” John asserts. The opposition of God against all evil. In fact, “the axe is already laid at the root of the

trees” (Matt. 3:10; Lk. 3:9) of their unproductive and unfruitful religious tenets and practices. John could see that the judgment of God was going to fall upon the religion of Judaism and Israel, and their roots were already exposed for the felling blow. Such a declaration of coming judgment is not necessarily referring to a future and final judgment, but to the judgment of God on all evil and religion as the new covenant kingdom arrives in Jesus Christ.

Knowing the propensity of the Jews to fall back on patriarchal promises and genealogical privilege, John disallows and denies that the Jewish religionists can legitimately call Abraham their father and thus escape what God is going to do. “Nothing will happen to us; God will protect us because we are children of Abraham,” was the reasoning of the Jews. They thought that “eternal security” was in the claiming of divine promises, predestined election, and racial privilege, failing to recognize that it is only in the Person of Jesus Christ. John is taking a giant swing at the very root of Jewish religion. The Jews thought they were “children of Abraham” based on the divine selection of racial superiority and national privilege. “God is able to make children of Abraham out of these stones,” John declared. It was beyond the imagination of the Jews that God would take stony-hearted Gentiles and make them “children of Abraham” in the new covenant kingdom of Jesus Christ. By the receptivity of faith unto spiritual union with Jesus Christ, the Christian becomes a spiritual “child of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7,26,29; Rom. 4:13,16; 9:7,8), part of the true “Israel” (Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:16), the “chosen race, a holy nation, the people of God” (I Peter 2:9,10). Such was unfathomable to the Jewish religionist, and remains so to much religious interpretation to this day. Jewish race, blood and heredity avails nothing in God’s kingdom through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The multitudes asked John, “What shall we do?” (Luke 3:10), since they were seemingly convicted of their need to respond (cf. Acts 2:37; 16:30). John tells them to share their

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clothing and food with those in need. If you are a tax-collector do not extort more money than is due. If you are a soldier do not intimidate people, take kickbacks, make false accusations, or complain about your wages. In other words, bring forth behavioral fruit evidencing your repentance. Was John's ministry just a moral reform movement of behavior modification? All John could offer them was an opportunity to respond to their need of repentance from sinful behavior, and to identify with the Messiah who would take away the consequences of their sin in His death. The Jewish historian, Josephus, writes of John the Baptist:

“He was a good man and commanded to Jews to exercise virtue, both as justice toward one another and piety toward God, and so to come to baptism; for baptism would be acceptable to God, if they made use of it; not in order to expiate some sin, but for the purification of the body, provided that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness.”<sup>1</sup>

### Section 25

#### **The Coming One will Baptize and Judge - Matt. 3:11,12; Mark 1:7,8; Luke 3:15-18**

Some of the listeners thought that John might be the Messiah, and the Jewish leaders were afraid that he might be such also. John forestalls such speculation by explaining that One mightier than he was coming, for Whom he was but an unworthy forerunner or herald. The King is yet to come.

John explains that his water baptism is but a precursor which prefigures the spiritual realities conveyed in Jesus' activity of baptizing. “I baptize in water, but the One coming after me will baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire.” The activity of the Messiah will cause you to be overwhelmed either by the Holy Spirit or by the fire of divine judgment. Jesus' redemptive action creates an either/or of “eternal life” or “eternal punish-

ment” (Matt. 25:46). The dichotomy of this overwhelming action is based on belief or unbelief, faithful receptivity or rejection of Jesus Christ. The separating of mankind by receptivity or rejection of Jesus Christ is then illustrated by the picture of the “threshing-floor.” Jesus will come with a winnowing fork and “gather the wheat into His barn” (salvation), but “He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (judgment). The issue in Jesus Christ is eternal life or death.

### **Section 26**

#### **Jesus is Baptized by John - Matt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-23**

That Jesus chose to be baptized by John indicates a deliberate decision to align Himself with what John was doing and preaching. John took a radical stand in confronting the religion of his day, exposing the immorality and illegitimacy of such. Everything he said and did was the antithesis of the prevailing religion. Jesus identified with John in his repudiation and confrontation of all religion. Jesus concurred with John’s message of the impending judgment of God upon sin and the Jewish religion. In accord with John, Jesus called for an individual, rather than national, response of repentance. Jesus aligned Himself with John in affirming that the Jewish race and religion did not count for anything spiritual before God, and that there was going to be a new, spiritual Israel. Goppelt remarks that

“Jesus’ coming to John meant the assumption of a direction that was to separate His and, thereby, the Christian understanding of the Old Testament from that of the synagogue.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus presented Himself to be baptized by John in the midst of the crowds who were doing so. He had no sins to confess or repent of, and was in Himself the fulfillment of the overwhelm-

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ing identification they were making in such water baptism. Recognizing the superiority of Jesus over himself, John tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized. Jesus told John to permit His submission to John's baptism to "fulfill all righteousness." This statement has long been pondered by Christian interpreters. Was this a prefiguring of Jesus' identification and solidarity with sinful mankind? Was this a pictorial of His coming death and resurrection necessitated "to fulfill the justice of God?" Later Jesus referred to having an overwhelming "baptism to be baptized with" (Mk 10:38; Lk 12:50), so it might be that the water baptism of John was a prefiguring of the overwhelming of His substitutionary death which "fulfilled all righteousness." As the "Righteous One" (I John 2:1), the fulfillment of all righteousness in Himself, Jesus seems to have been identifying Himself as the One with whom all the people had identified in John's baptism.

God's confirmation of what Jesus and John were doing came in the form of a dove from the heavens. It served as a confirmation to John that Jesus was indeed the Messiah to whom he had been pointing and preparing the way. It served as a confirmation to Jesus that the Holy Spirit was present for the continuing revelation of Himself. Messianic prophecies of God's putting His Spirit upon His Servant (Isa. 42:1; 61:1) seem to have been fulfilled in this action. The voice of God declared, "This is My beloved Son (Ps. 2:7), in Whom I am well-pleased." God is well-pleased only when His own Being and character are actively expressed, and "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6).

Luke gives us the additional detail that Jesus was "about thirty years of age" (Lk. 3:23) when He began His ministry. Born while Herod the Great was still living, probably 4-6 B.C., Jesus must have been baptized by John the Baptist between A.D. 26 and 28.

**Section 27**

**Temptation of Jesus in the Wilderness - Matt. 4:1-11;**

**Mk. 1:12,13; Lk. 4:1-13**

Jesus was “led up by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil.” It was God’s intent that Jesus should be thus tested and tempted. Though God does not tempt anyone with evil intent (James 1:13), He does allow us to be put to the test. God tested Abraham (Gen. 22:1; Heb. 11:17) to see if he were willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac. In the midst of the same circumstance God tests a person to examine and prove whether that person will rely upon Him, and Satan tempts that person soliciting reliance upon his evil energizing. Perfectionistic religion thwarts such when it suggests that “if you are being tempted, you can be sure that you are not right with God.”

What was the purpose of God allowing or orchestrating Jesus’ temptation? Was it so that Jesus could “sympathize with our weaknesses” (Heb. 4:15) and “come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18)? Was it a psychological struggle to test Jesus’ commitment and dedication, as some religious interpreters have suggested? Others have posited that Jesus had to figure out God’s “plan” for His ministry, and adopt a “philosophy of ministry” by setting objectives and a projected operational plan. As God had just confirmed that Jesus was His Son and thus the Messiah, Jesus was probably led into the wilderness to come to terms with His identity and the implications thereof, and to test His understanding of the function of the God-man by being tempted by the devil to function outside of the human receptivity of faith.

Could Jesus have yielded to the temptation of the devil? Could He have sinned? Those who over-emphasize the deity of Jesus posit the doctrine of His impeccability, noting that “God cannot be tempted by evil” (James 1:13). Though Jesus was God, and never less than God, He was functioning as a man, having “emptied Himself” (Phil. 2:7) of the prerogative

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of independent and inherent divine function. It was not as God, but as a man, that Jesus was tempted. W. Ian Thomas explains,

“It is no explanation to suggest that though tempted, the Lord Jesus Christ was not tempted with evil...for the statement ‘yet without sin’ clearly indicates that the nature of the temptation was such that it would have led to sin had it not been resisted. ..Inherent within His willingness to be made man, was the willingness of the Lord Jesus Christ to be made subject to temptation...”<sup>3</sup>

The question still remains whether Jesus was doubly tempted, not only with human appetites and ambitions “in all things as we are” (Heb. 4:15), but also tempted to revert to His inherent divinity in order to resolve the situation, thus opting out of the human receptivity of faith. It does appear that His was a double-edged temptation.

Though the sequence of the temptations differs in Matthew’s and Luke’s account, we shall consider them in the sequence that Matthew presents them.

The first temptation during the forty days in the wilderness was to turn the stones into bread in order to satisfy his physical hunger. Surely this was a temptation to revert to the supernatural power of His inherent divinity and to make a display of such miraculous power for the sake of personal gratification of human appetites, rather than trusting God for His providential care and provision. It was a temptation to self-serving divine power, which is a contradiction of terms. Jesus’ faithfully receptive response is to quote Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,” indicating that He chose to rely on God for not only His physical needs, but for every expression that God wants to make in the man.

The second temptation, according to Matthew, was Satan’s taking Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple (whether physically,

by visual sighting, or by mental imagery we do not know). The devil suggests that Jesus could throw Himself down from the pinnacle, for scripture states that “He will give His angels charge over You; on their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone” (Ps. 91:11,12). The devil can quote scripture with a literalistic interpretation, as he so often does within religion. The temptation seems to have been to engage in sensationalism that would draw crowds of incredulous observers producing immediate popularity and satisfying the personal aspiration of success by a human agenda, without waiting on God to work in accord with His character and success standards. The end does not justify the means, for God’s end can only be achieved by His means. In response to the temptation to presume on God’s power to achieve success, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God,” indicating that presuming on God is not trusting in God.

The third temptation was to seek quick success and high-handed power by selling out to personal reputation and becoming a subordinate king, instead of submitting to God in the painful way of suffering via the cross. External success instead of internal transformation by spiritual exchange is to play into the hands of Satan. Jesus tells the devil to “Get lost,” and quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 saying, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.”

Religion, the devil’s handmaid, offers the same types of temptation today. The temptation to seek supernatural power instead of God’s providential care. The temptation to seek sensational popularity presuming on God’s power for success. The temptation to seek broad external success instead of internal transformation which involves pain and suffering. By Christ’s intercessory sufficiency we can turn away from temptation as He did.

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### Section 28

#### John Explains his Role - John 1:19-28

Having been publicly criticized by John, the religionists from Jerusalem sent a delegatory deputation to ask John, “Who are you?” Religion does not know how to identify a prophet, much less a Messiah, for they have no spiritual understanding and discernment. They were probably hoping to entrap John into claiming to be the Messiah, so they could set about to discredit him.

John disengages their disingenuous ways by immediately denying that he is the Messiah. Since the Jews expected that Elijah would return as a herald of the Messiah in accord with the prophecy of Malachi, “I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5), these religious representative inquire whether he is Elijah. John did not apparently consider himself as such and denies that he is the return of Elijah, but later Jesus seems to indicate that he was such (Matt. 11:14; 17:12; Mk. 9:11). Remembering that Moses said that the Lord would raise up a prophet like him (Deut. 18:15), they ask if John is that prophet. John replied, “No.” John simply identified himself with the prophecy of Isaiah, as “a voice crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’” (Isa. 40:3); just a road-straightener and a path-leveler for the King.

The delegation then asks, “Why, then, are you baptizing?” “If you do not claim to have prophetic and religious authority, what gives you the credentialed right to presume to baptize?” The Jewish religion baptized proselytes as an initiation rite into associate membership in Judaism, and John did not have the right to do so. Not only that, John was calling all persons to be baptized, even Jews and Pharisees who were not regarded to be “unclean” or “sinful.” John explains that he baptizes in water in order to allow people to identify with the Coming One, the Messiah, whose sandal he is unworthy to untie, and who is

presently in their midst, living historically at that time in Palestine.

### **Section 29**

#### **John Introduces Jesus - John 1:29-34**

The next day Jesus approached, and John declared to those present, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” John apparently recognized Jesus as the “suffering servant” of Isaiah 53, who would be “led like a lamb to slaughter” (Isa. 53:7), the sacrificial lamb who would take the collective sin of mankind upon Himself and be victorious over all forms of religion (Rev. 17:14).

John also identifies Jesus as a man superior to himself and preexistent to himself. “After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me” (John 1:30). His introduction and manifestation was my purpose for coming and baptizing, John indicated. God had told John that “He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit,” and John had observed such and was convinced that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah.

### **Section 30**

#### **Jesus Calls the First Disciples - John 1:35-51**

Two of John’s disciples, Andrew and an unnamed disciple (probably John, who foregoes mention of his own name throughout the writing), decide to follow the One that John the Baptist was pointing to. Andrew, in turn, found his brother, Simon, who Jesus renamed Cephas, or Peter, meaning “rock,” indicating his character and the role he would play in the early church.

The next day they went to Galilee and found Philip, who led them to Nathanael, saying, “We have found Him of Whom

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Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph.” Philip was convinced that everything in the entirety of the old covenant literature pointed to Jesus as Messiah, as indeed it does. Nathanael was not yet convinced, and responded with a common snide remark of regional scorn, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Jesus told Nathanael that He saw him under the fig tree before he ever came, and that was enough for Nathanael to call Him, “Son of God” and “King of Israel.” Jesus told Nathanael that he would see “greater things than these; you will see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” This is figurative and metaphorical language that represents the interactive communion between heaven and earth as Jesus serves as the Mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5). Some think there may be a veiled reference to Jacob’s ladder scene (Gen. 28:12), representing the assurance of God’s activity. This is also the first occasion of Jesus using the self-designation of the “Son of Man” whereby Jesus is identified with humanity, but also with the prophecy of Daniel which states that “One like a Son of Man is coming, that all men might serve Him in an everlasting kingdom” (Dan. 7:13,14).

### Section 31

#### **The Miracle of Turning Water into Wine - John 2:1-11**

In Cana of Galilee, about four miles northeast of Nazareth, Jesus and His disciples (about six of them) are invited to a wedding, probably beginning on a Wednesday, as was the custom. In the midst of the wedding celebration which lasted for several days, the hosts ran out of wine, whether by negligence of poor planning, the poverty of the host family, or the additional guests, we are not told.

Jesus supernaturally made wine out of water. In this, His first miracle, He confronts and exposes Jewish religion. He took the old clay water-pots of legalistic cleansing and purifica-

tion in the Jewish religion, and puts into them the celebratory “bubbly” wine that represents the dynamic, living and active life of God in Himself. The symbolism is that the new covenant wine of His own life, full of joy and blessing, replaces the old dirty water of the purification vats of religion. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels” (II Cor. 4:7), writes Paul. The wine provided in Christ is superior to that which was before, and is provided in abundance (John 10:10). John calls this “the beginning of Jesus’ signs,” or actions which signify spiritual realities.

Some religious interpretations try to explain that this was not real wine, but just diluted grape juice, based on their legalistic assumptions about abstinence. Others would fault Jesus for engaging in social merrymaking and levity, condescending to engage in mirth. Religious legalism and discontent keep many from enjoying the joy of the Lord.

### **Section 32**

#### **Jesus Goes to Capernaum - John 2:12**

Along with His mother, brothers, and disciples, Jesus goes to Capernaum, situated on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. There is no reason to deny that the “brothers” who accompanied Him were the half-brothers of Jesus, children of the union of Joseph and Mary after Jesus was born.

Capernaum, where they stayed for a few days, might have been like a tropical resort, for the Sea of Galilee was below sea-level and usually warm and balmy. It was located on the main road between Damascus and Jerusalem, and would be a convenient place to join the “caravan” that would be headed to Jerusalem for the coming Jewish Passover, which is what Jesus and His followers apparently did.

## Jesus Confronts Religion

### Section 33

#### Cleansing the Temple in Jerusalem - John 2:13-22

Jesus engages in a direct confrontation with the Judaic religion in the early part of His ministry by challenging the corrupt religious practices in the temple. He apparently did so near the conclusion of His ministry also (Matt. 21:12; Mk. 11:15-17; Lk. 19:45). Some have seen in these occurrences a fulfillment of Malachi 3:1-4 where the prophet indicates that “the Lord will come to His temple, the messenger of the covenant. Who can endure the day of His coming? He is like a refiner’s fire and fullers’ soap. He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them...so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.” Jesus certainly came as a refiner and a purifier of the religious practices He observed in the temple in Jerusalem.

Under the management of Annas, the *de facto* high priest, there was an elaborate system of graft, kickbacks, extortion and economic corruption. The priests were skimming from the exorbitant profits of the money-changers and animal merchants. These priests served Mammon rather than God. They engaged in economic exploitation of the people’s religious devotion and piety. The temple courts served as a bizarre bazaar that was an abomination of the place that represented the presence and worship of God.

Jesus wove together a whip out of some rope, and drove out the animals and the money-changers. Many of the Jewish population would probably have applauded Jesus as a champion of justice, for they knew the whole system was corrupt and hated the situation; but not until A.D. 67 did popular indignation force the end to such. Jesus’ disciples thought of Psalm 69:9 where David wrote, “Zeal for Thy house will consume me,” and thought that it certainly applied to Jesus.

The Jewish leaders, knowing their guilt, hypocritically ask Jesus for some miraculous attestation of His authority to clean house like this. “Prove that you are the Messiah by perform-

ing a miracle,” they say. “Miracles on demand will document God,” is a typical religious thesis – that because their God is no bigger than magical stunts! Religion is always concerned with authority structures and supernatural attestation, desiring sensational demonstrations rather than waiting for God to work out His activity in His way.

Jesus explained that He could attest to His authority to thus refine and purify. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” He asserted. The Jewish religionists, in their literalistic obtuseness, and always concerned with physicality rather than spiritual things, could not figure out how their magnificent Herodian temple, which required forty-six years to construct, could be razed and raised up from destruction in just three days. But they knew that temple desecration was a capital offense, and later would use these very words as an accusation of “intent to destroy” the temple at Jesus’ trial, when they misquoted Jesus’ words and argued that Jesus said, “I will destroy” (Mk. 14:58), or “I am able to destroy” (Matt. 26:61) this temple, charging Him with seditious, conspiratorial “intent to destroy.” John explains that Jesus was speaking figuratively and metaphorically of the temple of His body, the holy place of the Holy One, which after three days in death would be raised up in resurrection life.

The religious leaders wanted supernatural attestation of His authority, and such was forthcoming in God’s due time in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, when He “was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). Eschewing the sensational supernaturalism that religion desires, and the inordinate physicality of religion, Jesus knew the spiritual end for which He came. Religion seems to be inevitably corrupt, greedy, full of political graft and self-aggrandizement, unconcerned with the good of the people or the worship of God, and more concerned with physical structures. The dynamic of Jesus’ life and character will always seek to wipe such out!

## Jesus Confronts Religion

Henceforth, Jesus and His disciples were *persona non grata* to the religious authorities in Jerusalem. They were on the “suspect” list as a roving band of possible revolutionaries who could upset the political and religious *status quo*, and were on the verge of being “wanted men,” fugitives on the run.

### Section 34

#### Nicodemus Needs New Birth - John 2:23 – 3:21

Jesus went on to perform additional “signs” in Jerusalem (not to prove to the priests who He was, but to show God at work), and many believed that He was the Messiah because they saw something supernatural. But Jesus knew their hearts and their motives, and knew that they could not yet be receptive in faith to the redemptive activity of God whereby His very presence could come into them by His Spirit. Theirs was a reactive impulse and emotional high. Religion traffics in such responses and regards them as legitimate faith! “If it is supernatural, it must be of God,” they reason. Such is not the case, for such supernaturalism may be a satanic exhibition of religion. Belief based on seeing supernatural phenomena is precarious and usually spurious, for it is too easy for men to be duped and deceived by magical manipulations.

So, when Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, Jesus explained that each individual needs a spiritual regeneration, not just an awe of God’s power or a sympathy with God’s plan – not just a mental recognition, emotional reaction or volitional commitment.

Nicodemus came as an individual, not as an envoy of religious leadership. It is likely that his real interest, despite his opening pleasantries and accolades, was to ascertain whether Jesus was going to establish the Messianic kingdom, and if so when and in what manner. This seems evident from the fact that Jesus immediately addresses the subject of the “kingdom of God” and the basis for participation in such. Nicodemus

probably shared the contemporary expectation of Jewish religion for a restoration of God's reign, but the parameters in which Nicodemus understood and expected the "kingdom" were antithetical to that which Jesus explained. Nicodemus thought of the kingdom in terms of a physical and visible realm, whereas Jesus referred to the kingdom in terms of the spiritual and invisible reign of God. Nicodemus thought of the kingdom in terms of "establishing" an entity, whereas Jesus referred to the kingdom in terms of "entering" into spiritual reality. Jesus' perspective of the "kingdom" was a confrontation to all religious concepts of the "kingdom" involving physicality, geographical location and place, a material capital, throne, temple and tangible sacrifices, organizational structure, and the extent and duration of space/time measurement. The kingdom of God brought into being in Jesus Christ has nothing to do with such, contrary to all religious thinking down through the centuries.

Jesus told Nicodemus that the spiritual kingdom required a spiritual birth in order to enter into the participation thereof. Nicodemus naturally reverted to physical thinking of human obstetrics and returning into his mother's womb. Like a typical religionist, he thought in literalistic concepts, failing to understand spiritual metaphors of illustrative language. Jesus contrasted physical birth and spiritual birth, being born of the flesh and being born of the Spirit. Religious interpretations which take the reference to being "born of water" as a reference to the rite of water baptism are employing the same type of physical and material understanding evidenced in Nicodemus, and usually view such a baptismal rite as initiation into their "kingdom" of an ecclesiastical institution.

To attempt to explain this spiritual mystery of spiritual new birth, Jesus used the mystery of the wind – we do not know where it comes from or where it goes, but we see the obvious effects. The Greek word for "Spirit" and "wind," *pneuma*, is the same, so this was a natural connection. Being a typi-

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cal teacher of religion, failing to understand spiritual things, Nicodemus asked, “How can these things be?” No amount of illustrating with earthly analogies is going to cause such people to see spiritual and heavenly realities. Revelation is caught, not taught! As no man has ascended into heaven to figure out spiritual realities, they can only be revealed by the One who has descended from heaven, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. The essence of religion is the continued attempt to ascend into the heavenly knowledge of God, but the Christian gospel is anti-theological to all religion as the descent of God in His Son, Jesus Christ. French author, Jacques Ellul notes that

“The opposition between religion and revelation can really be understood quite simply. We can reduce it to a maxim: religion goes up, revelation comes down.”<sup>4</sup>

“The central fact of the revelation of Jesus Christ, is that God descends to humankind. Never in any way, under any circumstances can we ascend to God, howsoever slightly.”<sup>5</sup>

In similarity to Moses’ lifting up of the bronze serpent (Numb. 21:9) after God’s judgment of fiery serpents, to which men could look in repentance of their sin, so Jesus is the One all men must look to for repentance and genuine forgiveness of sins. The spiritual realities of eternal life and participation in the kingdom are made available when Jesus is “lifted up” on the cross, raised in resurrection and in ascension to the spiritual throne of God’s spiritual kingdom.

Verses 16-21 seem to be John’s synopsis of Jesus’ discourse with Nicodemus. God’s grace in His Son, Jesus Christ, received by personal faith, is the basis of eternal life participation in the spiritual kingdom. Jesus did not come to do a bang-up job of judgment by physical destruction, but that the world of mankind might be made safe spiritually from spiritual usurpation and dysfunction. The judgment of God comes in the

failure of an individual to receive Jesus Christ. The religion of Jesus' day engaged in evil, loved the darkness, did not want their wicked deeds exposed, and hated the light of God in Jesus Christ. Religion continues to do so for their deeds are derived from the diabolic source, whereas those who come to Jesus as their light and life, find their deeds being manifested as having been wrought in God.

### **Section 35**

#### **John Explains Jesus to his Disciples - John 3:22-36**

Jesus took His disciples out of Jerusalem into the surrounding area of Judea, where John the Baptist was also preaching and baptizing. Two of the severest critics of religion were teaching in the same general location. Some of John's disciples seem to have been jealous that Jesus was drawing crowds away from John. John humbly and self-effacingly explained to them that if this was what God was doing, so be it. John recognized that he was not the Messiah, but merely a forerunner, a friend of the bridegroom who rejoices at the joy of the bridegroom. The supremacy of the ministry of the Messiah is God's will, John pointed out. "He must increase; I must decrease."

Again, verses 31-36 seem to be the synopsis that John, the writer of the gospel-record, makes of the words of John the Baptist. Jesus comes from heaven and bears witness of God by investing and laying down His life. He speaks the words of God and gives the Spirit without measure. This is contrasted to religion which is always calculating measured activities of the Holy Spirit, failing to understand that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and comes to us unmeasured, undivided, and not in part or percentage. The Christian is "complete in Christ" (Col. 2:10), having received all things in Christ (I Cor. 3:20-23). By the receptivity of faith we come into spiritual union with the Spirit of Christ, participating in His eternal life and kingdom. "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things

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into His hand” (John 3:35), implying that all of God’s activity is Christocentric and Christo-ontologically dynamic, a reality which most of “Christian religion” fails to understand.

### **Section 36**

**Jesus Goes to Galilee - Matt. 4:12; Mk. 1:14; Lk. 3:19,20;  
Jn. 4:1-4**

“Divide and conquer” is one of religion’s methodologies, and the Jewish religionists seem to have employed it successfully in conspiring to create dissension between the followers of Jesus and John the Baptist. That is not the reason Jesus chose to move on into Galilee, however. John the Baptist, who always called sin “sin,” had denounced the sin of Herod Antipas for having put away his wife, the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia, and taken the daughter of his half-brother, Aristobulus, who was already the wife of his other half-brother, Philip, to be his own wife. Her name was Herodias, and she was furious with these revelations of incest and adultery, so she conspired to have John arrested and imprisoned in the dungeon of Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea. Jesus decided to go north through Samaria and into Galilee.

### **Section 37**

**The Woman at the Well in Samaria - John 4:5-42**

The region of Samaria was located between Judea and Galilee. The Samaritan people were regarded as half-breeds, having intermarried with Gentiles in the seventh and eighth centuries B.C. when the northern kingdom was carried into exile. Within this region was the well originally dug by Jacob (Gen. 33:18,19; 48:22), about a mile south of the city of Sychar, and close to Mt. Gerizim, the mount on which the Samaritans had built their temple about 400 B.C., having been ostracized by the Jews from the temple in Jerusalem. That temple was

destroyed by John Hyrcanus in the second century B.C., and was probably in ruins on the top of the hill when Jesus came through the area.

In His confrontation of religion, Jesus repeatedly broke the rules of religious tradition. In this case He conversed with a woman of mixed race which was regarded as “unclean” by the Jewish religion. Jesus was not concerned with religious traditions, approval or prestige. He was concerned about people, regardless of race, sex, economic status, marital status, etc. This woman was immoral and despised by those around her as an outcast; regarded as “lowly” in the social scale. Jesus came for such as her. He came to bring all races, nations and genders into one new humanity in Himself (cf. Eph. 2:15). Religion traditionally engages in ethnic separation and racial segregation. Case in point: the most racially segregated time in the United States is on Sunday morning when the most people are participating in their religion.

When Jesus spoke of “living water” (cf. Jere. 2:13; Zech. 14:8), the Samaritan woman could not understand that He was referring to spiritual realities within Himself. Her religious background of veneration of Jacob, caused her to doubt that Jesus could be greater than Jacob, at whose well they stood. The spiritual water of life in Jesus Christ is far superior to the physical water provided by the patriarch, Jacob, in the old covenant religion.

Jesus asked her to call her husband to the well, perhaps for the sake of propriety, and she honestly said that she did not have a husband. The Spirit of God apparently revealed to Jesus that she had five previous husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband. When Jesus noted such, she perceived that He was a prophet and tried to turn the conversation into a theological discussion. It is always easier to discuss theology than reality. Religion has long argued about places of worship, styles of worship, orders of worship, etc. Jesus said, “God is Spirit, worship Him in spirit and in truth,” which is to

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say, “You can only worship God through Me.” As the “living water” of “eternal life” in the spiritual kingdom, Jesus is intrinsic to all true worship, for such must be Christocentric worship.

The Samaritan woman mentioned her expectation of the coming Messiah, and Jesus responded, “I am He.” She ran to tell the town-folk in Sychar, who returned with her to the well and subsequently invited Jesus and His disciples to stay with them, and during such time many believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Though it was yet four months until the physical harvest, Jesus saw the fields ripe for spiritual harvest.

### **Section 38**

#### **Jesus Returns to Galilee - John 4:43-45**

Continuing on to His home region of Galilee, Jesus was received as a favored-son, for the Galileans had heard of what He had done in Jerusalem when He cleansed the temple of the merchandisers. His reputation had preceded Him, but Jesus knew the popularity would not last long.

## Chapter Four

# Jesus in His Home Territory

Continuing north from Samaria, Jesus and His six disciples traveled to Galilee, Jesus' home territory. Galilee was removed from the intense and exclusivistic religious environment of Judea and Jerusalem. Since Samaria was located between Judea and Galilee, the religious leadership from Jerusalem had to travel through Samaria and encounter the uncleanness of the half-breeds, or go around Samaria and travel up the Jordan valley in order to reach Galilee. Galilee was another political region with an entirely different governmental structure. Whereas Judea had a Roman governor or procurator, Galilee still had one of the sons of Herod the Great, Antipas, ruling the region. This made it more difficult for the religious leaders of Jerusalem to exercise their "connections" with the political leaders like they did in Judea, calling for "political favors" and threatening to disrupt the peace if they did not get such. The religious pressure was not as intense, and it was a safer place for Jesus to teach and minister.

Galilee was far more diverse and disparate. Whereas Judea was almost exclusively populated with Jews, Galilee had more of a mixture of races and religion. Jesus grew up in this social environment, even though His religious training would have taught Him isolationism and separatism. The region of Galilee had such an admixture of different peoples that it was often referred to as "Galilee of the Gentiles," and regarded by the self-enlightened religionists of Judea as a place of "dark-

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ness.” Part of that designation was due to the region’s population being primarily employed as tradesmen or farmers, and those near the Sea of Galilee as fishermen, all of whom were regarded as lacking an elite religious and intellectual education. Jesus came as the “Son of Man” identified with all humanity universally, regardless of race, gender, economic status, educational privilege, etc., so the varieties of peoples in Galilee was conducive to His ministry.

### **Section 39**

#### **Preaching the Kingdom in Galilee - Matt. 4:17;**

**Mk. 1:14,15; Lk. 4:14,15**

John the Baptist had been apprehended by Herod Antipas, at the instigation of his wife, Herodias, for denouncing the adulterous and incestuous relationship of the two. John was taken down to the east side of the Dead Sea in the region of Perea which Antipas ruled, and incarcerated in the prison at Macheaerus. Apparently his followers had some access to visit him there, as they later came asking questions of Jesus on John’s behalf (Matt. 11:2-6).

After hearing that John had been taken into custody, Jesus went through Samaria, stayed a couple of days in Sychar, and proceeded north to the region of Galilee. His reputation for having confronted the religious corruption in the temple at Jerusalem preceded Him, and there was great anticipation for what He would say and do.

Jesus came “in the power of the Spirit,” doing what He did by the dynamic empowering of the Spirit of God functioning in and through His humanity. He was teaching in the synagogues of Galilee and “preaching the gospel of God.” Since the gospel of God is entirely embodied in the Person and work of Jesus, we must not apply a religious interpretation that makes the gospel into a corpus of information and doctrine that can be taught and assented to intellectually. To “believe in the gospel”

is to be receptive and open to all that He can and will do, for He is the “good news.”

Jesus’ message to the Galileans was, “Repent, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” The people needed a “change of mind that led to a change of action,” but inherent in Jesus was the empowering to effect such a change in behavioral expression. The “time” anticipated by all of the old covenant prophets, the time of radical newness, the time of the Messiah, the time when the kingdom of God would come, the time when mankind would be restored in relationship with God, the time when all religion would be confronted by God’s reality in His Son was fulfilled and continues to be fulfilled in the activity of Jesus Christ. The “fulness of time” (Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10), the “proper time” (I Tim. 2:6; Titus 1:3) was fulfilled. The kingdom of God wherein God in Christ actively reigns in the lives of His people came into being by Jesus’ incarnational advent, redemptive action, and resurrection victory. It was not the concept of the kingdom that the Jewish religion of His day was expecting, nor the kingdom that religion today is still trying to reconstruct or waiting for futuristically, but it was the kingdom God promised nevertheless. Jesus ushered in the final and eternal kingdom of God.

### **Section 40**

#### **Healing a Royal Official’s Son at Capernaum - John 4:46-54**

Returning to Cana where He had turned water into wine, Jesus encountered a royal official who probably served under Herod Antipas. The official’s son, located in Capernaum, was deathly ill, and the official requested that Jesus might go to Capernaum and heal him, having heard of His ability to do so.

Jesus was very cautious about being manipulated by man to perform miracles on demand. Religious methodology may be quick to do so, but Jesus was always cognizant of the greater

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spiritual need of mankind, and knew that He had not come simply to be a “miracle-worker”. “Signs and wonders” do not necessarily lead people to receive what Jesus has come to make available in Himself. They can become an idolatrous object of concern in themselves.

The anguishing petition of the official in entreating Jesus to, “Come before my child dies,” evidenced his desperate heart and his hope in Who Jesus was and what Jesus could do. Responding with compassion, Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your son lives.” Here was an opportunity of trusting faith. The official had requested Jesus to “come,” and Jesus commanded him to “go.” Did he have faith that Jesus could act “at a distance”? Apparently he did, for he started off immediately on the twenty mile trek down to Capernaum. On the journey home he was met by some of his slaves who were coming to report that the child was relieved of the fever, and he ascertained that the timing corresponded with the very hour when Jesus had said, “Your son lives.”

### **Section 41**

#### **Rejection at the Synagogue in Nazareth - Lk. 4:16-30**

Returning to His hometown, Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, and was apparently invited by the elders to read and expound the lesson from the prophets, which always followed the lesson from the Law. When the scroll was handed to Him, Jesus read from Isaiah 61, verses one and two. His subsequent exposition of the text explained that the fulfillment of that prophecy was present in their midst, inherent in Himself.

“Today this is realized in Me,” Jesus explained. “This is the day that the Lord has promised and prophesied, the day of the Lord, the day of salvation, the Messianic day, the last days, the favorable year of the Lord, the year of Jubilee;” all of these concepts may be included in what Jesus was declaring. This is not the “someday” promises of religion, but a realization of the

fulfillment of all God's promises in His Son. "It has come true today!"

With a clearly defined Messianic consciousness, Jesus was aware that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him and He had been Messianically anointed to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the downtrodden, all within Himself. Beyond the handouts of religion, the poor may have spiritual riches in Christ (Eph. 1:18; 3:8,16). Those "held captive by the devil" (II Tim. 2:16), captivated and bound by religion, are released from that prison in Christ. Those "blinded by the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4) can see the spiritual reality of God in Jesus Christ. The downtrodden, the disadvantaged, the oppressed, whether economically, politically or religiously, can be liberated by Christ and find real freedom to be all they were meant to be spiritually and behaviorally. Such is the real spiritual fulfillment of the prefiguring of the Year of Jubilee in the old covenant, when the oppressed were set free. Religion often seeks temporal deliverance, just as the Jewish religion of Jesus' day sought deliverance from Roman oppression. Since that time religion has continued to advocate deliverance from economic, political and social oppression, from ideological captivation, and from physical and psychological illness. But Jesus came, first and foremost, for the spiritual deliverance of mankind.

When Jesus sat down after reading from the scroll there was rapt attention on the part of the synagogue audience. They awaited His interpretation of the text, and were amazed at what He said, giving witness to their admiration. They wanted to believe that the promises were fulfilled and their hopes were to be realized, but then the doubts began to set in concerning whether this hometown boy, the son of Joseph the carpenter, was being too arrogant and audacious in claiming that the prophecy was being fulfilled in Himself. Their initial good impression turned to skepticism.

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Jesus “read” the audience, detected their skeptical thoughts, and posited that they were probably thinking, “Physician, heal yourself.” “Instead of claiming to be the Physician that heals all the ills of mankind, perhaps you ought to heal your own psychological delusions,” may have been their thoughts. Such skepticism would also have sought spectacular verification of His supernatural ability, as they had heard reported from Capernaum. Jesus does not cater to such religious skepticism with its requests for external verification.

Citing the adage that “a prophet is never welcomed or accepted in his hometown,” Jesus proceeds to illustrate that the prophets Elijah and Elisha both went beyond their own peoples. Elijah went to Zarephath, the widow in the land of Sidon (I Kings 17). Elisha cleansed Naaman, the Syrian leper (II Kings 5). If Nazareth would not receive Him for who He was, Jesus would also go to the Gentiles and allow the Nazarene religionists to atrophy in their own exclusivism and narrow-minded regionalism, rejecting the universal spiritual deliverance in Himself.

Having been summarily dismissed for their unbelief, the Nazarene synagogue attendees turned hostile. Anger and murderous intent are typical defenses of religion when their identity, ideology and power is threatened. Religionists revert to vengeance, terrorism, “holy war.” While they hoped to shove Him off the precipice in a mob action of murder without any individual guilt, Jesus forestalled such and departed.

### **Section 42**

#### **Residing in Capernaum - Matt. 4:13-16**

Moving even farther north away from Jerusalem and Nazareth, Jesus took up primary residence in the seaside resort of Capernaum. The name of the city means “Nahum’s village,” and it has been conjectured that the prophet Nahum was buried at this location. Capernaum was both a farming and a fishing

community, located strategically on the main route between Damascus and Jerusalem. It probably had an even more diverse and mixed population, including many Gentiles, than did Nazareth.

Matthew explains that Jesus' establishment of His headquarters in Capernaum was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that in "Galilee of the Gentiles" located "toward the sea" in the former areas of Naphtali and Zebulun, there would "spring up a great light" among those "who sat in darkness and the shadow of death" (Isa. 8:23; 9:1,2). Jesus came as "the light of the world" (John 8:12), bringing spiritual light and life to all men including Gentiles, who would remain in spiritual darkness (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13) languishing in the "shadow of death" (Heb. 2:15) apart from His Messianic and mediatorial action on their behalf.

### **Section 43**

#### **Four Fishermen Called to Follow - Matt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:1-11**

The six disciples who were following Jesus earlier, Andrew and Peter, James and John, Philip and Nathaniel, had apparently returned to their families and vocations while Jesus was ministering throughout Galilee. Now, having settled into residence at Capernaum, Jesus encountered four of them again. These two sets of brothers, Andrew and Peter, James and John, were fishing partners on the Sea of Galilee and were preparing their nets after a long night of unsuccessful fishing. As the crowd of curious listeners pressed upon Him, Jesus stepped into one of Simon's boats, asked him to shove offshore a short distance, and there taught the growing gathering of people from the pulpit of the boat.

Then Jesus instructed Simon Peter to, "Put out into the deep water and drop your nets for the catch." Though exhausted from a night of fishing, Peter did as he was told and caught so

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many fish that the nets were tearing and he had to summon his partners from the shore to come and assist. The haul was such that it almost caused both boats to sink. Responding to such, Peter fell at Jesus' knees confessing his sinfulness for he knew he was in the presence of the Lord.

Jesus called the four fishermen, saying, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men who will catch men alive in numbers beyond what you can imagine." They left the fishing business, surrendering any preoccupation with physical possessions and pursuits which can so easily become idolatrous, and cast their lot in following Jesus. Whereas religion places a "call" upon men to respond to the "need" of their "cause," or to follow the precepts, principles or procedures of their teaching system, Jesus simply invites men to follow Him. Ontological involvement with the Person of Jesus Christ is the essence of Christianity, in contrast to all religion. Christians are not called to follow a religious program or agenda, or to attach themselves to a belief-system or morality-system, but are invited to identify with Jesus Christ and to derive all from Him.

### **Section 44**

#### **Man with Unclean Spirit Healed on Sabbath - Mk. 1:21-28; Lk. 4:31-37**

On the Sabbath Jesus went to the synagogue in Capernaum and was apparently asked to teach by the presiding elders. The manner of His teaching caused the audience to be filled with astonishment and wonder, for "He taught as one having authority, not as the scribes." Religious teachers often drone on monotonously, quoting the opinions of so-called scholars who have preceded them. Such religious teaching does not bear the dynamic of God's life; it is dead, dull and depressive. On the other hand, it is possible for religious teachers to assert a self-appointed authority over their listeners, claiming to have all truths figured out and dogmatically affirming the veracity

of their teaching and the moral obligation of those who hear to respond. They are often aware that their audience is comprised of passive followers who do not think for themselves. The authority of Jesus' teaching, though, was the authority of God making known spiritual realities. The synagogue audience recognized that such teaching was very different from their typical religious fare, for it spoke to their spiritual needs and hunger.

Suddenly in the midst of the synagogue session a man possessed of a demon became the vehicle of that evil spirit's verbal outburst. As "the whole world lies in the evil one" (I John 5:19), and many of those within his subtly disguised religious realm, the diabolic agencies hate to have their duped and deceived religious adherents hearing the Truth of spiritual realities in Christ. The demon yelled from the man, "What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know you are the Holy One of God." The demon had a supernatural knowledge of the identity of Jesus and announced such (cf. Matt. 8:29; Lk. 4:41). In response, Jesus did not employ any religious sleight-of-hand or any magical incantations of exorcism techniques, but simply rebuked the demonic spirit and ordered him to come out of the man.

Jesus had entered Satan's house, as it were, and because He was Who He was He could bind the diabolic strong man and spoil his house (cf. Mk. 3:27). The demon threw the victimized man to the ground, screeched a bloodcurdling scream, and departed from the man. The audience was now even more amazed that Jesus had the authority to command evil spirits, questioning, "What is this teaching, this word, this expression of God, that has power over demons?" Few of those who heard and saw Jesus seem to have understood that He was teaching of Himself in everything He said and did. His miracles and exorcisms were not crowd-drawing spectacularism, but the visible expression of His identity as the spiritual reality of God.

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### Section 45

#### **Peter's Mother-in-law and Others Healed - Matt. 8:14-17; Mk. 1:29-34; Lk. 4:38-41**

Leaving the synagogue, Jesus and the four fishermen disciples He had called, went to the local home of Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a fever, whereupon Jesus touched her, relieved her of her illness, and she immediately got up and served them.

Meanwhile the rumor-mill was spreading the word of Jesus' miracles and public exorcism in the synagogue meeting. As sunset was the completion of the Sabbath day, many were soon thereafter at the door of Simon's house seeking physical healing and relief from demonic oppression. Having compassion upon their suffering, Jesus healed their diseases and called the demons out of them. Many of the demons had supernatural knowledge that Jesus was the Son of God, but Jesus rebuked them and forbade them to reveal such, for their testimony would not serve His purposes. Only that which is derived from God can bring glory to God, and the statements of these demons were not derived from God.

Matthew explains that the healings and exorcisms in Capernaum were a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. In the distinctly Messianic prophecy of the Suffering Servant, Isaiah speaks for God saying, "He took our infirmities and carried away our diseases" (Isa. 53:40). Matthew saw that take place physically in Capernaum, though the spiritual healing of the painful consequences of sin was also inherent in what Isaiah prophesied.

## **Section 46**

### **Preaching in the Synagogues of Galilee - Matt. 4:23-25;**

**Mk. 1:35-39; Lk. 4:42-44**

The morning after the Sabbath, Jesus arose before daybreak and sought out a solitary place to pray, evidencing his human dependence upon the function of God in the man. Simon and the other disciples, discovering that Jesus had departed, went out to hunt Him down, noting that there was a miracle-seeking multitude searching for Him.

At the height of popularity, when religion would have seized the moment to cash-in on it and receive the glory of men, Jesus determined that He should go to other locations to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God. Jesus knew that He had not come as a temporal miracle-worker, but to reveal the good news of the kingdom of God in Himself. The supernatural sensationalism would later cause some of the Jewish people to try to impose upon Jesus their misguided interpretations of a material and militaristic kingdom, but Jesus knew that the kingdom He came to usher in was not “of this world” (John 18:36), but was the spiritual reign of His life and being in the lives of receptive persons identified with Him.

Along with the four fishermen disciples, Jesus began to preach the gospel of the kingdom throughout Galilee. Again, He drew great crowds from as far away as Judea and beyond the Jordan River, often seeking physical healing and release from demonic activity.

## **Section 47**

### **A Leper Healed and the News Spreads - Matt. 8:2-4;**

**Mk. 1:40-45; Lk. 5:12-16**

While in an unknown city of Galilee a leper sought out Jesus and fell on his face before Him saying, “If you so will, You can make me clean.” Leprosy was a particularly loath-

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some disease that rotted the tissues of the body. The Jewish religion of the time regarded leprosy as divine punishment for grotesque sins. A leper was ostracized from society, could not enter into any walled city, and when any other person came near him was required to yell, “Unclean! Unclean!” This man was daringly audacious to approach Jesus requesting cleansing. Equally contrary to the social and religious traditions, Jesus put forth His hand to touch the leper and declared him cleansed of his leprosy. The leper would still have to go through the ceremonial cleansing of a Jewish priest in order to be duly declared “clean” and socially acceptable, and Jesus encouraged him to do so, asking him not to explain how he was healed of the leprosy. The man was incapable of understanding that the Messianic mediator between God and man had cured his physical disease – the One Who was within Himself the remedy for all the maladies of man and the spiritual restoration of divine health and life. The proclamation of another physical healing, especially of leprosy, brought increased popularity that centered on external application rather than on Who Jesus was and what He was to do in Himself.

Jesus’ request for silence and secrecy was not honored by the cleansed leper, for he was probably so excited that he couldn’t keep quiet. Though we can understand his enthusiastic joy, his disobedience led to the crushing influx of crowds seeking external relief of their physical symptoms from Jesus, and He chose to withdraw into the unpopulated desert regions, probably on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, to avoid the crowds and to pray.

### Section 48

**Paralytic Lowered through Roof and Healed - Matt. 9:1-8;  
Mk. 2:1-12; Lk. 5:17-26**

Returning to Capernaum by boat sometime later, Jesus was apparently again in the house of Peter and the rumors spread

quickly that Jesus was back in town. In the midst of teaching the many inquirers who crowded into the house and courtyard each day, including some religious “doctors of the Law” and Pharisees who came to check out this phenomenon, four enterprising young men brought a man who was paralyzed in order that he might be healed by Jesus. Unable to push through the crowd with the pallet bearing the paralyzed man, they ascended the external steps to the roof of the house and proceeded to take off the roof tiles in order to lower the pallet right into the presence of Jesus.

Seeing their belief in His ability to provide remedial relief to the physical condition of this paralyzed man, Jesus declared, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Jesus knew that the organized opposition of the religionists was present, hoping to pin Him down with false teaching and violation of religious law. In the thought of Jewish religion, sickness and disease was viewed as a consequence and punishment for sin. If sickness was to be cured the causal sin would have to be forgiven first, and that only through their intermediary religious and priestly endeavors on behalf of God. It always serves the purpose of religion to keep people paralyzed in guilt about their sinfulness whenever they experience sickness, for such keeps religious people in the repetitive performance of turning to and giving to the religious system which is seen as the instrument for their forgiveness of sins. Religion perpetuates such a “self-sustaining system of penitential achievement and forgiveness”.<sup>1</sup>

Sin can indeed be the cause of sickness, both naturally and supernaturally, but all sickness is not always to be identified as the result of individual sin in a direct cause and effect premise. Religion falsely presumes to assume the prerogative of representing God in the forgiveness of sins. Jesus was acting in accord with their religious and theological premises by first forgiving the man’s sin, but in so doing He ran into conflict with their presuppositions about who could represent God in such. The religionists were correct in their premise that “only

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God can forgive sin,” but they were incorrect in charging Jesus with blasphemy, for by their own admission they did not know Who this was that was speaking, having no understanding or willingness to understand that He was the Messianic, mediatorial God-man.

Perceiving the hypocritical evil in the hearts of the religious leaders as they suspected Him of blasphemy, Jesus asked a question that placed them on the horns of a dilemma. “Which is easier,” He inquired, “To say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to exercise the power of God and heal this man of his paralysis?” In essence Jesus was saying that since they did not represent God, they could do neither of them. Then, in order to document that He, the Son of Man who had come to enact the everlasting kingdom (Dan. 7:13,14) of God, did indeed exercise the power of God, Jesus told the paralyzed man to “get up, take the pallet he was laying on, and walk out.” The invisible reality of God’s power expressed in verbalizing the declaration, “Your sins are forgiven,” was then visibly documented in the healing of his physical paralysis, evidencing the power of God at work in the Person of Jesus. The issue of this confrontation with religion was whether Jesus was blasphemously claiming to be God by forgiving sin as the religionists surmised, or whether He indeed was God evidencing such divine authority by visible physical healing and invisible spiritual healing of sin. God’s Person and power was not separated way up in heaven somewhere to be administrated by the religionists, but was inherent in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

The people who observed what Jesus did that day were convinced that they had seen God at work. Though filled with fear of the awesomeness of God, they praised God that He had expressed such power among men.

**Section 49**

**Matthew Called to Follow - Matt. 9:9; Mk. 2:13,14;  
Lk. 5:27,28**

Walking along the seashore must have been a relaxing respite for Jesus since He was so often crowded by onlookers and seekers. Even so, a large following developed and Jesus taught them until he met Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at his tollbooth. As many in this region of mixed races and religion had both a Hebrew name and a Greek name, he might have had a dual name of Levi Matthew, and it is the latter of these by which he is more popularly known and identified elsewhere. Levi was a Jew who was employed by the Roman government to collect tolls, tariffs and custom taxes, and was referred to as a “publican,” for he engaged in such public duty. Since Capernaum was on the primary trade route from Damascus, Levi would have been collecting highway tolls for using the road, import and export taxes on merchandise traveling in either direction, farm taxes, fishing taxes, along with fees and taxes on almost any other objects and activities that he and his superiors could think of taxing. His position allowed for much abuse and graft, embezzlement and extortion. It is not difficult to see why first-century Jewish patriotism regarded tax-collectors as collaborators with the oppressive occupying power of Rome. They were regarded as traitors who had sold out to the enemy of God for mercenary motives. There was an intense hatred for these legalized criminals who seemed to have “a license to steal.” Pharisaic tradition regarded them as morally unclean and unacceptable, to be ostracized as outcasts in the same category as harlots, thieves, gamblers and common criminals, allowing for no association without contamination and moral pollution.

Without respect for religious and cultural traditions, Jesus came to make Himself available to all mankind regardless of their race, nationality, sex, morals, vocation, economic class or

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other concerns. Jesus does not seem to have shared the narrow patriotic attitudes of the Zealots of His day, who regarded paying taxes to Rome as an unfair imposition. He did not engage in the pretensions of religious and social respectability which would ostracize the civil servant employed by Rome. He invited Matthew to become His disciple, saying, “Follow Me.” Again we must note the ontological basis of identification with the very Person and Being of Jesus in contrast to religious solicitations to follow after and identify with a *cause celebre* based on a particular ideology. Matthew followed Jesus and became true to his name which means “gift of God.”

### Section 50

#### **Matthew’s Feast - Matt. 9:10-13; Mk. 2:15-17; Lk. 5:29-32**

Sometime afterwards Matthew arranged for a great feast to be held in his house, inviting his former publican associates to sit down and eat with Jesus and His disciples. The Pharisees and their scribes, who would never have accepted an invitation to such a meal, were apparently lurking in the shadows and peeking over the wall at those assembled for this feast. These religionists regarded it scandalous that Jesus would mix socially with “publicans and sinners” who were regarded as “unclean.” The religious definition of a “sinner” is usually one who does not conform to the acceptable moral code of the religionists, and thus offends them by such offense against their rules. The religious and cultural traditions of these Jews regarded fellowship at a meal as indicative of mutual acceptance and the recognition of a sense of equality with the other persons. They regarded Jesus to be “sitting in the seat of scoffers” (Ps. 1:1), and were appalled that He would associate and consort with the disreputable, the dregs, the “low-lives” and sleazy types, becoming “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19).

The Pharisaic religionists called the disciples of Jesus to the side to ask them, “Why does Jesus, and why do you, eat with publicans and sinners?” Perhaps they thought they could discredit Jesus with the impropriety of this disreputable social action and create disloyalty in His disciples. Jesus overheard their murmurings and confronted the religionists with their proud exclusivism which regarded themselves as “righteous” and all others as “sinners.” “Though you may think that publicans and sinners are incapable of true repentance,” Jesus seems to say, “I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” “I came for those who recognize that they are spiritually sick and need a Spiritual Physician,” Jesus said. “Perhaps you religious teachers ought to go and start learning what God meant when He said through the prophet Hosea, ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice.’” (Hosea 6:6). The empty show of religious ritual and pretense is an abomination before God. Jesus came to demonstrate the love (I John 4:8,16) and compassion of God toward mankind who has been used and abused by diabolic forces in the dysfunctionality of sin.

### **Section 51**

#### **Why Jesus’ Disciples Don’t Fast like John’s Disciples - Matt. 9:14-17; Mk. 2:18-22; Lk. 5:33-39**

Keying off of the feast at Matthew’s house, the next issue of confrontation between Jesus and the religionists recorded by the gospel writers was that of fasting. The dichotomy between feasting and fasting again evidences the difference between what Jesus came to bring in Himself and religion.

The identity of the questioners is somewhat ambiguous, but it may have been the disciples of John who were encouraged to do so by the conniving of the Pharisees. The question was asked, “Why do the disciples of John and the Pharisees fast, but the disciples of Jesus do not fast?” The religionists did not regard the disciples of Jesus to be engaging in acceptably

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religious activities of personal austerity and self-abasement whereby they should participate in the self-discipline of personal mortification (cf. Col. 2:16-23). It is indicative of much religion to encourage a proud pretense of piety by putting on a face of mournful dreariness and engaging in the abstinence of all pleasurable activities. Such “dill-pickle piety” is not very inviting, and attracts only those who feel so laden with guilt that they must afflict themselves with such abstinence to merit God’s pardon.

Jesus responded to the questioners by using one of His favorite teaching techniques. To explain one subject, He parabolically threw down another mental picture alongside of the other in order to illustrate His point.

The first illustration was a takeoff from John the Baptist’s words just prior to his incarceration at Macheaerus. John had noted that Jesus was the Bridegroom and he was but the friend of the Bridegroom rejoicing greatly because of the Bridegroom (John 3:29). Jesus explained that the friends and guests of the bridal-party do not mourn and fast at the wedding when the Bridegroom is present. It is time to celebrate! It is a time to rejoice with excitement and enthusiasm and conviviality. Notice how often Jesus illustrated the vibrancy of His own life in the context of a party celebration, whereas religion is more like the mourning at a morgue that sadly sings the dirge of death. The presence of Jesus should always bring great joy!

Secondly Jesus indicated that the life that He had come to bring in Himself was so novel, unique and innovative that it was incompatible with old religious routines such as fasting. The radical “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4) that we receive within the “new covenant” (Heb. 8:) when we become “new creatures in Christ” (II Cor. 5:17) cannot serve as a “patch of reformation” upon the old covenant religion of Judaism to which the Pharisees and the disciples of John were contextually related. The old tattered garment of religious orthodoxy with its set patterns of ritual, like fasting, would be hopelessly contorted and

torn if the new cloth of Christ's life were merely applied like a patch. The sterility of religious conservancy must be dispensed with.

The third illustration also revealed the incompatibility of the newness of Jesus' life with the old patterns of religion. If new wine is put into old brittle wineskins, the animal skins that were used to contain wine in the first-century, then when the new wine began to ferment it would burst open the skins and all would be lost. The new wine of Jesus' life is bubbly, effervescent and explosive. "Old-time religion" has no elasticity or flexibility. It is rigid and hard, set in its ways, static and incapable of expansion. The dynamic of Jesus' life cannot be contained in religious formations like fasting, but must be free from such traditions in order to be expressed however God desires.

Jesus was fully cognizant of people's religious preference for the old, familiar and established ways. They will say, "The old is good," and will want to conserve their attachment to the traditions. It is difficult for them to give up the old patterns of religion. Many would "rather fight than switch," arguing that "we've never done it that way before." But Jesus was saying that the radical newness and joy of His life requires the repudiation of and dispensing of the old religious rituals and routines which cannot be the means of expressing His life.

### **Section 52**

#### **Man Healed at Pool of Bethesda - John 5:1-9**

Jesus had been ministering in Galilee, but in this narrative He attended a feast in Jerusalem. If the feast referred to was the Passover, this could elongate the ministry of Jesus by another year by adding another Passover observance to be accounted for, or this incident could have transpired during one of the other recorded Passover visits.

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Jesus came to the pool called Bethesda, meaning “house of mercy,” and found many physically afflicted people who were superstitiously awaiting an angel to stir up the water, on which occasion the first one in the water would allegedly be healed. Jesus singled out a particular man who had been ill for thirty-eight years, and asked, “Do you want to get well?” After first decrying his disability, the man decided to act in obedience to Jesus’ command to, “Arise, take up your pallet, and walk,” therein discovering the divine dynamic within the demand.

### **Section 53**

#### **Violation of the Religious Sabbath - Jn. 5:10-18**

It was the Sabbath when the foregoing incident took place, and the religious legalists seem to have cared less that a man had been healed, but were very upset that the man was violating the religious rules of the Sabbath by carrying his pallet. Though initially unable to identify who had told him to carry his pallet, he later told the Jewish authorities that it was Jesus, and they then sought to prosecute Jesus as an habitual Sabbath-breaker. The issue that caused the confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish religionists was the place and purpose of the Sabbath day. Though originally instituted so that man could rest and enjoy what God had done, the religionists had added restrictive rules and regulations, prohibitions and injunctions, that made the Sabbath into a legalistic nightmare. Though the Law read that the people of God were not to work on the Sabbath (Exod. 20:10), Jesus explained to the authorities that God, His Father, had continued to work, and therefore He was continuing to work irregardless of the day of the week. On the basis of that self-assertion the religious authorities not only sought His death for Sabbath-breaking, but for blasphemously calling God His personal Father and making Himself equal with God.

## **Section 54**

### **The Works of the Father - Jn. 5:19-47**

Jesus explained to the religious antagonists that He did nothing of His own initiative by exercising independent divine prerogative, but derived all that He did from God the Father, so that all that He did was really God at work in the man. From this divine union, and mutuality enacted by functional derivation, Jesus claimed to have the divine power of life and judgment for all mankind. In skillful legal deposition, Jesus listed the witnesses of His identity and power: the divinely ordained forerunner, John the Baptist; the divine works He had accomplished; the divine witness of God the Father; and the divinely inspired scriptures. Then Jesus brought countercharges against the religious leaders, which have general validity as charges against religion in every age. In essence Jesus said, "You are engaged in bibliolatry, for you search the Scriptures, thinking that in them you have eternal life, when it is they that bear witness of Me, and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life." In addition, "You do not have the love of God within you; You are unwilling to receive Me for who I am, coming in the name of My Father, God; You do not seek the glory of God, but of men; You do not even believe your own patriarchal founders and prophets, for they foretold of Me."

Leaving them stunned in condemnation, with the jury still out, Jesus departed. He had confronted and exposed the Jewish religion in particular and all religion in general.

## **Section 55**

### **Disciples Pick Grain on Sabbath - Matt. 12:1-8;**

**Mk. 2:23-28; Lk. 6:1-5**

With no indication of location, another Sabbath controversy is recorded by the synoptic gospel writers. Jesus and His disciples were traveling through some fields of grain, and His

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disciples picked some heads of grain, rubbed them together in their hands separating the husks and chaff, and ate the dry grain. Jewish Law allowed for such action even in other's fields (Deut. 23:25), but the ridiculously scrupulous Pharisees had determined that such action was "reaping" and "threshing," and therefore "work" that could not be performed on the Sabbath. When religion attempts to micro-manage life with the minutia of meticulous mandates, they inevitably make mountains out of molehills.

The Pharisaic religionists asked Jesus and His disciples, "Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?" Their question presupposes that their own traditional interpretations are to be regarded as the criteria for determining what is lawful, right and good. Religion engages in the "good and evil game" that was first played in the garden of Eden, whereby man sets himself up as his own center of reference for the determination of good and evil.

Jesus responded by deftly questioning whether they had ever read the scriptures about their favorite Jewish hero, David, who along with the men who were with him, was hungry, and they entered into the holy place and ate consecrated show-bread from the tabernacle (I Sam. 21:1-6) which was reserved for the priests to eat on the Sabbath (Lev. 24:9). Here was a precedent for the sustenance of life superseding the Sabbath regulation, which would prove His point about the Sabbath being made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. "If David could set aside or suspend the Law, then as the fulfillment of all that David was but the prefiguring of, I can supersede the Law," Jesus seems to be saying.

Then Jesus proceeded to question whether they had ever read in their own Law about how the priests set aside Sabbath restrictions of "work" in order to prepare for the worship of God (cf. Numb. 28:9,10,18,19). Jesus is the High-priest of God who is essential to all true worship of God, which expresses the "worth-ship" of God's character regardless of time and place.

Jesus is greater than the religious temple of the Jews, for He is the One in whom God tabernacled in man, and is the spiritual reality for which the physical temple served only as an instrumental prototype.

The old covenant Law was intended for the purpose of revealing the character of God and man's inability to manufacture such character. The Sabbath observance was established so that man could take time to rest and enjoy God and His creation. It was intended to be a blessing, rather than a burden that kept men in paranoid uncertainty about observing every traditional detail and thereby quenched the expression of God's character in the enjoyment of God and for others. Religion uses the Law to dominate and oppress people, allowing it to become an idolatrous and legalistic club, rather than a merciful functional tool.

"If you had understood Hosea," Jesus chided the religious Pharisees, "you would have understood that "God desires mercy, and not sacrifice," (Hosea 6:6), and "would not have been falsely accusing My disciples of breaking the Sabbath law." Rather than enthroning the Law as a legalistic taskmaster to impose the conformity of obedience upon religious people, it must be recognized that the rigid rules of religion are self-serving restrictions and regulations that serve the dictatorial benefit of religion, disallowing the merciful benefit that God intended for man through the Sabbath-law.

The capstone of Jesus' argument was His claim to be "Lord of the Sabbath." Jesus is the One who rested from His creative activities on the seventh day. He knew what their purpose was when the Triune God established the Sabbath in the old covenant Law. He controlled the Sabbath, and could interpret it and change it. This He has done by becoming the personal indwelling provision for expressing the character of God, the "Law written in our hearts" (Heb. 8:10; 10:16), allowing for a perpetual Sabbath-rest (Heb. 4:1-11) wherein the Christian enjoys the activity of God.

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The Jewish religionists were appalled that a man should claim to have authority over the prescriptions of the Law. Religion continues to prefer the legalism of prescribed demands over the personified dynamic of Jesus Christ.

### **Section 56**

#### **Man with Withered Hand Healed on Sabbath -**

**Matt. 12:9-14; Mk. 3:1-6; Lk. 6:6-11**

Yet another confrontation concerning the Sabbath is recorded by the gospel writers. They wanted to make sure that their readers understood that Jesus did not capitulate to rigid legalism of religion, but kept confronting such in order to reveal that the shackles of Sabbatarianism have been stripped and superseded by the freedom to be man as God intended by participation in His life.

In a synagogue at an unidentified location, Jesus entered on the Sabbath, probably along with His disciples, and found there a man with a withered right hand. The religious scribes and Pharisees who were following Jesus everywhere He went, in order to entrap and accuse Him, were again present. To precipitate the conflict they asked Jesus, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?," knowing that the Law did allow healing if a man's life was in danger, but that this man was not in danger of dying from his condition.

Jesus called the man forward and asked the scowling, long-bearded Pharisees, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do harm; to save a life, or to kill?" They sat in sullen silence because they knew it was lawful to save a life on the Sabbath, but if they admitted it was lawful to "do good," which in this case was one and the same, they would sanction the healing of this man. These religious hypocrites would rescue a sheep who fell into a pit on the Sabbath because it served their own greedy economic benefit, but they would not allow a man's arm to be restored. Jesus obviously considered a man to be of more value

than an animal. The anger of God burned within Jesus as He viewed the inconsistent insensitivity of their religiously hardened hearts which were impervious to all spiritual truth.

Telling the man to, "Stretch forth your hand," Jesus blatantly defied the legalistic guidelines of the Pharisees and restored the use of the man's withered hand. The confrontation with religion was becoming increasingly more defined. The Pharisees were seething with rage at Jesus' action, and went out to conspire with the Herodians, whom they contemptuously hated as heretical and traitorous, in order to plot the destruction of Jesus. Religion seeks strange bedfellows in its efforts to seek its own ends. Henceforth the foreboding of Jesus' death at the instigation of the religious leaders will haunt the gospel-narratives.

### **Section 57**

#### **Teaching and Healing by the Sea of Galilee -**

**Matt. 12:15-21; Mk. 3:7-12**

Jesus and His disciples were again by the Sea of Galilee, and throngs of people from far-off places came to hear Him teach and to be healed of their infirmities. They often pressed upon Him so hard that Jesus instructed His disciples to have a small boat ready in case He needed to use it to back off from the crowd. Some of the demons who were cast out by Jesus supernaturally identified Jesus as the "Son of God," but Jesus forbade such proclamation, knowing that such testimony was not derived from God.

Matthew explains that this ministry of Jesus was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 42:1-4. Jewish interpreters applied these words to the nation of Israel, but Matthew applies them to Jesus. Jesus is indeed the Servant chosen by God in whom God is well-pleased to have His Spirit function within the man, in order to proclaim hope to the Gentiles. Jesus did not strive for personal recognition nor cry aloud for atten-

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tion, for He even commanded the demons not to broadcast His identity. This particular point seems to be the connection that Matthew made with what Jesus was doing. Matthew was also apparently impressed with the tenderness of Jesus in response to the people's problems.

### **Section 58**

#### **Selecting the Twelve Disciples - Mk. 3:13-19; Lk. 6:12-16**

Jesus went up to a mountain to pray and determined to designate twelve men as a select group who would be sent out as "apostles." The number twelve corresponds with the twelve tribes of Israel and represents the completeness of God's people. The symbolic significance of the number twelve provides a picture of the continuity of completeness in the spiritual new Israel, the new People of God, the Christian community wherein Christ reigns as King in the promised Kingdom of God.

The twelve men selected were just ordinary men. Some were married. Several were fishermen; one was a publican; and one is identified as a zealot. The majority were from Galilee. The only one who appears to have come from Judea was Judas Iscariot, who is identified last in the listing along with the notation that he was the traitorous betrayer of Jesus.

## Chapter Five

# The Sermon on the Mount

The contextual setting of the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is extremely important for interpreting the implications of what He was saying. As He revealed Himself as the divine Messiah in a completely different kingdom, there was an inevitable and constant conflict with religion. The Jewish Pharisees and scribes were dogging his every step, spying on His every movement, and trying to entrap Him in His words and actions in order to bring semi-justifiable charges against Him.

Jesus had moved progressively farther away from the center of religion in Jerusalem of Judea, having settled in Capernaum in the northernmost part of the region of Galilee, and periodically venturing farther north and west. The religious leaders followed Him wherever He went, apparently regarding Him to be a threat to their control over the people.

Of particular concern to the religionists were the radical statements Jesus seemed to be making about His ushering in the kingdom of God. The Jews of the first century believed that God was going to intervene on their behalf, deliver them militarily from Roman rule, and establish a Jewish kingdom in a physical and material realm which would be religiously nationalistic and racially pure. Jesus spoke of a kingdom wherein He would reign as King, and such was unsettling both to the Jews and the Romans.

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When Jesus was “proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23), He was speaking of a spiritual reality that was as different from the Jewish expectation of the kingdom as day and night. Since natural men, religious men, cannot understand spiritual things (I Cor. 2:14), they could not understand that Jesus was not referring to a kingdom that was essentially a physical time and space realm, but to a kingdom that was essentially spiritual and eternal, yet lived out in physical time and space. “My kingdom is not of this realm or world,” Jesus later explained (John 18:36). “The kingdom has come” (Matt. 12:28), Jesus said, for it is inherent in My presence and Being and action. The kingdom Jesus came to bring was the dynamic and ontological reign of His life as Lord and King in the lives of those who received Him by faith. Wherever Jesus was the spiritual kingdom could function. The Kingdom of God came with “power” (Mk. 9:1) at Pentecost (Acts 2) after Jesus was “declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). The kingdom is present and yet future, already inaugurated though not yet fully consummated.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is explaining the essence and functionality of the kingdom He came to bring in Himself, in contrast to the old covenant religion of Judaism. This new covenant kingdom of grace would function not on the basis of legal and ethical principles and precepts, but by the divine dynamic of the person and life of Jesus. The Jewish religionists were scattered among the audience listening as Jesus noted the radical contrasts between their religion and the life of the kingdom that was His life.

Subsequent religious thinking has been as dull and obtuse as were the original Jewish antagonists. Religion still tries to cast the kingdom into a physical, material and nationalistic realm. Some strive to reconstruct God’s dominion and theocratic rule by imposing what they consider to be “kingdom principles” on present Western government, trying to bring the kingdom of God into being by force and violence, and install

the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount as the “law of the land.” Others regard Jesus’ comments about the kingdom to be a projection of a kingdom that is a space and time realm of one thousand year duration in the future in Palestine, in which case it is not relevant and applicable to Christians today. The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount thus becomes the “law of the future millennial kingdom,” and they fail to comprehend the present dynamic vitality of Christ’s life as Lord and King. Still others regard the Sermon on the Mount as an “interim law” until Jesus comes again, twisting Jesus’ statements into an ethical ideal of principles and precepts, behavioral standards and regulations, which Christian people should strive to conform to in order to live like Christians and make the world a better place. What they all fail to understand is that the Sermon on the Mount is not a codification of a new covenant form of “law,” but a preview of the new covenant kingdom wherein God’s grace would function in the life of Jesus Christ within receptive Christians.

It is therefore imperative that we understand what Jesus was saying about the essence and functionality of His kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount.

### **Section 59**

#### **The Setting of the Sermon - Matt. 5:1,2; Lk. 6:17-19**

Matthew explains that Jesus “went up on the mountain” to teach, whereas Luke’s account has Jesus already on the mountain and descending to “a level place” such as a plateau to teach those who had gathered. Their explanations of the physical setting are not incompatible and are the basis of referring to this teaching as the “Sermon on the Mount.”

The question of whether this was a singular message which Matthew transcribed word-for-word, or whether this was an accumulation of material from sermons which Jesus taught over and over again, is not a serious issue to be concerned

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about. If it is a collection or compilation of Jesus' teaching, such does not impinge upon the inspiration of scripture. It is overly-objectified religion that insists on precise literalness in their bibliolatrous deification of the Book.

### Section 60

#### **Kingdom Blessing and Witness - Matt. 5:3-12; Lk. 6:20-26**

The first words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount refer to the blessings of God, the privilege of divine favor, mercy and grace, upon the attitudes and actions of certain people. Certain attitudes and conditions are indicative of those who are "approved of God" in the kingdom, though we must always recognize that "all the blessings of God are ours in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:3). Kingdom participants are not affirmed in or promised a "chance happiness" or "fortune," as some English translations indicate, but participate in the divine blessing of God in Christ.

The "poor in spirit" are participants in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus proclaimed. The onlooking religionists were haughty and proud in their self-righteousness, so Jesus contrasts those of His kingdom who recognize their spiritual bankruptcy and unworthiness, admitting their impotency, their need, their dependence on a spiritual resource beyond themselves. Those who recognize that they do not have what it takes in themselves may discover that their spiritual need and poverty becomes abundant and unfathomable spiritual riches in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:18; 3:8,16). "Having nothing, yet possessing all things" (II Cor. 6:10), the Christian has "all things" in Christ (I Cor. 3:21-23). When Jesus reigns as King in our lives we have all things that belong to the King. Religion does not have a solution for spiritual poverty, so they emphasize social programs to attempt to alleviate physical and material poverty. Like the Jewish religion of Jesus' day, they view material prosperity as a sign of God's favor and blessing. They often

seek to raise people up from their financial poverty into their own middle or upper class level in an egalitarian society so that the “poor people” will not have to be dependent any longer. In so doing they encourage self-dependence and self-sufficiency rather than the dependency of spiritual need and receptivity which is indicative of Christ’s kingdom, and thus restrain people from the kingdom of heaven.

“Those who mourn” are comforted within the kingdom Jesus came to bring in Himself. Judaic religion of the first century mourned with self-pity that they could not have what they wanted in self-rule and self-direction. Religion through the centuries has often mourned that it did not have all the wealth that it wanted in order to do what it wanted in the guise of benevolent service to mankind. In contrast to such religious mourning, Jesus seems to be saying that the comfort of God is available in the kingdom for those who mourn over their own sinfulness and wretchedness (Rom. 7:24), as well as the sinfulness of others. Those who mourn that people are going to hell without spiritual and everlasting life; those who mourn the cynicism and lack of integrity in society; those who mourn that people with real needs are not being ministered to by religion which despises and rejects certain types of people, like tax-collectors and “sinners” and lepers; these mourners will be comforted by the fact that the character of Christ in the kingdom of grace does indeed respond with compassion and deal with sin and evil. The Messiah grants to “those who mourn in Zion, the oil of gladness instead of mourning” (Isa. 61:3), for He is “the consolation of Israel” (Lk. 2:25). The “God of all comfort” (II Cor. 1:3) “comforts us in abundance through Christ” (II Cor. 1:5), for the Spirit of Christ serves as the “Comforter” (John 14:16,26). There is a present comfort in Christ for our mourning, and we look forward in hope to the experience of the kingdom wherein there is “no death or mourning” (Rev. 21:4) for any therein.

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Contrary to the ways of the world and of religion, wherein the strong, aggressive and assertive engage in strong-arm power tactics to succeed and become victorious, the followers of Jesus in the kingdom will, through meekness, gentleness and humility, inherit the earth. The Pharisaic religionists were conniving politically with the Herodians (Mk. 3:6), and later with the Roman authorities, to achieve their own ends of dispensing with Jesus. Throughout history religion has employed political power-plays and prostituted itself with governmental authorities to gain advantage. Jesus indicates that those within the Christian kingdom will humbly allow themselves to be humiliated without seeking to protect their dignity or reputation. Jesus presented Himself as King “meekly mounted on a donkey” (Matt. 21:5), instead of on a white steed of victory, symbolically evidencing that His power was of an entirely different kind than that of the world. Jesus is “gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29), and those who are identified with Him are to function in the “meekness and gentleness of Christ” (II Cor. 10:1), expressing the gentleness that is a “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:23). Meekness is not weakness, for Moses who was “meek more than any other man on earth” (Numb. 12:3) was not cowardly, indecisive or wishy-washy, but was a strong leader. Those in the kingdom of Christ who are willing to renounce all their rights of self-assertion, who refuse to defend themselves and are patient under attack, will discover that by such a Christian attitude they will “overcome” and “inherit the earth” (Isa. 37:11).

Another feature of the radical kingdom that Jesus came to bring in Himself was that “those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled and satisfied.” The Jewish religionists were, at the very moment Jesus spoke these words, salivating as they sought to sabotage the successful ministry of Jesus, hungering and thirsting after an expedient means to murder the Messiah. Most religion is unsatiated in its gluttonous self-indulgence of seeking its own ends. Religion hungers

and thirsts after power and influence, blessings and experiences, knowledge and witnessing skills, and righteousness by meritorious performance, but they seem to know nothing of the intense desire for the character of divine righteousness. In the kingdom of Christ those who passionately want and seek that righteousness which they realize they cannot establish for themselves by religious means and merit (Phil. 3:9), will be filled and satisfied with the righteousness which comes by grace through Jesus Christ. As the spiritual “Bread of life” (John 6:35) and “living water” (John 4:11-14), Jesus satisfies our spiritual hunger and thirst. Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; I Jn. 2:1) fills us with Himself, and becomes to us righteousness (I Cor. 1:30), in order to manifest the fruit of His righteousness (Phil. 1:11) in our behavior.

In Jesus’ kingdom the merciful are blessed in their receipt of God’s mercy. The contrast of such was evident in the Jewish religionists who were trying to entrap Jesus in order to “black-ball” Him and demand vindictive punishment. Religion has so often been hard-nosed and unforgiving in its unremitting demand for law and order, callously delighting that people “get what they deserve.” To be merciful is to be moved with empathy and pity for those who are miserable and in need. Mercy is not afraid to get dirty helping others, or to be ostracized for consorting with “publicans and sinners.” God “saved us according to His mercy” (Titus 3:5), for Jesus served as the “merciful and faithful High Priest” (Heb. 2:17), coming to us “while we were yet sinners” (Rom. 5:8) and undeserving of mercy. The “mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:21), the Merciful One, is evidenced in the kingdom-living of those who have experienced God’s grace far beyond what they deserve.

Whereas the hearts of the Jewish religionists were filled with sinful, selfish and sinister motivations as they sought to stifle Jesus, Jesus contrasts such with the “pure in heart” within the kingdom. Jesus exposes the hearts of religionists as being “deceitful and sick” (Jere. 17:9), and “filled with evil” (Matt.

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12:34) which spills out in “evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, slanders” etc. (Matt. 15:19). Knowing nothing of “purity of heart,” religion strives only for the external pseudo-purity of parochial piety. The hearts of those in the kingdom of Christ are fixed on Him, having been “purified” (Titus 2:14), and thus “purifying themselves as He is pure” (I John 3:3). Thereby Christians can experience the purity of heart which is set free from distracting double-minded desires (James 4:18) and fantasies in order to “see” God at work in the new covenant kingdom of Christianity. Such was the desire of David when he expressed his desire for “clean hands and a pure heart” in order to “ascend into the hill of the Lord and stand in His holy place” and “receive blessing and righteousness from the God of his salvation” (Ps. 24:3-6), and that desire is now fulfilled in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Peacemakers are approved in the kingdom, for being called “sons” of the “God of peace” (I Thess. 5:23), they are “like Father, like son.” The Jewish religionists who were stalking Jesus at the time were not peacemakers, for they were not seeking peace either with Rome or with Jesus. They were looking for conflict, eager to become embroiled in battle. It has been said that “fundamentalists always fight,” engaging in disputes to defend their narrowly-defined doctrines and codes of conduct. The history of religion is replete with religious wars, inquisitions, and cruel crusades. Jesus is the promised “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6) who “brings good news and announces peace” (Isa. 52:7). He is Himself our peace (Eph. 2:14), and in Him we have peace (John 16:33). He gives His peace to us (John 14:27) that we might “pursue peace with all men” (Heb. 12:14). To be “peacemakers” in the kingdom is not to be appeasers who always capitulate, but it does mean that we seek to settle differences of opinion and difficulties with the peace and love of Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of God will include “those persecuted for the sake of righteousness” who are reviled and falsely accused

because of their identification and spiritual union with Jesus Christ. In general, religion wants to be recognized, accepted and revered; and when rejected, reviled or falsely accused it will defend itself to the death. In particular, the Jewish religionists protected their rights and privileges very closely. Status and prestige, based upon ancestry, wealth, authority, education and virtue, were of ultimate importance. The admiration and attention of men were so highly valued that they would rather die by committing suicide than lose face before men. Jesus explained that such status and reputation is not to be sought and will not be maintained in the kingdom of God. Those who are identified with Him will be falsely accused, reviled and persecuted. “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20), Jesus said. “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before you” (John 15:18). “In the world you have tribulation” (John 16:33). “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (II Tim. 3:12), adds Paul. When we are wronged or mistreated, slandered or falsely accused, ridiculed or ostracized for His sake, we are not to retaliate or seek to escape. Peter advises that Jesus “while being reviled, did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (I Peter 2:23), and His consistent character will seek to do the same in the Christian.

It is so evident in these beatitudes of Jesus that the function of the spiritual kingdom of heaven is antithetical to all religious kingdoms and their practices. The kingdom of Christ is opposed to and will triumph over the kingdom of Satan, who as the “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4) and the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) is the promoter of all religion. Christianity, the functionality of the kingdom, is not religion, but is the dynamic manifestation of the life of Jesus Christ.

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### Section 61

#### **Kingdom Visibility and Righteousness - Matt. 5:13-16**

Participants in the kingdom will be conspicuously different from those in the world around them. The invisible character of God is made visible in their behavior and will leave a stamp on the world around them, for such is the “image of God.” This divine character expression of humility and purity, righteousness and mercy will cause them to stand out as unique and of a different kind. The good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in (Eph. 2:10) and equipped us for by His empowering (II Tim. 3:17; Heb. 13:20,21) and the sufficiency of His grace (II Cor. 9:8), will of necessity bring glory to God. Such a visible expression will not always be appreciated by the world around us, for it will expose the world’s selfish ways and their adaptation within religion. Walking as children of light (Eph. 5:8), we will “appear as lights in the world, blameless and above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (Phil. 2:15). Those in whom Christ reigns as Lord and King will often stick out like a sore thumb, stand out as the odd-man out, and provide a salty seasoning to a society that does not want to be preserved from its rotteness. Although religion sometimes causes its adherents to “stand-out” by their weird expressions of piety, by becoming social nuisances in their evangelistic zeal, or by insistence on engagement in their causes, Christians will stand out by their expression of godly character and activity. We are salt and light because Christ in us is the One who preserves the world from rotteness and exposes the darkness of the world by His light (John 8:12). It is not that we possess some saltiness or enlightenment, nor that we must strive to become salt or light, but because of Christ’s indwelling presence we are salt and light expressions. Visible expression of such is a logical and spiritual necessity. We must behave like who we have become. As Bon-

hoeffer so aptly explained, “Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Section 62**

#### **Kingdom Righteousness - Matt. 5:17-20**

The expression of God’s righteous character in kingdom participants is superior to and far surpasses the legal conformity of behavior that is falsely called “righteousness” by those engaged in religion. Jesus explained that “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). Religious attempts to behave righteously by external conformity and correctness to standardized codes of conduct are always self-defeating, for despite our best efforts at behavior modification in order to be like God we can never reach such perfection by ourselves. Yet, religion continues to employ oppressive authoritarianism to dominate and intimidate people into ever-increasing guilt-producing efforts to conform and to be righteous and perfect. Righteousness will never be a personal achievement of man. Kingdom righteousness exceeds and surpasses that of religion because it is the extraordinary and supernatural righteousness of Jesus Christ, who as the Righteous One (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; I Jn. 2:1) becomes to us righteousness (I Cor. 1:30) in spiritual condition, and thus internally and spiritually empowers the fruit of the expression of His character of righteousness (Phil. 1:11; James 3:18) in Christian behavior.

A primary tool of religious oppression has been the moralistic and ethical use of the law. In the old covenant God had given the Law to Moses for man’s benefit so that he could recognize the character of God and his own inability to enact such. The Law was not intended to be a legalistic club to be used by religionists to beat mankind into conformity and slavery, but Jewish religion began to use the Law for selfish and destructive purposes. In the first century A.D., Pharisaic Judaism tended

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to equate the Law with God, but at the same time interpreted it with self-serving traditions and found hypocritical loopholes to avoid compliance. Since the Law had been deified and absolutized (much like how fundamentalistic and evangelical religion treats the scripture today), it needed to be relativized by being made relative to the Person and Being of Jesus Christ, but at the same time without denigrating what God had done by giving the Law in the old covenant.

Jesus carefully explained, therefore, that He had come not to denigrate the Law and the Prophets of the old covenant, but to actualize them with all the fullness of God's eternal intent. The Law is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7:12) for it expresses the holy, righteous and good character of God, and that same God who gave the Law is the same God who is working in Jesus Christ. Jesus did not want to disconnect or detach the old from the new expressions of God's activity. He did not come to set loose the Law from its moorings in the activity of God. He did not come to set the Law adrift as a meaningless "social experiment" in religion and morality from the past. He did not come to "trash" the Law, to denounce it derisively as God's disaster of the Old Testament era. He did not come to discount and devalue and defame the Law of the Old Testament as a failure, a fiasco, a plan that did not work. He did not come to write the Law off as God's mistake; as wrong, useless, and having no purpose. He did not come to demolish and tear down the Law in contempt and disgust. He did not come to denigrate, deprecate, depreciate, or decimate the Old Testament Law with disdain and derision. Jesus knew that the Law had served God's good purposes historically as the preliminary and instrumental introduction to the righteousness that is in Jesus Christ.

Though not wanting to raze the Law, He did want to raise the Law to its eternal and essential purpose by bringing to full fruition all that the Law pointed to pictorially and custodially. Jesus fulfills the Law, not only by historically fulfill-

ing the promises and the prophecies thereof, but even more importantly by completing, actualizing and consummating the Law by personally becoming its full intended content. Jesus becomes the divine dynamic of God's character, the living Torah, the Law, the Word of God, empowering such divine character as the Law expressed by His ontological presence in the spirit of those who receive Him as King in the kingdom. The externality of moral behavioral conformity to the Law's demands is displaced and replaced by the internality of the presence of Jesus Himself, "the Law written in our hearts" (Heb. 8:10;10:16). Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness (Rom. 10:4), for genuine righteousness is not derived from ethical conformity to the Law (Phil. 3:9), but only from God in Christ on the basis of the receptivity of faith. The character of God which the Law expressed is never obsolete and can never be abrogated, but His righteousness and love do find a fullness of dynamic expression as the life and love of Jesus is expressed within Christians. "Love is the fulfillment of the Law" (Rom. 13:10).

### **Section 63**

#### **Reconciliation; Not Murder - Matt. 5:21-26**

Jesus proceeds to give six examples of the surpassing righteousness that is to be found in Himself in the kingdom. Whereas religion offers external regulations usually in the form of prohibitions, Jesus wants to show that kingdom living is by the internalized provision of the Spirit of Himself. He keys-off of the regulations of the religionists by contrasting what "they say," and what He says.

The Old Testament Law contained the admonition, "You shall not murder" (Exod. 20:13) as the sixth of the ten commandments with which all Jewish people were very familiar. Murder is an external action that usually stems out of an internal attitude of anger, wrath, contempt, spite, hostility

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or animosity. Just because a person has refrained from committing the external action of murder does not mean he is internally pure, gentle, merciful and righteous as those in the kingdom are to be. When the internal attitude is one of anger and hostility, it is often acted out in rash acts of destruction and homicide, as Moses himself had experienced (Exod. 2:12; Numb. 20:10,11). Even when the attitude of anger does not lead to physical murder it can be personally destructive when verbally expressed in abusive language employing contemptuous epithets and derogative insults. Whether it be the psychological slaying of character assassination or the name-calling and labeling of another as a “brainless idiot,” these words are designed to hurt, damage, disgrace and destroy. Religionists have been quite guilty of hurling derogative insults of heresy at others who do not conform to their thought and action, as well as actual physical murder in their religious wars. Such is indicative of character that is derived from the diabolic spirit who is a “murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44; I Jn. 3:12). Jesus goes beyond the externalities of the Law’s demands, explaining that hatred (I John 3:15) and anger are not consistent with the divine character and life, and evidence the need for a spiritual exchange within the new covenant kingdom whereby the Spirit of God comes to indwell an individual and to manifest His character in our behavior. The character of Christ’s love produces new attitudes of forgiveness, mercy and compassion which allow us to cease holding grudges against others, to be reconciled, and to have loving unity in our interpersonal relationships.

### **Section 64**

#### **Faithfulness; Not Adultery - Matt. 5:27-31**

A second example of the internality of spiritual provision in the kingdom contrasted to the externality of religion has to do with adultery. The Law clearly stated, “You shall not commit

adultery” (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18). The external act of having sexual relationship outside of God’s intended context of a husband and wife within marriage was strictly prohibited. God’s intent is that His created human beings manifest His character of fidelity and purity within their sexual relationships. But once again the action of abstaining from improper sexual activities externally does not necessarily forestall sinful attitudes of sensual desire within. Later in His ministry Jesus said that “from within, out of the heart of men proceed the evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, deceit, sensuality, etc. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man” (Mk. 7:21-23). Within the kingdom we are to understand that behavior is generated from an indwelling spirit whose character we allow to be activated in our behavior. When we view persons of the opposite sex merely as sex objects, gazing upon physical bodies and allowing our minds and emotions to imagine and fantasize, contemplating adultery or even rape, then we have chosen to allow the character of the Evil One to become activated in our willingness. Religion has often been guilty of such sexual abuse and adultery (II Pet. 2:2,14; Rev. 2:22), and the Jewish religionists of Jesus’ day were likewise guilty (Matt. 15:8,19,20). The need of mankind is to have a new heart and a new spirit within (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26) with a new nature and a new character of purity and faithfulness. This is provided within the kingdom in Jesus Christ and expressed in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). Jesus seems to make use of overstatement in His admonition to tear out the eye or cut off the hand if they are instruments that precipitate adultery in viewing or taking what does not belong to you, for He was fully aware that self-mutilation of body parts in the removal of eyes or hands would not eliminate lustful desires. The intent of His comments is to emphasize the priority of spiritual renewal wherein we allow for repentance and the cutting off of sin from our hearts in order to allow God’s purity and faithfulness to be activated in our behavior.

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### Section 65

#### **Marital Union; Not Divorce - Matt. 5:32**

Divorce was another issue that Jesus used to explain the “surpassing righteousness” of the kingdom. Although Moses had permitted divorce among the Jewish people “because of their hardness of heart” (Matt. 19:8), simply requiring the discontented husband to provide his wife with a certificate of divorce (Deut. 24:1,3), Jesus again wanted to reveal that the external enactments were not the real issue, but the internal attitudes toward marriage were of prime importance. When God made mankind as male and female (Gen. 1:27) and caused them to be joined in “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) in marriage, such a marital relationship was not to be a provisional arrangement but an indissoluble union intended to portray that the two were becoming one. “God hates divorce” (Mal. 2:16), for it desecrates the expression of His character of unity and love. The Jewish religionists of Jesus’ day treated divorce as a triviality, sanctioning divorce with loose interpretations that allowed divorce for any cause, and religionists of subsequent generations have treated divorce as a mere externality as well. Jesus wanted to point out that within the kingdom of God our spiritual regeneration should provide the character to overcome selfishness, evil desires, and the hardness of heart that allowed for easy divorce and sexual impropriety, granting us instead the character of Christ in love and unity and fidelity leading to loving relationships that are not torn asunder. Within the kingdom our marital relationships are to portray the loving unity of the spiritual relationship between Christ, the Bridegroom and His bride, the Church (Eph. 5:23,29,32).

### Section 66

#### Truth; Not Oaths - Matt. 5:33-37

God's character of truthfulness and honesty is another issue in the kingdom of God. Within the old covenant this feature of God's character had been emphasized by repeated inculcations. "You shall not swear falsely by My name" (Lev. 19:12). "If a man makes a vow or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word" (Numb. 30:2). "When you make a vow to God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin" (Deut. 23:21-23). "It is better that you should not vow, than that you should vow and not pay" (Eccl. 5:4,5). Over the centuries the Jewish religionists had developed all sorts of regulations about oath-taking which were but convenient loopholes and evasive justifications for lying and deceit. Jesus reamed the scribes and Pharisees for their lack of integrity in "swearing by the gold of the temple" (Matt. 23:16-22). In like manner religion through the subsequent centuries has allowed for "little white lies" to be regarded as venial violations which are excusable, allowed for the expedience of the end justifying the means, dogmatized what could not be documented scripturally, and engaged in fallacious illustration to play on people's emotions, all the while advocating "swearing" and "cursing" prohibitions based on Jesus' words. Jesus told the Pharisees that they were identified with the devil, who is "the father of lies" (John 8:44), and explained that if we cannot answer a straightforward "Yes" or "No," then any other answer of equivocation is derived from the Evil One. "Make no oaths at all," Jesus said, and then you will not have to worry about sworn testimonies and assurances, and the possibility of perjury and falsehood. Within the kingdom of God Jesus Christ is the indwelling Truth (John 14:6), and such Truth sets us free (John 8:32,36) to manifest the integrity, the honesty, and the reliability of the character of God in our behavior.

## Jesus Confronts Religion

### Section 67

#### Grace; Not Retribution - Matt. 5:38-42

“Vengeance is Mine” (Deut. 32:35), declared the Lord, but the old covenant Law contained a system of retribution for making wrongs right. The Israelites were advised to show no pity or mercy, but to extract and inflict life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot (Exod. 21:23,24; Lev. 24:19,20; Deut. 19:21). This external application of social justice rapidly degenerated into personal vendettas full of malice, hatred and vengeance from within the selfish heart of man. Religion through the centuries has likewise tended to be vindictive and retaliatory, administering “tit for tat” equivalence. Jesus explained that within His kingdom this is to be radically different. If our spiritual identity is united with Jesus Christ and all of our worth is found in Him, then we have nothing to protect or defend. We do not have to react in violent self-defense and retaliatory revenge in order to “save face” and protect our personal rights and personal reputation, even if we are wronged and violated. Bonhoeffer calls this “freedom from the tyranny of our own ego.”<sup>2</sup> Kingdom living should evidence a carefree detachment from personal reputation, money, things, and impositions. When we give up all rights to what we naturally think we “own” and are willing to be wronged and robbed, then we can act in God’s grace through Jesus Christ to share, give and serve others above and beyond what they may ask or demand. Some have asked whether this means that Christians should always “give in,” capitulate, “roll over and play dead,” and never stand up for what is right, but always respond in pacifistic nonresistance. Though there is a time to stand up for what is right, our personal reactions are to be non-retaliatory and nonviolent. When Jesus was reviled, He reviled not in return (I Peter 2:23), and so it is that the character of Christ expressed within kingdom

participants will not be defensive, vindictive or retaliatory, but respond in gracious generosity and service to others.

### **Section 68**

#### **Love; Not Hate - Matt. 5:43-48; Lk. 6:27-30, 32-36**

The sixth example of the “surpassing righteousness” of the kingdom has to do with “loving your neighbor.” The old covenant law clearly indicated that God’s people were to “love their neighbor as themselves” (Lev. 19:18), but the Jewish religionists debated how to exclusively define their “neighbor,” as well as the extent of concern, compassion or cooperation that such love might entail. The Law did not advocate “hating your enemies,” but such was a logical consequence of narrowly defining one’s “neighbor.” The Jewish religion and culture of the first century had a narrowly developed sense of national solidarity and elitist collectivity. A “neighbor” was a fellow Jew who was a member of the same party, and believed and acted like you – one who was in the same group or brotherhood. They would stand together in loyalty and assistance with people of their own group, but had great prejudice and even hatred for those who were not of their group, and regarded them as enemies. Such group solidarity is thickest among criminals and religionists. Here in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is introducing the reality of the kingdom wherein the character of divine love would be extended to all men of the human race, even to one’s enemies and persecutors. “God is love” (I John 4:8,16), and His love is “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us” (Rom. 5:5) as the “fruit of the Spirit” Gal. 5:22). Such love is not based on subjective feelings about the other person and their opinions and actions, but since it is God’s love it shines and rains on the just and the unjust, and on the righteous and the unrighteous. Only God can love like that, loving the unlovable, the helpless, sinners and enemies (Rom. 5:6-10) with unconditional agape love, and we behave as sons of the

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Father in heaven when we allow such love to be evidenced through us to all men “in deed and truth” (I John 3:18), as the fulfillment of all that the Law required (Rom. 13:10). Loving those who are different and disagreeable, we recognize that the real spiritual enemy is the adversary, the devil, who is using and abusing people, even causing them to persecute and abuse us. We are surprised that they are not worse, knowing that the “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4) is controlling their behavior, and allow good to overcome evil (Rom. 12:20,21) by expressing Christ’s compassion and love toward them.

The character of God expressed in the behavior of mankind is the essence of the function of the kingdom of God. Having noted that the “surpassing righteousness” of the kingdom will manifest God’s forgiveness, mercy, compassion, purity, unity, love, fidelity, truthfulness, honesty, grace, and love in various circumstances, Jesus concluded by explaining that those in the kingdom “are to be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect.” Again, such perfection of behavior is impossible in the religious program of performance and achievement wherein people are repeatedly encouraged to conform to and imitate exemplary behavior by moral and ethical behavior modification techniques and formulas. God’s kingdom has a radically different *modus operandi* whereby the total provision for godly and righteous behavior is derived from God in Christ by His grace, as Christ reigns as Lord in our lives. Only as Jesus Christ, the Perfect One, the Merciful One (Lk. 6:36), the Holy One (I Pet. 1:16), the Loving One (I John 4:7) lives in us and manifests the perfect, merciful, holy and loving character of God in our behavior does the kingdom function as God intended.

### Section 69

#### Kingdom Genuineness - Matt. 6:1

Recognizing the divine derivation of the godly character of perfection, holiness and righteousness in the kingdom,

there is nevertheless a constant temptation to revert to external religious activities of piety which are self-manufactured in self-deception and hypocrisy. Religion is so concerned about what people think, its reputation, its “image,” and it is therefore easily deluded into the conspicuous piety of public impressions enacted in hypocritical playacting. Bonhoeffer noted the paradox of how “our activity must be visible, but never be done for the sake of making it visible,” and how “we have to take heed that we do not take heed of our own righteousness.”<sup>3</sup> The concern of kingdom participants should only be what God thinks of us and whether we are available to all that He wants to be and do in us. The effects of His expressions are to be hidden from ourselves and disregarded, so that our behavior continues to be the spontaneous expression of the life of Jesus Christ, “no longer I, but Christ living in me” (Gal. 2:20).

### **Section 70**

#### **Giving - Matt. 6:2-4**

Jesus gives three illustrations of activities that are often paraded in public displays of piety by religion. Giving, prayer and fasting are the three examples of external ostentation that He uses to emphasize the contrast with the kingdom practice of internal communion and unobtrusive expression.

Giving of the monetary resources that have been entrusted to us by God can easily degenerate into a public display of self-congratulation and self-glorification whereby we are honored by men for our generosity. Many in religion have attempted to buy a reputation of “spirituality” by advertising their benevolence. Egotistic philanthropy motivated by selfish pride is often evident in the brass memorial plaques that bedeck religious edifices. People want the credit for being the benefactor, and “blow their own horns” in varying public relations stunts to draw attention to their personal giving. In contrast to the literal trumpet blowing of the Jewish religionists as they gave alms,

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Jesus indicated that kingdom giving is to be private, secret and hidden. “Every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17), and we must not take His credit, for Christian giving is not what we do, but what the giving God does through us. By the presence of the Spirit of Christ within the Christian, God’s character of grace, givingness and generosity is available to be expressed through the behavior of kingdom participants. By the figurative language of “not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing,” Jesus indicated that those in the kingdom must not let their minds get caught up in getting attention by giving, for we will scarcely know or remember what we have given, since it was all prompted by the giving God within.

### **Section 71**

#### **Prayer - Matt. 6:5-15**

Prayer will also be a private matter for those in the kingdom, rather than the public parade of piety that it has often become in religion. The play-acting Pharisees engaged in prayer that was staged for public notice. They were showing-off in self-advertisement of their supposed piety. Religion has often made prayer a performance of repetitious verbosity and babble employing the pious intonations of a “prayer voice.” Prayer within the kingdom is not a matter of “saying prayers” full of idle clichés, but is a private matter of personal communion with God wherein we recognize the necessity of our continued receptivity and obedience in prayers of faith (James 5:15). God knows our needs before we ever pray, so our prayers are not informing God of our needs, nor pleading and begging for His provision, which is always sufficient in Christ (Phil. 4:19). Kingdom prayer is Christocentric in that Jesus Christ is the subject, object and answer to all Christian prayer.

A pattern for such prayer was verbalized by Jesus for those present. It was not intended as a formulized “Lord’s Prayer” for repetitious liturgical use, as religion has henceforth used

these words. Emphasizing the manner rather than the content, Jesus intended to show how kingdom prayer would recognize the total provision for all that is sought in Himself. “Our Father who is in heaven” is not distant, detached and removed, but is simultaneously transcendence and immanent, personally caring for every need of His spiritual children, having provided all for them in Jesus Christ. “Hallowed is His name,” for His holy character has been extended to man in the Holy One, Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, and the only holiness of condition and behavior that we will ever experience must be derived from the Holy God through Jesus Christ. Prayer that God’s “kingdom come,” is always answered for “the kingdom has come” (Matt. 12:28) and we have been “transferred into the kingdom of the Son” (Col. 1:13) to “reign in life with Christ Jesus” (Rom. 5:17). To ask that “His will be done on earth as in heaven” is to recognize that the will of God is always the character expression of God in Jesus Christ. The prayer for “daily bread” is to recognize that all of our physical needs are cared for (Matt. 6:25,31). To pray for “forgiveness of sins” is to acknowledge that the redemptive work of Jesus has enacted such “forgiveness of sins” (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), and that as “we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (I John 1:9). In particular we will appreciate His forgiveness of our sins as we allow Jesus Christ, the Forgiver to function through us in forgiving others. “Lead us not into temptation” is a prayer that we know is answered for “God does not tempt anyone” (James 1:13), but “with the temptation provides the way of escape, not allowing us to be tempted beyond what we are able” (I Cor. 10:13) to endure by His provision in Christ, thus “delivering us from evil.” The doxological ending added late in the second century A.D. is consistent with the prayer pattern that Jesus proposed, for it recognizes the ontological basis of the kingdom and power and glory in the very Being of God. Christocentric prayer recognizes and is receptive to the totality of God’s provision in Jesus Christ.

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### **Section 72**

#### **Fasting - Matt. 6:16-18**

The third activity abused by the religionists is that of fasting. The Pharisees of Jesus' day abstained from eating on Mondays and Thursdays of each week, but in so doing they put on sackcloth and ashes, and play-acted by putting on a sullen, gloomy and sad countenance as a hypocritical show of their self-afflicted piety. This feigned "spirituality" was a sham of self-promotion. Religion in general has followed suit by engaging in self-abasing (Col. 2:23) self-abnegation and abstention as a discipline of pious "spirituality." Jesus explained that His disciples did not fast like the Pharisees and the disciples of John, for they were joyously celebrating the presence of the Bridegroom in the new covenant (Luke 5:33-39), a fulfillment of the prophecy that "the fasts will become joy and gladness" (Zech. 8:19). If and when those in the kingdom do voluntarily fast it should not be done in ostentatious externality, but as a private abstention from food in order to "count all things but loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord" (Phil. 3:8).

### **Section 73**

#### **Kingdom Priority - Matt. 6:19-34**

Inordinate preoccupation with anything or anyone other than the King and His righteousness in the kingdom disallows the function of the kingdom as God intends. The central feature of kingdom living is Jesus Christ, for Christianity is Christ.

Material "treasures on earth" can so easily become the preoccupation of our mind and emotions, to the extent that they are appraised and prized of having ultimate value in our personal priorities, and thus become deified in idolatrous covetousness. We must "be on guard against avarice and greed, for life does not consist of possessions" (Lk. 12:15), Jesus said on

another occasion. Paul warned that “the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil, and some longing for it have wandered away from the faith” (I Tim. 6:10). The Jewish culture and religion laid great stock in material things and monetary assets. Religion has often succumbed to greedy materialism that has focused on buildings, budgets and bank-accounts, rather than on God and on the expression of His grace and compassion for mankind in Jesus Christ. The secular materialism that pervades Western society today is preoccupied with transient, temporal things which are accumulated, collected, hoarded and stock-piled in ever-larger storage sheds and barns. Jesus wanted us to understand that the kingdom of God is not materialistically based, and that the attitude of possessiveness toward things is contrary to the kingdom concept of constant receptivity, even attitudes of possessiveness toward salvation, holiness, and eternal life. We are “not to fix our hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God” (I Tim. 6:17), and to recognize that the spiritual and eternal treasure is Jesus Christ. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God, and not of ourselves” (II Cor. 4:7).

“The person who constantly covets material things does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Eph. 5:5). “No man can serve two masters.” If Christ is Lord and Master of our lives in the kingdom, and reigns in us to manifest His character through our behavior, then the money-god of Mammon cannot be allowed to usurp the centrality of His life in us. The spiritual equation is always either/or, God or Satan, life or death, spiritual treasure or material treasure, for we will submit to and be enslaved by one or the other. Jesus is not saying that poverty is a virtue, but that our attitudes of preoccupation and priority toward God or toward material wealth will reveal the god to whom we have submitted ourselves.

This explains the necessity for a singularity of focus whereby we “fix our eyes on Jesus” (Heb. 12:2) and “the eyes of our heart are enlightened to see the hope of His calling,

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what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18). Religion has traditionally had an “evil eye” of selfish and material preoccupation. Even the religious focus on ten-percent tithing has been a focus set in the wrong place. Without a singular spiritual focus, religion is involved in a double vision that is essentially “doublemindedness, unstable in all its ways” (James 1:8). Jesus indicated that our spiritual focus in the spiritual kingdom should be on the spiritual treasure that is ours in Christ. Our treasure-focus will determine whether we participate in godliness or idolatry. “Set your mind on things above” (Col. 3:1), and not on material wealth, profit and money which seem to gleam so brightly in the darkness and blindness of the world-system.

Earthly possessions do not provide security and freedom from anxiety as the world advertises, but instead they produce anxiety. Therefore Jesus advised that we should “not be anxious for our life, what we shall eat, or drink, or what clothing we shall put on.” There is a delusion in the illusion that the “god of this world” promotes, that there is a direct cause and effect link between employment with its monetary accumulation and physical sustenance. The handmaiden of religion has often propagated this delusion by attempting to make everyone self-sustaining, so that they will be church-sustaining, rather than being sustained by God by deriving all from Him in faith. Those in the kingdom should react differently to the pressures and problems and needs of life. By the receptivity of faith we believe that “God will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). We need not be anxious about our money-making abilities and how we are going to make a living, for we entrust ourselves to God’s providential and provisional care. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made know to God” (Phil. 4:6). Anxiety denotes a preoccupation and enslavement to material things rather than to God.

Thus our priority should be to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.” Focusing on the reign of Christ in our lives will free us from undue material concerns. The behavioral expression of the righteous character of the Righteous One living in us should be top priority in the kingdom, and such is manifested by the grace of God received by faith, not by religious conformity to external moral codes. When the visible expression of the righteous character of God is top priority in our kingdom living, God will take care of all other needs we might have. This is not fatalism or passivism, but the recognition of all sufficiency in Jesus Christ. “My grace is sufficient for you” (II Cor. 12:9).

We need not borrow trouble from tomorrow to create anxiety concerning what tomorrow will bring, for tomorrow there will be sufficient grace to provide for that day’s needs and concerns. We live in the present with the priority of allowing the personally present “I AM” God to provide for our every need while manifesting His personal character of righteousness through our behavior in the kingdom of God.

### **Section 74**

#### **Discernment in the Kingdom - Matt. 7:1-6; Lk. 6:37-42**

As the activity of the kingdom is derived from God and not from ourselves, we are in no position to engage in the judgmentalism of censorious criticism and finger-pointing that condemns others for thinking and acting different than we do. God in Christ must be allowed to act uniquely in all who are receptive to His reign in their lives. Religion is inevitably rampant with judgmentalism which justifies its own behavior while condemning others. They are engaged in the “good and evil” game first played in the garden of Eden when man set himself up as his own center of reference determining that his opinions and actions were the “good” and the “right,” and all others were “evil” and “wrong.” From that self-centered

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vantage point self-oriented religion has judged others with a critical spirit attacking dissenters with harsh verdicts for failing to conform. Jesus explained that “in the way you judge, you will be judged,” apparently verbalizing the obvious reciprocity of judgmentalism whereby one side attempts to build itself up by running down the others. This breeds a constant religious sectarianism wherein nonconformists are labeled as “sinners, heretics, unspiritual,” and guilty of advocating “another gospel.” Those involved in the kingdom cannot assume the self-elevated position of superiority that allows them to judge or condemn another in unloving, detached objectivity, for their spiritual condition is only received by the grace of God and Christ desires to express His character of love and acceptance toward all men through us.

Faultfinders are so often blind to their own faults, like David was when he reacted to Nathan’s story of the poor man’s ewe (II Sam. 12:1-7). Religion is so often blind to its own sins, and ends up being “a blind man guiding a blind man until both fall into a pit” (Matt. 15:14). Such myopic faultfinding is illustrated by Jesus in the hyperbole of having a log, a plank, a timber in one’s eye while attempting to take a splinter or speck out of another’s eye. Self-blinded by their own self-importance, religionists refuse to be self-critical and engage in self-examination. They have a spiritual ophthalmological impediment that disallows them to see from God’s perspective. Those in the kingdom must realize that they are in no position to chastise and condemn other’s faults for God graciously accepts us in the midst of our faults. His love in us does not “keep a record of wrongs” or “delight in evil” (I Cor. 13:5,6). Constantly we must examine ourselves (Gal. 6:4; I Cor. 11:28) and test ourselves in order to recognize that we are who we are only because Jesus Christ is in us (II Cor. 13:5).

Though we are not to lambaste others in condemnation and judgmentalism, neither are we to be so lax that we are spiritually undiscerning and indiscriminating. “Do not give what is

holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine,” Jesus said. In light of His constant conflict with the Jewish religionists, this statement appears to be a bold picturing of these antagonists as dogs and swine, both of which were particularly offensive to the Jews. There comes a time when the most valuable holy character of God is no longer offered to those who in their self-sufficiency are impervious to the grace of God and cannot or will not appreciate it, reacting to the gospel with contempt, scorn, rebellion and antagonism. When the hypocritical Pharisees were offended at Jesus’ portrayal of them, Jesus said, “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind” (Matt. 15:14). When the Jews resisted and blasphemed in Corinth, Paul said, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I shall go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6). They both understood that there was a time to avoid sharing spiritual reality with those who could not appreciate such and were only enraged by such.

### **Section 75**

#### **Receptivity in the Kingdom - Matt. 7:7-12; Lk. 6:31**

The attitude of kingdom participants must always be that of receptivity. God wants to give everything to us ontologically and dynamically in His Son, Jesus Christ. His grace must be received in faith as we “ask, seek and knock.” We do not try to “lay hold” of God by “storming the gates of heaven” as religion has advocated, thinking that we have a right to manipulate God by demanding and commanding what we want. To such religionists James explained, “You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so you can spend it on your own pleasures” (James 4:2,3). The kingdom attitude is faithful receptivity to God’s grace activity. Those who ask receive; those who seek find; and those who knock find the door to be opened in Christ. Even religionists, identified with the Evil One, know how to be benevolent and helpful, but such is nothing compared to the

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grace of God in Jesus Christ whereby He wants to give us all that He has to make us all that He intended us to be. Karl Barth notes that

“The Christian understands God as the unique source of all good and himself as absolutely needy in relation to Him. He has nothing either to represent or to present to God except himself as the one who has to receive all things from Him.”<sup>4</sup>

“The most intimate thing in Christian prayer is the fact that the Christian both may ask and actually does ask. The Christian is able to ask and to take because God gives Himself and all that He possesses. He freely gives us all things (Rom. 8:32). The true worship of God is that man is ready to take and actually does take where God Himself gives, that he seeks and knocks in order that he may really receive. This receiving is Christian prayer in all its centrality as petition. It does not derive from the self-will of the Christian himself, ...it derives from what the Christian receives from God.”<sup>5</sup>

The essential intent of the Law and the prophets and all of the old covenant prefiguring is summed up, fulfilled and brought into being when Christians within the kingdom are receptive to the activity of God in them, allowing God’s character of grace, love and goodness to be expressed to His glory. To be recipients of God’s grace and love is what all men that God created most want for themselves, whether they know it or not, and now those in the kingdom can positively express the character of God unto others in an initiatory way by being receptive to God’s activity. Such is a “golden rule” indeed, for it is God’s function in the kingdom.

### **Section 76**

#### **Two Ways - Matt. 7:13,14**

Contrasting the kingdom with religion, Jesus draws His message to a close by using four illustrations to expose the

dichotomy between the two. He pictures two ways, two trees, two claims and two houses, and within each He presents an antithesis that presents all men with the necessity of choosing one or the other, either God or Satan, either Christianity or religion.

The small narrow gate is the entrance to the narrow way which leads to life, and few find it for it is not naturally attractive, comfortable or easy. Jesus Christ is the way and the life (John 14:6), and His way is the way of radical singularity in the kingdom. His way is not easily passable, for indeed it is impossible apart from the receptivity of God's grace. It is not the popular road of majority opinion which pleases the masses, for it must often be walked alone seeking only God's approval. Few indeed are being saved (Lk. 13:22-30), for so many are not willing to submit themselves to God in receptivity. The way of the kingdom is summed up in Jesus Christ who is Himself the gate, the way, and the journey's end of life.

The other way is a wide inviting gate entering on a broad way that leads to destruction, which many have chosen to enter. The religious way is a popular way for it is easier and expedient and more socially acceptable. There is a broad latitude of ecumenical pluralism with many ruts and ditches of epistemology and experientialism to settle in to. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12). All men will choose one way or the other, leading to spiritual life or spiritual death.

### **Section 77**

#### **Two Trees - Matt. 7:15-20; Lk. 6:43-45**

The character fruit of the tree will reveal whether one is "in it for profit" or is genuinely a prophet of God. The religious false-prophets are just wolves in sheep's clothing with insatiable carnivorous appetites to "eat people alive." Such "savage wolves" (Acts 20:29) can be so beguiling for they talk like a

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Christian, preach like a Christian, and use all the correct and orthodox vocabulary of Christian theology, but it is the fruit of their behavioral character and methodology that will eventually betray and reveal them. The rotten fruit of enmity, divisiveness, impurity, sensuality, etc. (Gal. 5:29-21) and the corrupt methods of power, influence, fame and success will be revealed as being derived from the Evil One, who controls all religionists as his agents (II Cor. 11:13-15). When their evil and deceitful character is revealed they face being cut down and thrown into the fire of God's judgment (John 15:6; Rom. 11:19-22), along with all those identified with them. Until then we must not become separatistic "fruit inspectors" and "heresy hunters," but allow Christ to do the separating until their selfish disobedience is exposed.

God's prophets and people are like the good tree that produces the good fruit of His character. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and godly control of the self" (Gal. 5:22,23). The fruit of God's character can only be derived from God by faithful receptivity, and can never be manufactured by man. Those in the kingdom should be cognizant of and discerning of spiritual character fruit in order to distinguish between those involved in religion and Christianity.

### **Section 78**

#### **Two Claims - Matt. 7:21-23; Lk. 6:46**

Men will make all kinds of claims to be identified with the Lord, but there is a vast difference between those who know and submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ in the kingdom and those who merely use His name in religion. Many there are in religion who will say, "Lord, Lord," and claim to have done all kinds of "signs and wonders" in His name. They will list their religious good works of having professed God, served God, experienced God, received the blessing of God, prophesied

for God, done supernatural things for God, and achieved great results for God. They think they should have special privileges from God because they have been so loyal, dedicated and committed to God. But God does not reward self-righteousness which issues forth in lawless behavior that is contrary to His character. The lawlessness of sin (I John 3:4) which is derived from diabolic source (I John 3:8) is already at work (II Thess. 2:7) in the religious endeavors that pervade the world. To such peoples Jesus will say, "I never knew you," for He never entrusted Himself to them (John 2:24) and had no spiritual oneness and intimacy with them. It is one thing to say, "Lord, Lord," for words are cheap, but it is another thing to submit to the costly lordship of Jesus Christ and allow Him to reign in our lives in the kingdom. Religionists often want to say, "Lord, Lord," but they do not want Jesus Christ to "lord it over them" and be in control of their lives. They do not want to listen under Christ in obedience and "do the will of the Father" by allowing the character of Christ to be lived out in their behavior. Only thus do we enter into and participate in the kingdom of Christ.

### **Section 79**

#### **Two Houses - Matt. 7:24-27; Lk. 6:47-49**

As a final dichotomy Jesus refers to two houses which may look very much alike on the exterior, but they are built on different spiritual foundations. The wise man in the kingdom who recognizes that Christ is his wisdom (I Cor. 1:24,30) builds a "spiritual house" (I Pet. 2:5) upon the solid rock foundation of Jesus Christ Himself. Acting on His words by allowing for the receptivity of His activity, the Christian "stands firm" in Christ by the grace of God. Religion builds its house on the sands of self-sufficiency. Building with the self-righteous materials of "wood, hay and stubble" (I Cor. 3:12), the foundation of these foolish religionists will not stand. The storm tells the differ-

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ence. The trials and testings of life do not overcome Christ's life in the Christian, but the foundation of self-reliance on which the religionists have built cannot endure the forces of life and their house will fall with a great crash.

The message of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount thus concludes with a fourfold repetition of the dichotomy between kingdom living and religious structure. All men are choosing creatures who must choose one or the other, with the complete cognition that one leads to the stability of spiritual life in Christ and the other to the ruination of spiritual destruction.

### **Section 80**

#### **Audience Amazed - Matt. 7:28 – 8:1**

Those who heard Jesus were once again amazed that "He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" in Jewish religion. Religious teachers often regurgitate the old, secondhand interpretations of past "authorities" and scholars, or they insinuate their own self-designated authority in a new revelation or interpretation. Creedal orthodoxy and inspired personal opinions are no match for the divine authority that Jesus exhibited. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18).

It must be reiterated in conclusion that failure to understand the Sermon on the Mount in the context of the conflict between religion and the kingdom often leads to yet another religious interpretation of His words that advocates new ethical behavior standards that Christians are encouraged to conform to or achieve. Jesus was not introducing a new covenant law system, but was giving a preview of the kingdom of grace wherein He would reign as Lord in Christians, manifesting His life and character of righteousness.

## Chapter Six

# Continued Ministry in Galilee

Following His extended teaching on the plateau of the mount, Jesus descended back to His adopted hometown of Capernaum. The gospel writers record several incidents wherein Jesus continued His ministry in the region of Galilee, continuing to keep His distance from the center of Jewish religion in Jerusalem of Judea.

### Section 81

#### **Centurion's Son Healed - Matt. 8:5-13; Lk. 7:1-10**

Upon His return to Capernaum a centurion approached Jesus explaining that he had a servant who was dying. Luke indicates that the centurion first went to the Jewish leaders seeking an introduction to Jesus. As religion has often accommodated government for the reciprocal advantages to be gained thereby, the Jewish leaders brought the centurion to Jesus explaining that this man was “worthy” of having his plight considered because he had built their synagogue and loved their nation. It was a case of “you help us, and we’ll help you; you scratch our back, and we’ll scratch yours.” Despite their motives, Jesus accompanied them because He loved people and lived to serve men in need.

The centurion made it known that he did not consider himself worthy of having Jesus come to his home to heal his servant. Believing that Jesus’ power and authority did not

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require Jesus' physical presence, since he too was one who commanded and delegated authority, the centurion suggested that Jesus could just heal the servant from a distance, which He did. Jesus was rather surprised that a Gentile would have such trusting faith, and commended the centurion saying, "I have not found such faith in Israel," among the Jewish people.

Jesus was quite aware that the kingdom He came to inaugurate would include all peoples universally and would not be exclusivistically defined by nationality, race or religious practices. Countless numbers of people from all around the earth would dine with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the forerunners of faith, in the fellowship of God's spiritual banquet as "sons of the kingdom," while the Jews who thought they had a "corner on God" and His kingdom by their physical heritage would exclude themselves in unbelief and be cast into the judgment of Gehenna. Such a scenario was inconceivable to the Jewish religionists in their nationalistic pride, but that is exactly what transpired as physical Israel forfeited its identity as the "people of God" and those identified with Jesus Christ as Christians became the spiritual Israel of God's intent (cf. Rom. 9:6,7; Gal 6:16).

Religious exclusivism and elitism based on nationality, ethnicity, gender, economic advantage, ideology, moral conformity, etc. is not the basis of the kingdom that Jesus came to expound and expedite. The criteria for participation in the Christian kingdom is reception of the Messiah-King in faith which recognizes His function in situations that often seem impossible, and is receptive to His authority and activity.

### **Section 82**

#### **Widow's Son Raised - Lk. 7:11-17**

In the fair city of Nain, for that is what the name of the city means, located approximately twenty-five miles southwest of Capernaum, Jesus and His disciples along with a sizable group

of followers met another group of people. A widow had lost her only son and the body was being carried in a funeral procession to the cemetery outside of the walled city. The procession of the One who is Life met the procession of death.

Acting in unsolicited compassion for the woman and without regard for religious traditions and superstitions, Jesus approached and touched the coffin bearing the body of the dead son. Jewish religion regarded the touching of dead bodies and any items associated with death as cause of religious defilement requiring ceremonial purification. Knowing that He was “Lord both of the dead and living” (Rom. 14:9), Jesus disregarded such superstitious externalities and acted in compassion for the grieving widow. Without elaborate ceremony, He tenderly exhorted the widow, saying, “Do not weep,” and then proceeded to remove the cause of her weeping by commanding the lifeless body to, “Rise up.” Death could not hold the son as he stood before the Lord of Life. The young man experienced life out of death, sat up, and began to speak.

Those who observed this miracle were convinced that “God had visited His people” in the form of “a great prophet.” Having seen death give way to the power of life in the Son of God, those who observed such reported it far and wide.

Religion has no solutions for death, but exists in the fear of death with its alleged pollutions and defilements. As a participant in spiritual death and the deeds of death derived from the diabolic source of the one “having the power of death” (Heb. 2:14), religion is impotent to resolve the problem of death, for it is itself a form of death. Jesus alone is the “resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), replacing all forms of death with His life.

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### Section 83

#### **Inquiry from John the Baptist - Matt. 11:2-15; Lk. 7:18-30**

John the Baptist had prophesied coming cataclysm and judgment. The reports that he received of Jesus' ministry were not of judgment, but of compassion and healings. From the dungeon of Machaerus John heard that Jesus was gentle, loving, and had even healed a servant of a Roman centurion at the behest of Jewish religionists. John was perplexed. He was not as sure as he previously was as to the identity of this One whom he had declared "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29). He was questioning whether he had been premature in recognizing Jesus as Messiah. "Are you the One?" he asked through his disciple couriers. John the Baptist did not have a full understanding of the spiritual nature of the Messianic kingdom Jesus came to bring in Himself.

Jesus allowed John's delegates to observe His ministry in order to note that it was indeed a fulfillment of prophecy wherein the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised up, and the poor receive good news (Isa. 2:18,19; 35:5,6; 61:1). Jesus told them to report to John what they had seen, and to tell him, "Blessed is he who does not feel let down by what I do." Though not in accord with John's inadequate Messianic preconceptions, God's judgment was indeed coming and repentance was needed.

When the representatives of John departed to carry their report to John, Jesus then commented on and commended John. John was no weather-vane moved by the wind of public opinion (like religionists usually are). John was not bedecked in the soft silken vestments of royalty and religion, but rather in coarse camel's hair. John was a rough-cut prophet, the greatest of all the prophets, the special prophet to introduce the Messiah (Mal. 3:1). But the age of prophets is over. The prophets "prophesied until John," who was the end of the line of the old covenant prophets. John was the anti-type of Elijah (Mal. 4:5;

cf. Lk 16:16). Fulfillment of the entire line of old covenant prophecy has come to fruition in Jesus Christ. Jesus indicated that all who are in His kingdom are greater than John, for they have more privilege, more blessing, and more hope than John ever realized. All who were in the old covenant prophetic age “did not receive what was promised” (Heb. 11: ; Lk. 10:23,24). Christians have all of God’s blessings and promises in Jesus Christ (II Cor. 1:20; Eph. 1:3).

Matthew records Jesus saying that “from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force” (Matt. 11:12). This could mean that zealot-type religious revolutionaries try to force what they perceive to be God’s program and kingdom into effect by violent, high-handed power-plays, or that religionists, often in coalition with governmental authorities, often make violent attacks on Christians in the kingdom. Another interpretation is to view “violence” as forceful pressure that seems to violate the misconceptions of what God had promised of the Messiah. The Messianic kingdom presses in apart from the expected channels of operation in the Law and the prophets. John the Baptist kicked off the force of an avalanche of God’s saving activity, and the pressing force of God’s activity of grace in the Son cannot be stopped despite what force might be brought against it by antagonistic religionists. The kingdom has come and the power of God’s grace cannot be stopped!

### **Section 84**

#### **Religious Games - Matt. 11:16-19; Lk. 7:31-35**

Jesus then compared the Jewish religion of that time, which is indicative of all religion, with a typical children’s game. Religion engages in the hypocritical charade of play-acting and role-playing. It likes to assume the director of activities to dictate what people should do in the “wedding game” or the “funeral game.” It is like the child’s game of “Simon says...”

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“Simon says, do this, do that – play this game, play that game – act happy, act sad – celebrate, mourn.” Simon calls the shots, but does not engage in the activity, and is never satisfied with what others do. The participants can never measure up to the performance demanded; they will always be charged with imperfection and impropriety; they are damned if they do, and damned if they do not. John’s ministry, for example, was like a funeral dirge. John did not eat or drink, and was charged with having a demon. The ministry of Jesus, on the other hand, was like a celebratory wedding dance, with feasting rather than fasting. Jesus came eating and drinking, and was charged with being a sacrilegious friend of publicans and sinners. Religion was not satisfied with either one of them.

The wisdom of God is justified however, for God is shown to be righteous in what He has done both in John and in Jesus, despite the fact that neither met the religious expectations of the day. Despite some misunderstanding of what the other was doing, God was working novelly and uniquely in both men at different times and in different circumstances. We must beware of the religious demands for conformity of methodology and expectation.

### **Section 85**

#### **Privilege Brings Responsibility - Matt. 11:20-24**

Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum were cities within the northern region of Galilee wherein Jesus had been ministering, teaching and doing miracles, but there had not been any real repentance and acceptance of His Messianic kingdom by the people of these areas. Jesus explained that the privilege of opportunity involves responsibility of determination and receptivity. Impenitence brings judgment. These people were stuck in their temporal and physical perspective of the benefits that could be derived, whether physical food, healings, spectacular

entertainment, etc. Religion attempts to cater to such, without demanding repentance.

Judgment will come upon those who prefer religion to the kingdom of Christ and His life lived out in them. Tyre and Sidon (Isa. 14:13-15), and Sodom (Gen. 19:24) will have more excuse than those who have seen Christ at work. Ruth Graham is reported to have commented on the depravity and degradation in the United States, saying, “If God doesn’t judge America, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.” Capernaum, being the center of Jesus’ activity in Galilee, had the greatest privilege and is thus compared to the worst city.

### **Section 86**

#### **The Simple Receive and Rest - Matt. 11:25-30**

All was not discouraging however. Jesus thanked the Father that the “wise and understanding,” the religious scribes and Pharisees, failed to understand the spiritual realities He was sharing, but there were some “babes,” some simple, trusting folk, who did repent and receive in faith. Religious pride and conceit blinds the religionists to spiritual truth, but the humble recognize their spiritual ignorance and need. Religion places great value in education, learning and knowledge, but the truth of the kingdom is often perceived by the uneducated and ignorant, the “have-nots” who in their simplicity recognize their need.

Reflecting in prayer, Jesus said, “No one fully knows You Father, but Me; and no one fully knows Me, but You, Father.” Jesus was quite aware of the oneness of essence and mind, of personal being and knowledge, that He had with the Father, God. He was willing to walk the lonely road of misunderstanding in order to reveal God. Spiritual truths are only realized as they are revealed to men by God. Revelation is caught not taught. Religion thinks that the gospel is propositional truth to be consented to and believed, that revelation is believing the

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Book, that the process of conversion is to “teach it; believe it; accept it; do it!” The revelation of the kingdom of Christ is spiritually discerned and appraised.

Jesus then made an invitation to those who are weary and heavy-laden by religion. The yoke of religious activity is indeed heavy and laborious. Religious leaders are high-handed and demanding in their “authority.” Religious activity allows for no rest. There is a constant demand for dedication and commitment, to be more involved and active in serving the organization and its leaders. Endless duties and ceremonies, services and rituals, are inculcated; go, go, go and do, do, do; unceasing performance and preservation of the traditions. The Apostle Peter later referred to the “yoke our fathers were not able to bear” (Acts 15:10) in the old covenant religion. Instead Jesus invites all men to rest from human activity and the performance of religion, in order to receive God’s activity of grace. In the Sabbath rest of the Christian covenant (Heb. 4) we can enjoy God’s activity, recognizing that Christianity is what God does, and not what we do. Jesus said, “Take MY yoke; learn of ME.” The ontological dynamic of Jesus Christ is the essence of Christian activity. Come and receive. Do not settle for the wearisome and burdensome toil and labor of religious performance; accept instead the grace of God’s activity in Jesus Christ, resting in His sufficiency.

This does not mean that the Christian life is all painless pleasure, an “easy street,” “membership in God’s red carpet club,” smooth sailing on seas of life. The divine resource and sufficiency are ours for every eventuality in the grace of God by the personal presence of Jesus Christ.

### **Section 87**

#### **Sinful Woman Anoints Jesus’ Feet - Lk. 7:36-40**

In an unidentified Galilean location, a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to eat with him. His motivations would

appear to be less than admirable, for he neglected to accord Jesus the common and conventional courtesies of social hospitality expected in that culture. In his proud exclusivism he condescended to receive Jesus into his home, probably to engage in some *ad hoc* detective work to personally interrogate Him and pin Him down on His ideas and prophetic credentials.

In the midst of the meal a woman known throughout the city for her sinful involvement in prostitution approached Jesus' feet as He reclined at the low table. Her unveiled head and unbound hair stigmatized her as a harlot. Violating social custom to "crash" the occasion of male conversation at table, she knelt at His feet and wept, then wiped the tears with her hair and anointed His feet with expensive perfumed ointment. Perhaps she wept in shame and repentance over her sinfulness and the recognition of the sinlessness of Jesus.

Jesus wasn't concerned about His "image" and reputation. He did not pull back from the touch of a woman, even a woman regarded socially and religiously as scandalous. Religion is self-righteously and hypocritically offended and disgusted at sin, while thoroughly engaged in the subtler forms thereof. Religion regards sin to be polluting and unclean, focusing on the externalities of such. Jesus realized that sinful expression was internally derived from the diabolic source (John 8:44; I Jn. 3:8).

Simon the Pharisee was horrified. He reasoned that if Jesus were a real prophet, he would have known what a sinful woman this was that was touching him and would be repulsed. The Pharisee had a skewed idea of those who spoke for God, expecting prophets to be rejective of sinfulness, and of sinners. Loveless and merciless religion is repulsed by, and shies away from, sinners. Religion is perhaps the greatest impediment to the open invitation to the kingdom of Christ, because it is predominantly concerned with the externalities of visible piety.

Reading Simon's mind, Jesus said, "I have something to say to you, Simon." "Speak, O Teacher," the Pharisee replied,

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perhaps with haughty contempt, patronage and mocking use of the title.

### Section 88

#### Parable of Two Debtors - Lk. 7:41-50

Jesus then employed a parabolic analogy that pictures the Pharisee in a worse condition than the prostitute. A lender had two debtors; one owed 500 denarii (a denarius being the equivalent of a day's wages) and the other 50 denarii. Neither could pay so he forgave both of their debts. Which of the debtors will love the lender most? In his typical materialistic mode of understanding, the Pharisee presumed that the one who had the greater debt which had been cancelled would love the lender the most. Jesus allowed for the accuracy of his humanistic reasoning, and proceeded to explain that the Pharisee was on this occasion the greater debtor and the least appreciative and was therefore inconsistent, irrational and inexcusable. The Pharisee was most in debt to Jesus on this occasion particularly for his lack of social courtesy and conventional hospitality, which evidenced his proud disdain and attitude of superiority over Jesus. The prostitute on this occasion had a proper attitude of humble repentance and honor for Jesus, and could appreciate divine forgiveness of her sins when subsequently granted by Jesus. The ironic anomaly being exposed is that of the greater appreciation being expressed by the prostitute, when the greater sin of the Pharisee met with no appreciation whatsoever for who Jesus was as the Forgiver. The parable is often interpreted as the prostitute being the greater sinner in general and therefore the most in debt to God for the transgression of His purity, and most appreciative of forgiveness. The Pharisee, along with all religion, would have thought so, evaluating the grossness of sinfulness by external quantity and quality, but this fails to take into account the context of the social *faux pas* of the Pharisee,

and the blindness of religionists to their own sinfulness and need of forgiveness.

Jesus told the woman, “Your sins are forgiven.” The religionists were appalled that Jesus would claim to forgive sins, for such was the domain of God alone. Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” Receptive faith allows God’s forgiveness to become personally efficacious in the individual. Receptivity of divine activity allows for divine functionality to take place. The woman was humbly available to God’s work; the Pharisee was isolated and excluded from the work of God by his pride.

### **Section 89**

#### **Women Minister to Jesus -Lk. 8:1-3**

Jesus continued to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God throughout the region of Galilee. Though Jewish religion relegated women to inferiority, Jesus confronted religion by treating women with equality as persons, knowing that “male and female are one before God” (Gal. 3:19). Jesus regarded the physical and spiritual needs of women no less important than those of men, but to this day religion around the world still treats women as inferior and as second-class persons.

Three women in particular are mentioned as having been healed of demons and infirmities by Jesus during this Galilean ministry. Mary Magdalene, from Magdala on the south end of the Sea of Galilee, had been healed from seven demons. Tradition within the early church indicated that she had previously been a prostitute. Joanna, the wife of Chuza, steward of Herod Antipas, whose palace was at that time located in Tiberias, is mentioned. Some have conjectured that she was the mother of the boy healed by Jesus in John 4:46-54, but this is inconclusive. The third woman mentioned is Suzanna, of whom there is no further mention in Scripture. Women such as these three

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appear to have organized together to provide physical support for Jesus and His disciples as they travelled.

### **Section 90**

#### **Jesus Accused of Being of Beelzebub - Matt. 12:22-37; Mk. 3:20-30**

Reports of Jesus' activities had been received in the religious headquarters of Jerusalem, and a delegation of scribes had been sent to northern Galilee to attempt to counteract and quench the phenomena of Jesus' ministry by any means possible. One of the means was to indicate that Jesus was crazy and "out of his mind" because he was being empowered by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demon world. Some of Jesus' friends were so caught up in the intensity of the antithetical spiritual conflict that they bought into the lie of such a charge.

A man who was possessed by a demon and was blind and dumb was brought to Jesus, and Jesus cast out the demon and caused the man to see and speak. The people who observed this miracle were amazed and concluded that Jesus was the "son of David," the Messiah. Genuine exorcisms of demons were regarded as manifestations of the Messianic kingdom of God as promised fulfillment of David – demonstrations of God at work. The Jewish religionists could not let this go unchallenged, so they declared that Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, who had originally been a Canaanite deity, "the lord of the high place," but had become in Jewish theology the designation of the ruler of the abyss and the abode of demons.

Jesus elucidated a basic principle of social dynamics in explaining that a kingdom divided against itself in civil war cannot stand and will be destroyed. If the prince of demons is casting out demons, he is fighting against himself. Satan is a smarter strategist than to attempt to cast himself out or destroy himself. Because of his deceitful and destructive ways, his

religious kingdom is often divided against itself in religious infighting, heresy hunting and excommunicative endeavors, but he does not seek to destroy himself.

The ball was thrown into their court when Jesus asked the accusing Pharisees to identify the derivative source of the spiritual power by which their religious exorcists cast out demons. “Do they cast out demons by the diabolic power of Beelzebub, as you are reasoning?” Jesus asked. Their own argument is turned against them, impinging upon their own religious colleagues.

“Since I cast out demons by the power of the Spirit of God, you can be assured that the kingdom of God has come,” Jesus concluded. The greater power of the omnipotent God has entered into the world realm of the “strong man,” the “god of this world,” the “evil one,” in order to bind him and desecrate and destroy his religious house and kingdom. In the completed period of Christ’s finished work, Satan who has bound people in religion throughout human history is himself bound so as to be denied free reign over mankind, and is overcome by the victorious Christ (Rev. 20:2).

Those who are not spiritually united with Christ (I Cor. 6:17) and therefore united in the expression of His purpose are necessarily opponents of Christ and His kingdom. The religious adherents and antagonists are the enemies of Christ and the Christian kingdom. They are aligned with the Evil One. Religionists do not gather mankind into the spiritual kingdom of Christ identified only with Him and the expression of His character; rather they scatter men into religious denominationalism, sectarianism, divisive doctrinal dissensions, etc.

To further amplify the definite either/or antithesis between those Christians who are identified with Him in the kingdom and the religionists who are identified with the devil, Jesus referred to an unforgivable eternal sin. The Pharisaic religionists were so blinded by the god of this world (II Cor 4:4) that they had identified the activity of God as being the activity of

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Satan. When confronted with God's good, they called it evil. When confronted with religious evil, they called it good. Such a distorted spiritual perspective that leads one to blasphemously speak harmfully of God's activity by the Holy Spirit and to identify such as diabolic rather than divine evidences a deliberate and settled defiance of God that will be unforgivable because the person is incapable of spiritual discernment of what God is doing in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus continued to drive home the point of the antithesis of His kingdom and that of religion by explaining that the derivative spiritual source of all that we do and say must be understood as being traceable back either to the root of the goodness of God or to the evil of the Evil One. In the spiritual heart of every man dwells either the good treasure of God in Christ (II Cor. 4:7) or the evil treasure of the Evil One, bringing forth good character or evil character in our behavior, respectively. The religionists who had accused Jesus of being Beelzebub were deriving their behavior and speech from the Evil One, and were incapable of speaking anything that represented the goodness of God, for which they would be held accountable in the judgement of God. Jesus identified them as the offspring of low-down poisonous serpent snakes, identifying the religionists spiritually with the "serpent of old" (Gen. 3:1-4; Rev. 12:9; 20:2).

### **Section 91**

#### **Sign of Jonah - Matt. 12:38-45**

Religion keeps trying to accommodate the evil and adulterous generations that seek after signs. They think that in seeing the supernatural they have seen God, failing to realize that the spiritual realm includes the Evil One and his supernatural abilities, even those which inspire their selfish seeking after signs.

In this case the religionists themselves demanded a supernatural sign which might possibly convince them of Jesus'

Messiahship. Jesus refers to them as part of “an evil and adulterous generation” estranged from the God of Israel, who could not perceive the power of God if it were performed right before them, as it was being done. Jesus offered them only “the sign of Jonah.” There is obviously a similarity between Jonah and Jesus in the three days and nights that Jonah spent in the sea-creature and Jesus spent in the tomb, but Jesus seems to be turning the similarity back on the religionists who are dogging Him for a sign. The Pharisees, like Jonah, were bitter and angry about what God was doing. Jonah and the Pharisees did not want God to be merciful to sinners, to be “a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness” (Jonah 4:2). Like Jonah, the Pharisees did not have “good reason to be angry” (Jonah 4:4). There would indeed be a sign in the miraculous resurrection of Jesus that evidenced the compassion and grace of God toward sinful men, restoring men with the loving life of God. Religionists are exposed by their failure to appreciate God’s grace, preferring instead their man-made methods of enacting what they call “fairness” and “justice.”

Jesus goes on to indicate that the Ninevites will stand in the judgment with the Pharisaic religionists and the evil generation they have produced, and the Ninevites will stand in condemnation of the present religious establishment for they at least repented and turned to God, which the Jewish religionists were refusing to do. “One greater than the prophet Jonah is present,” Jesus explains, referring to Himself.

“One greater than Solomon is here,” Jesus went on to say. Jesus is the wisdom of God personified (I Cor. 1:24,30). The queen of the South, Sheba, had sincerely sought out the wisdom of Solomon, but the Jewish religionists did not know divine wisdom when He stood before them and spoke to them, and would thus be condemned even by the Egyptians which were such enemies of the Israelites in the judgment before God.

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The parable of the demon being cast out and returning with seven spirits more evil than himself is quite enigmatic. This is more than just a return to the discussion of demon exorcism. Perhaps Jesus was intimating that the demon of unbelief was cast out of the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba, but had returned sevenfold in the Jewish religionists. More likely Jesus was noting that His ministry was figuratively as well as literally casting out evil spirits, opposed to God. He came to expel the Evil One from his enslavement of humanity, but though Jesus cast out the Evil One by His redemptive work, the demonic activity would return seven times worse than before because of the unbelief of the Jewish religionists and Jewish peoples. Prophetically Jesus was indicating that the situation for the Jewish religionists and their evil generation would be worse than before His coming, and indeed it was as historically documented at the fall of Jerusalem.

### **Section 92**

#### **Spiritual Family - Matt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21**

Jesus was becoming so direct in His invectives against the religionists that His own mother and brothers apparently sought to dissuade Him from His pointed pronouncements, and perhaps to protect Him from Himself by removing Him. Unable to get access to Him because of the crowds, a message was conveyed to Jesus that His mother and brothers sought to speak with Him.

Responding to the request, Jesus asked rhetorically, “Who is my mother and my brother?” Cognizant of the greater spiritual family in the kingdom of God, Jesus looked out on the believing followers and said, “Behold, My mother and My brothers.” The physical connections are not as important as the spiritual connections of familial oneness of all who “do the will of the Father” by receiving the Spirit of His Son and allow the

character of God to be expressed in the behavior of man to the glory of God.

### **Section 93**

**Jesus Stills the Storm on the Sea - Matt. 8:18,23-27;  
Mk. 4:35-41; Lk. 8:22-25**

After speaking parabolically about the kingdom, Jesus departed with His disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee. In the midst of the crossing a storm arose, as is quite common as the winds whip into the depression that sits below sea-level where the Sea of Galilee is located. Their small craft was filling with water from the high waves, and they were in jeopardy of sinking.

Jesus was asleep in the stern of the boat, so the disciples awoke Him to plead that He save them from perishing. Jesus miraculously stilled the winds and the waves, and then asked His disciples why they were full of fear instead of faith. Faith is the antidote to fear. Faith recognizes and is receptive to the activity of God in the situation, in which case we have nothing to fear. The disciples marvelled that Jesus had such divine power over the entirety of the created order. Religion may conjure up limited paranormal events, but they cannot command the meteorological events of the natural world.

### **Section 94**

**Demons Cast into Swine - Matt. 8:28-34; Mk. 5:1-20;  
Lk. 8:26-39**

On the other side of the Sea of Galilee in the region of Gadara (Matthew) and Gerasa (Mark and Luke), being the same general region, Jesus was confronted by two men possessed by demons. One man in particular ran around naked and lived among the tombs of the dead, unable to be restrained by chains, engaging in masochistic and suicidal acts against his

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own body. This man who appears to have been more active and aggressive than the other, ran up to Jesus and screamed, “What do I have to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Please do not torment me!” Jesus commanded the demon to depart from the man and requested the demon’s identity. “My name is Legion, for we are many,” replied the demon. “Please do not send us to the abyss; send us into that herd of swine instead,” they pleaded. Jesus allowed them to enter the swine, whereupon the entire herd rushed over the cliff into the sea.

The hired pig-tenders ran into the city to report the loss of the herd in their charge and what had happened to the men possessed with demons. Throngs of people came to see the previously vile demoniac now “clothed and in his right mind.” They were superstitiously fearful though, either of the presence of divine power or that Jesus would inflict further economic deprivation from loss of livestock, and they asked Jesus to leave. They would rather retain their pagan and demonic religion than the physical and spiritual restoration of life in Jesus Christ. As He reluctantly entered the boat with His disciples the man exorcised of demons requested that he might go with them, but Jesus told him to return to his peoples of that region and report what Jesus the Lord had done for him.

### Section 95

#### **Healings Evidencing the Receptivity of Faith -**

**Matt. 9:18-26; Mk. 5:21-43; Lk. 8:40-56**

Returning across the sea probably to Capernaum, Jesus was soon met by a Jewish ruler of the local synagogue, a man named Jairus, whose only child, a twelve year old daughter, was dying. Religious belief gave way to real need and the Jewish leader requested that Jesus come to heal his daughter.

As they were proceeding to his home, the synagogue ruler was probably frantically agitated when Jesus stopped to inquire who had touched His garment, for He had felt the divine power

administered. A woman who had been suffering from hemorrhaging for twelve years admitted that she had touched the cloak of Jesus, believing perhaps superstitiously that such a touch could heal her. Jesus explained that the receptivity of her trusting faith has indeed allowed the power of God to restore functional health in her body.

While speaking to the healed woman, reports arrived from the home of Jairus that his daughter was already dead. Jesus said to Jairus, "Do not fear; remain receptive in faith to what God can do in making your daughter healthy." Taking only Peter, James and John, Jesus went into the house of Jairus and found it full of religious mourners ostentatiously wailing in grief. He told them to quit weeping, for the child was "not dead, but sleeping." Those present laughed with scorn at His declaration, for they were convinced that she was dead. Apparently Jesus was indicating that the child was not permanently dead, but could be awakened unto life. "Sleep" is often used as a figurative euphemism for death by Jesus Christ and Christians, for physical death is not a terminus of annihilation but a gateway for continued experience of the spiritual and eternal life of God in Christ Jesus. Religion is incapable of effecting physical or spiritual restoration and healing. Only the Creator-Christ can restore the physical life He brought into being and bring spiritual new creation. Jesus took the hand of the dead child and spoke the Aramaic expression, *Talitha cumi*, meaning "Little girl, get up!" Without any period of convalescence the girl arose, walked away, and was given nourishment.

### **Section 96**

#### **Healing Two Blind Men and a Demon-possessed Mute - Matt. 9:27-34**

Two blind men were led to Jesus after He left the home of Jairus. They cried out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David," using a designation that identified Jesus as the Messiah in the

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lineage of King David. Jesus asked them whether they believed that He had the Messianic ability to cause them to see, and they replied, “Yes, Lord,” evidencing even more their acceptance of the identity of Jesus. Touching their eyes, Jesus healed their blindness and caused them to have physical sight, saying, “Because you have been receptive in faith to who I am and what God can do, you have received this healing.” Jesus then encouraged them not to broadcast their healing for He did not desire any additional attention from the religionists, but they disregarded His admonition.

Another man possessed of a demon and unable to speak was brought to Jesus. When the demon was exorcised the man could speak. The crowds of people continued to be amazed, saying, “We have not seen anything like this in Israel before.” The Pharisees, despite the previous denunciation of their reasoning (Matt. 12:24; Mk. 3:22), could not venture any other explanation but to attribute Jesus’ activity of casting out demons to the devil himself.

### **Section 97**

#### **Final Visit to Nazareth - Matt. 13:54-58; Mk. 6:1-6**

Jesus returned a final time to his home territory of Nazareth. He taught again in the local synagogue, and the people were amazed, asking, “Where did this man get this wisdom and power?” But their incredulity gave way to disbelief when they remembered again that Jesus was but a local carpenter who was never trained in the acceptable religious schools of the rabbis. Scandalized at what they presumed to be pretension, they wrote him off. Jesus noted that a prophet is seldom recognized with honor in his home country, but continued to be chagrined about their unbelief.

**Section 98**

**Twelve Disciples Sent Out in Galilee - Matt. 9:35-11:1;  
Mk. 6:6-13; Lk. 9:1-6**

Continuing on to the plain of Esdraelon, Jesus had compassion for those who are duped by religion. The followers of religion are confused, bewildered, unfulfilled and wandering around looking for answers, for they are sheep without a shepherd, abandoned by their insensitive and incapable religious leaders. Their religious false-shepherds are wolves in sheep's clothing who harass and destroy them. Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted this phenomena when he wrote,

“There were no longer any shepherds in Israel. No one led the flock to fresh waters to quench their thirst, no one protected them from the wolf. They were harassed, wounded and distraught under the dire rod of their shepherds, and lay prostrate upon the ground.

“There were questions but no answers, distress but no relief, anguish of conscience but no deliverance, tears but no consolation, sin but no forgiveness.

“What good was it when the scribes herded the people into the schools, when the devotees of the law sternly condemned sinners without lifting a finger to help them? What use were all these orthodox preachers and expounders of the Word, when they were not filled by boundless pity and compassion for God's maltreated and injured people? What is the use of scribes, devotees of the law, preachers and the rest, when there are no shepherds for the flock?

“The bad shepherds lord it over the flock by force, forgetting their charges and pursuing their own interests.”<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the greatest mission-field is to be found among the religious who have been abused by their religious leaders and do not understand the gospel of the kingdom.

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When Jesus sent out the disciples on their first missionary endeavors there was a particular urgency for those bound up in the Jewish religion, identified as “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” since Jesus seemed to have been aware of their impending destruction and demise which came at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70. This also explains part of the priority of sharing the gospel with the Jewish peoples in Acts 1:8 and Romans 1:16. The initial priority was to share the kingdom of God with those who should have been prepared for such by their heritage as the pictorial people of God and would soon experience decimation of their race and religion. Thus the disciples were encouraged not to go to the villages of the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but first of all to the Jews. Jesus told the disciples, “You will not complete your going to the cities of Israel, until the Son of man comes,” referring to the coming of God’s judgement upon Israel in A.D. 70.

So keen was Jesus to bring the good news of the Messianic kingdom to the Jewish people that He envisioned them as a harvest field ready for reaping, while at the same time there were insufficient laborers to proclaim that the time was fulfilled. The twelve disciples were sent out as apostles to preach this radically new concept of the spiritual kingdom which was not of this world, and given authority to heal and cast out demons. God’s physical provision was promised to them. The source of their witness was to be derived from the Spirit of God, for “the Spirit of your Father speaks in you.” They were cautioned about the inevitable persecution and suffering that they would endure in identification with Jesus, particularly from religionists and their cohorts in high places, but guaranteed that God would care for them and receive them unto Himself even if they were to die for His sake.

In the context of His warning of the inevitable conflict between Christianity and religion, Jesus stated, “I came not to bring peace, but a sword.” Religion and the world often view peace as but the absence of conflict and the acceptance of the

status-quo. The reality of the life of Jesus Christ in His people will be a “subversion” of such attempts at social peacefulness. Jesus is always a “disturber of the peace,” of the false tranquility that religion tries to engineer. The life of Jesus will “cut through” the hypocrisy and the veneer; it will serve as the “cutting edge” of spiritual reality. Jesus did not mean that He came to start a physical “holy war,” or to advocate political rebellion and revolution via “liberation theology”, or that He came to disrupt and diminish family life, but that His life would inevitably cause conflict and disruption with the world’s ways, which are the ways of religion. The life of Jesus necessarily confronts and conflicts with religion. Respectfully disagreeing with F. F. Bruce,<sup>2</sup> it was indeed Jesus’ *purpose* to bring “the sword” and to “cut through” religion in order to decimate and destroy such.

### **Section 99**

#### **The Death of John the Baptist - Matt. 14:1-12; Mk. 6:14-29; Lk. 9:7-9**

King Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, heard reports of what Jesus and His disciples were doing. Perhaps his guilty conscience caused him to speculate and imagine that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead, or as others conjectured a repersonification of Elijah or another prophet of God. Herod was guilty of having imprisoned John the Baptist at Machaerus on the east side of the Dead Sea at the behest of Herodias after John had denounced Herod’s incestuous and adulterous marriage to her. She was his niece, being the daughter of Aristobulus, and his sister-in-law, being the wife of his half-brother, Philip. Being a man of no scruples, he married her anyway.

Meanwhile Herodias kept seeking to have John the Baptist killed, and finally succeeded when at a birthday party for the king, her own daughter, Salome, danced lewdly before Herod who was drunk, and he promised her anything her heart desired up to half of the kingdom. At the instigation of her murderous

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mother she requested the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Afraid to lose face, Herod Antipas followed through and ordered the murder of John the Baptist. John's disciples buried his body and reported his death to Jesus as He was concluding His ministry in Galilee.

## Chapter Seven

# Parables of the Kingdom

In the midst of His ministry in Galilee Jesus taught the listeners in parables. His primary objective was to reveal Himself as the King of the new spiritual kingdom being inaugurated by His presence, but such was not in accord with the Messianic kingdom expectations of the Jews. In explaining the kingdom of God, Jesus necessarily exposed the prevailing religion of Judaism to be contrary in almost every detail to the reality of God's grace expressed in the life of the Son. The contrast Jesus was making led to inevitable conflict with the Jewish religionists. They thought He was a rebel-rouser, a Messianic pretender, a quack, a weirdo who was out of His mind, empowered by Beelzebub. When He spoke in parables they often could not understand what He was trying to say, but they eventually understood that He was talking about them and exposing their religiosity.

The use of parables can be a very effective teaching technique. The Greek word for "parable" is derived from two other Greek words, *para* meaning "beside" and *ballo* meaning "to throw." Literally, then, a parable is an illustrative story that is "thrown alongside" or "placed side by side" a similar or comparative concept. A parable brings parallel ideas together by drawing a figurative word-picture to illustrate a particular thought. It is often a thought-provoking analogy that leaves the mind of the listener in sufficient doubt as to its application that it stimulates further consideration thereof. Parables are often

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problematic and puzzling which leads some to refer to them as “riddles.” This enigmatic nature of a parable allows the story to function as a pictorial ponderable which leaves an image on one’s mind to be considered again and again. As such, the Biblical parables grate against dogmatism and the fundamentalistic desire to have everything figured out and nailed down in precision of understanding. When attempting to interpret Jesus’ parables the issue is not so much whether we “get it” figured out, as whether Jesus “gets to us” by planting a glimmer of His divine perspective of spiritual realities. The parable serves as a dum-dum bullet shot into our brain which then explodes and begins to color our thinking in accord with the “mind of Christ.”

When Jesus began to teach by using parables, He was using a method of story-telling that coincided with Middle-Eastern thought patterns. The mind-set of the average Palestinian in the first-century was not all systematized in tight patterns of deductive and inductive Aristotelian logic. They were simple people who often used the language of imagery and idioms which employed word-pictures based on known agricultural, vocational, social, political and religious customs. A contemporary example of the same analogical and artistic technique might be the editorial cartoons found in our newspapers which picture a present situation or issue in symbolic imagery. Obviously one must understand the situation which is being illustrated in order to understand the picture, and such is equally true in understanding the parables of Jesus. In theological terminology this is expressed by the German phrase, *sitz im leben*, meaning the “setting in life” in which the teaching has taken place. German scholar, Joachim Jeremias, has emphasized this necessity of understanding the contextual setting of each parable by considering when and where it was told, the audience who was listening, the objective of the teaching, etc.<sup>1</sup>

From at least the second century to the nineteenth century Biblical exegesis considered the parables to be allegories

wherein every detail of the story could be extracted and given a particular spiritual significance. This allowed for a wide latitude of subjective identification of the features of each parable, leading to far-reaching speculations of meaning that strained common-sense altogether. The interpretations of Origen of Alexandria in the third century were particularly outlandish examples of such allegorical interpretation. This tendency remained though until 1899 when Adolf Julicher<sup>2</sup> suggested that every detail of every parable did not have a precise meaning, but that every parable as a whole had one particular point that it was designed to reveal. This interpretive method for understanding the parables can lead to the opposite extreme of vague generalizations of varying emphases which are oversimplified and have limited value for understanding the teachings of Jesus. Avoiding both extremes, we must recognize that some parables, like the parable of the sower and the parable of the weeds, are interpreted allegorically by Jesus Himself. Other parables are not so interpreted, and should not be forced into such, although such seems to be the natural propensity of the biblical exegete. Each parable must be considered in the *sitz im leben* context within which it was told, and interpretations must avoid dogmatic assertions of meaning. We must avoid forcing psychoanalytical principles from our own age, as well as our own particular theological and eschatological biases, upon the interpretations of the biblical parables.

When Jesus first told these parables it was in the initial and preliminary period prior to His “finished work” on the cross. Of necessity there was a vague and veiled emphasis, which could only later be progressively revealed in greater detail. Jesus was painting a broad picture of what God was doing by sending His Son to reign as King in a kingdom that was radically different than what was expected and desired by the prevailing Jewish religion. As Jesus continued to teach the Jewish scribes and Pharisees became increasingly aware that what Jesus was proposing and proclaiming was the very antithesis of everything

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they espoused. The contrast led to open conflict which led to the crucifixion of Jesus at the instigation of the Jewish leaders, which served God's foreordained purposes to bring life out of death and form the eternal kingdom of grace in Jesus Christ.

### **Section 100**

**Teaching by Parables - Matt. 13:1-53; Mk. 4:1-34;**

**Lk. 8:4-18**

As Jesus taught by the Sea of Galilee the crowds of listeners pressed upon Him, so He entered into a boat, and seated therein He continued to teach the people. Although He had previously employed comparative and figurative analogies (cf. Mk. 1:17; 2:17,19,22; 3:34 etc.), Jesus now chooses to deliberately teach by parabolic comparisons.

### **Section 101**

**Parable of the Sower - Matt. 13:3-23; Mk. 4:3-20;**

**Lk. 8:5-15**

This parable sets the tone for all the parables which immediately follow. It does so by setting the cosmic context of God's activity. Failure to understand such has led to many parochial and religious interpretations of this and other parables.

God the Father has sown the seed of His intentioned activity into the cosmos of the affairs of mankind. The seed of His divine activity is the incarnate manifestation of the Word of God, Jesus Christ (John 1:1,14). The seed of the Christic Word was planted in the soil of this world. Like the seed, the Word was covered up; He disappeared; He died; and rose again (John 12:24). Such was the activity of God in the "finished work" (John 19:30) of Jesus Christ by the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and continued Pentecostal outpouring. God's intended restorative work has been accomplished in the work of Jesus Christ (John 17:4). God is not sitting on a heavenly

throne holding a biblical seed-catalogue, somewhat dismayed that sufficient numbers of evangelists and missionaries will not volunteer to plant His seed according to the Book. The seed of the Word, Jesus Christ, has been planted in the world once and for all (Rom. 6:10). God has acted in grace in the work and ministry of Jesus Christ (John 1:17); the pervasive power of God continues to work presently (Rom. 8:32); and His “purposes cannot be thwarted” (Job 42:2).

Despite any and all apparent interferences and failures, the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ has arrived and cannot be stopped. Everything necessary for Christ to reign as King in the world of mankind has been done by God. The reign of Christ in the lives of receptive mankind will bring forth the fruit of God’s character in the behavior of His creatures. Jesus Christ will indeed reign as Lord and King over all creation. The primary point of this parable is to express the assurance of the sufficiency of God’s work of grace in Jesus Christ, which will bring forth a harvest of fruitfulness “exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think” (Eph. 3:20).

The Jewish religionists who heard this parable by the Sea of Galilee, along with their religious counterparts through the centuries, could not understand what Jesus was saying. Religion never understands the “finished work” of God in Jesus Christ, and they certainly could not do so prior to its being finished. They always think that they must work and perform in order to finish the job. Neither can religion accept the universality of God’s work in the world, for such goes counter to their favored exclusivisms. The scribes and Pharisees could not fathom that the field of God’s activity was not a Jewish field and that the Messianic kingdom would include Gentiles as well. Even more offensive would have been the idea that Jews might be left out of the privileges of the kingdom because of their hardness of heart and unbelief (Rom. 11:20,25).

God has completely enacted the kingdom in the planting of the seed of His Son, Jesus Christ. Even the diabolic work of

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that “dirty bird,” the devil, cannot hinder or thwart His redemptive and restorative work in any lasting or permanent way. Satan may attempt to eat away at the gospel of Jesus Christ, but just like birds ingesting and excreting seed, he only serves to allow for broader distribution. Jesus had already identified the Jewish religionists with the Evil One (Matt. 12:34,35) and would do so again (John 8:44), so He seems to be indicating that the hostility and antagonism of religion might interfere with what God has done and is doing in His Son, Jesus Christ, but religion will never be able to overcome and thwart His divine work. Religion and its worldly ways might serve as the shallowness of rocky places and the choking thorns of improper desires and deceit, but God is going to accomplish and complete what He has intended to do in His Son, Jesus Christ, and will bring forth the abundant fruitfulness of His character (Gal. 5:22,23). Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:39).

The extent to which mankind gets sidetracked into religion does not impinge upon the ultimate victory of God in Jesus Christ. Men will respond to the interferences of religion and such will diminish the fruitfulness of God’s character in their lives as they fail to let Jesus Christ reign as Lord and King within them. God’s desire and the continuous preserving work of His Spirit is to cause His people to abide by faith in the Seed and in the Vine (John 15:5) so they will bear the fruit of His character unto His glory. Such is not calculable by the statistical percentages and results of religious procedures and endeavors. It is not what we do, but what He does that endures and bears fruit.

The religionists were devoid of spiritual understanding and did not “have ears to hear” and understand what Jesus was saying about the kingdom of God. The disciples of Jesus were themselves somewhat befuddled, so Jesus explained that He taught in parables not to hide the kingdom or its signifi-

cance, but because the kingdom of Christ had to be revealed by the Spirit of God; it has to be spiritually caught, rather than logically taught. The Christocentric mystery of the kingdom is never appraised and understood by natural logical and theological determinations, for such means are incapable of understanding “spiritual things” (I Cor. 2:14). Religionists are always caught up in the peripherals of religious experience, refusing to allow Christ to be the entirety of Christianity (I Cor. 3:21-23). Christ alone is the mystery of the kingdom (Col. 1:27; 2:2). The kingdom of God is only effectuated when Christ, the King, is reigning as Lord in the lives of His receptive people as the mysterious essence of the spiritual kingdom. Those who have received the Spirit of Christ are given spiritual discernment (I John 4:1), and the experience of the abundance of Christ’s life (John 10:10). Religionists who do not have the Spirit of Christ, even their common sense will fail them. Jesus reminds them that God foretold through the prophet Isaiah that the Jewish religionists would fail to hear, see, understand and receive Jesus Christ (Isa. 6:9,10). Those who receive the Spirit of Christ as Christians see and hear spiritually what the prophets and righteous men of old desired to see, but they “did not receive the promises” (Heb. 11:13), for the kingdom did not come until Jesus came.

### **Section 102**

#### **Parable of the Lamp - Mk. 4:21-25; Lk. 8:16-18**

Amplifying the idea of the inevitable victory of the sovereign activity of God in the kingdom, Jesus likens the reign of the King in the kingdom to a lamp which cannot be put under a basket or under the bed. God has made His stand as the “light of the world” in His Son, Jesus Christ (John 8:12; 12:35,46). Jesus Christ is the Light that cannot be hidden, the Truth (John 14:6) that cannot be denied, the Word (John 1:1,13) that cannot be silenced, the mystery (Col. 2:2) that cannot be concealed,

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the King (Rev. 19:16) who cannot be defeated. Religion is often surreptitiously engaged in the secret mysteries of Gnostic knowledge, seeking enlightenment of reason to disengage from the darkness of understanding, but such is not the pursuit of the Christian kingdom. Jesus Christ Himself is the essence of the mystery of the kingdom, a mystery (Col. 1:26,27) that was once concealed but has now been revealed for all men to know. That Christ is the reigning King of the kingdom will come to light. Full manifestation of the mystery of the kingdom must come to pass. The Light will shine in the darkness. The King will triumph in victory. The reality of Jesus Christ cannot be contained, quenched, hidden or stopped.

The measure of your spiritual understanding and discernment will allow you to have even more spiritual understanding, Jesus promised His disciples. Religionists who measure out the Christian message in the packaged epistemology of systematic theologies alone will sacrifice all common sense and understanding, and will fail to see what God has done and is doing as the Light of the Son permeates the darkness of the world.

### **Section 103**

#### **Parable of the Growing Seed - Mk. 4:26-29**

The kingdom of God has been sown by God in the Person and work of the Son, the King, Jesus Christ. Jesus has been sown into the world of mankind by His death, burial and resurrection (John 12:24), and His divine Life will of necessity take root, grow and bear fruit. God is at work in the soil of mankind which He created and prepared. God is doing what only God can do! The realization and success of the kingdom is not dependent on the efforts of man, though religion constantly tries to manufacture and orchestrate, to program and produce the kingdom, trying to make it happen and bring it into being, just as Jewish religionists were zealously doing in the first century. God's kingdom is the reign of the activity of the "finished

work” of Jesus. The active work of God’s grace in the dynamic of the life of the risen Lord Jesus will continue to bring to pass what God intends. The King actively reigns, and His grace-activity will be spontaneous, inauspicious and effective. Religion often promotes splashy and spectacular demonstrations of what they allege to be kingdom-activity as they try to establish such activity as being divine, but God just continues to do what He has always intended to do through His Son, Jesus Christ.

We “know not how” God does what He does in the completing of His kingdom. This frustrates the religionists no end, for they perpetually seek to figure out the “how-tos” of procedure, technique and formula in order to program the success of the kingdom. It is not necessary that we be cognizant or conscious of what God is doing.

Neither are we called upon to calculate the statistical results of ecclesiastical efforts to effect a harvest for the kingdom. Despite what religion does to interfere with God’s activity in the kingdom, there will not be a crop failure that forestalls the harvest. God’s harvest will come to pass in perfect fruition, the fulfillment of His intent in the restoration of mankind by His Son. The consummation of Christ’s “finished work” will come to pass by God’s activity of grace.

### **Section 104**

#### **Parable of the Weeds - Matt. 13:24-30; 36-43**

In yet another agri-theological parable, Jesus likens the kingdom to good seed which has been sown into the field of the world. As both the “Son of Man” and the “Seed of Abraham” (Gal. 3:16), Jesus could be viewed as both the sower and the seed, the giver and the gift. Those identified with and related to Jesus Christ by the presence of His life and activity within them are Christ-ones, Christians, “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26), “sons of the kingdom” transferred into the kingdom of the Beloved Son (Col. 1:13). Only by the

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indwelling dynamic of His life are we His seed, sons, children, or offspring. Christians are identified as “good seed” only because the goodness of God is operative in them and such goodness can only be sown and grown by God.

The kingdom has been planted in the world of mankind by the “finished work” (John 19:30) of Jesus Christ, and God continues to cause His life to grow in His people who are participants in the kingdom. Such growth and fruition is not threatened by birds, rocks, thorns or weeds. God’s good is not going to be overcome by evil. “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). The kingdom and the seeds of the kingdom are not in danger of being destroyed by the Evil One and the seeds of the weeds, which serve only as interference and inconvenience. The kingdom, the crop, the harvest are not threatened. The danger of uprooting comes only when the religious servants start yanking out plants.

While the farmer was getting his much needed sleep at night (no negligent napping is implied), an enemy came under the cover of darkness and sowed counterfeit seeds of weeds, tares, darnel or cheat. The diabolic Evil One, Satan, the devil, is the enemy and adversary of God’s work of grace in Jesus Christ. The weed seed that he plants are “sons of the Evil One.” Though John indicates that “the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious” (I John 3:10), the obviation is in the fruit that they bear rather than in the external foliage of bodily recognition. The wheat and the counterfeit cheat-weed look very similar and are almost indistinguishable; their appearance is not obviously different. But when the servants saw the plants growing in the field they were able to recognize that both wheat and cheat were growing side by side. They asked the owner of the field why the weeds were sown in the field, and he replied, “An enemy has done this.” Religious scholars have often been preoccupied with the problem of evil and why God allows terrible things to happen, the theological question of theodicy, but the biblical answer is quite straight-

forward, “An enemy has done this,” and that enemy is the adversary, the Evil One, the diabolic devil, the sin-producing Satan. Though defeated by the “finished work” of Jesus Christ, the devil is still active in his hindrances and misrepresentations of God’s work. The context of the kingdom of God on earth contains an inevitable admixture of good and evil, genuine and counterfeit, Spirit and flesh (Gal. 5:17). The presence of these antithetical spiritual activities does not imply that God got caught napping, allowing the devil to sneak in and do his evil deeds. God is quite aware of the presence and necessity of these contrasting operations.

The servants inquire of the landowner whether he would have them to tear out the weeds in order to leave the wheat to stand alone. Religion has often sought to create a community of the pure, holy and righteous by separating and casting out what they believe and perceive to be aberrations in order to develop an exclusivistic stand of elitists. The meaning of the word “Pharisee” is derived from the root of “separatism.” The Messianic expectation of the Jews of the first century was that the reign of God would come with a great separation between Jew and Gentile, expelling the pagan Gentiles and establishing a nationalistic racial and religious kingdom. Religious separatists have attempted to “play God” throughout the centuries of human history by exercising their own judgment in order to purge the community of God’s people from alleged unfit and unworthy members. Preoccupied with the problem of misrepresentation, they have engaged in programs and pogroms to extricate evil, sending forth heresy-hunters on witch-hunts of inquisitions demanding excommunication of all nonconformists. Religionists seem to think that God is rather impotent to preserve His own and needs their help, someone to “go to bat” for Him as His “designated hitter” in order to “mop up” opposition. They fail to recognize that “the battle is the Lord’s” (I Sam 17:47; II Chron. 20:15), and the war has already been won in the “finished work” of Christ. God does not need zealous

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activistic soldiers who go out to fight evil, redress the wrongs, and eliminate the dissidents in premature judgmentalism which endangers and expels true followers of Jesus Christ. God knows whose are His (II Tim. 2:19), and He only expects His people to “stand firm” in who they are in Christ (I Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:11,13,14; Phil. 4:1; Col. 4:12; I Thess. 3:8; II Thess. 2:15), rather than attempting to fight His battles for Him. The divisive and destructive tactics of separatistic religion are the methods of the destroyer, as they engage in activistic attacks to avenge, abolish and annihilate with the militaristic strong-arm methods of political power-plays and violent vendettas. Satan loves to sucker God’s people into divisive judgmentalism and fighting, for they are then doing his destructive job for him and doing more harm than good.

The landowner told the servants not to attempt to separate the wheat from the weeds, the sons of the kingdom from the sons of the evil one, for in so doing they were liable to uproot and oust genuine Christians. Though the farmworkers may have had the expertise to differentiate between wheat and weeds, religious men do not have sufficient knowledge, perception and perspective in order to differentiate between what is of God and what is of Satan, between absolute good and relative good, etc. Only God in His divine discernment “knows whose are His” (II Tim. 2:19), and what is derived from Him and what is not.

So what is to be our response to the interferences and misrepresentations of Satan in the context of the kingdom? We are to forbear, “stand firm,” and allow God to bring forth the fruit of His character. “Let both grow together until the harvest,” Jesus said. The Greek word *aphete* means to “let, leave, allow, or permit,” and is the root of the word *aphiemi* which means “to forgive.” “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34). Does this imply a passivism or pacifism of non-interference and nonresistance wherein we do nothing to stand up for the way of righteousness? Apparently so, when

it comes to engaging in divisive separatistic endeavors that disrupt the participants of the kingdom.

The separating will eventually come in the harvest of God's judgment. The ultimate and inexorable victory of God's kingdom will allow the sons of the kingdom to be eternally gathered into the unhindered heavenly presence of God, and the weeds will be bound in bundles and burned in the furnace of hell's fire. Such separating will be absolutely just and in accord with each man's reception or rejection of Jesus Christ.

### **Section 105**

#### **Parable of the Mustard Seed - Matt. 13:31,32; Mk. 4:30-32**

Continuing to explain the kingdom by similarities with agricultural and horticultural models, Jesus likens the kingdom of God to a mustard seed, which was the tiniest seed that a first-century Palestinian was aware of. Later Jesus used the mustard seed to illustrate the littleness of faith (Matt. 17:20). Here the mustard seed is sown upon the earth, representing that the kingdom of God has been sown into the whole world of mankind by the "finished work" of Jesus Christ. The small and seemingly insignificant little seed is sown, just as one man in Palestine was put into the earth and died (John 12:24). The little mustard seed, hidden and obscure, would grow into a great tree, just like a little acorn becomes a mighty oak tree. The kingdom of God will come to its intended end with abundant growth and fruition. The tiny will become immense; yea, the biggest reality in the universe. Jesus and His disciples were at that time a rather small and seemingly insignificant movement, but they were going to affect the entire world of mankind. Jesus would be the "first-born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).

The Jewish religionists were hassling and harassing Jesus, attempting to quench His activity, but the kingdom He was declaring was destined to triumph. God would certainly act in

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accord with His sovereign will. The reign of Christ would be unstoppable.

Like the mustard seed, the expression of the life of Christ within the kingdom would come through gradual growth and development. The first-century Jews expected the kingdom to commence with great grandeur in a massive and explosive display of divine power. They longed for visible and bombastic action that would expel the Romans and establish their exclusivistic kingdom in Palestine rather than in the whole world among all men. They were engaged in zealous and revolutionary efforts to organize such and to make it happen. This is typical of religion in all ages. They seem to prefer dynamite explosives to mustard seeds. They want to see immediate action and big results. They organize their activistic causes to achieve such spectacular displays. The kingdom of God is never accelerated through such activism and revolutionism, for the quantitative growth must come through the qualitative growth of the life of Jesus Christ. What can we do to make it happen? We are only to be available and receptive to what God wants to be and do in and through us to manifest the life and character of Jesus Christ.

Steadily and inevitably the kingdom of God will grow into a full-grown tree bearing the fruit of God's character as He intended. The birds of diabolic religionists (cf. Mk. 4:15) may even nest in the branches of the kingdom-tree, but they will not affect the inexorable activity of God in His kingdom.

### **Section 106**

#### **Parable of the Leaven - Matt. 13:33-35; Mk. 4:33,34**

Using a more domestic picture, Jesus likens the kingdom of Christ to leaven that a woman puts into a large measure of flour dough. Had the Pharisaic religionists understood what Jesus was saying, they would have objected to Jesus' illustrating God's activity in a feminine role, for their paternalistic

prejudices depreciated women, as religion has been prone to do throughout the ages. God has folded the leaven of His kingdom into the big dough-lump of the world of mankind, by the “finished work” of Jesus. The leaven or yeast works unobtrusively and imperceptibly in the lump. Silently and invisibly the leaven penetrates, permeates and pervades, diffusing into the dough to become an indwelling union with the flour-meal. A powerful transforming influence is at work that cannot be stopped. God is going to continue His kingdom-work in Christ, and such will not be terminated in any “half-risen” or “half-baked” state.

The Jewish religionists were desirous of seeing the kingdom come in a visible and explosive manner with a bombastic display of divine power that would conquer the Roman oppressors. They were getting impatient and developing revolutionary plans whereby they could “conceive big things and achieve big things for God.” Such religious activism never brings God’s kingdom into being or advances the kingdom.

Like leaven in the dough, God is working out the kingdom by the risen life of His Son, Jesus Christ. God does the necessary kneading, both in world situations and in our individual lives, and then in the fermentation process the little pockets of carbon dioxide expand when heated to provide the character-texture that God desires. God will bring it all out of the oven, done to perfection (Phil. 1:6), in His due time. In the meantime we are to patiently endure, always receptive to what God is doing by His gracious activity in Jesus Christ.

### **Section 107**

#### **Parable of the Treasure in the Field - Matt. 13:44**

Jesus hits right at the heart of religion when he tells a story about valuable “treasure.” Christ Himself is the treasure (II Cor. 4:7) which God has hidden in the field of the world of mankind via the redemptive and restorative “finished work” set in motion at the cross. Jesus is the hidden mystery (Col.

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1:26,27; 2:2) of the kingdom, and as He spoke these parables this was not completely evident and visible to the understanding of His listeners, most of whom were ensnared in religion. When a man discovers the surpassing value of Jesus Christ there is always great joy (*chara*) for such is inherent in the appreciation of grace (*charis*). Jesus explained that His joy would be made full in us (John 17:13) when we are spiritually united with Him. The joy at the discovery of the incomparable and superlative value of Christ and His kingdom causes one to be willing to give up anything and everything else in order to receive Him. Paul said, “Whatever things were gain for me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ, for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:7,8). It is an all or nothing proposition, the ultimate sacrifice, wherein we are willing to give up everything we have and are, not begrudgingly, but with great joyful anticipation of the invaluable reality of life in Christ Jesus. “Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it” (Matt. 16:25). Such is the “cost of discipleship” as Bonhoeffer refers to it.<sup>3</sup> “Seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33), we are willing to pay whatever price, and give up whatever is necessary, to buy the field, i.e., whatever context is necessary to participate in the treasure.

Religion often projects the idea that God’s treasure in Jesus Christ can be bought and possessed. Justification, salvation, eternal life, and spiritual gifts are often regarded as “possessions” to be obtained, assets to be gained, with specific benefits and advantages to be attained. From such a fallacious premise the religionists then engage in hawking and peddling the gospel (II Cor. 2:18) as if it were a product to be sold through high-pressure sales-evangelism. They fail to recognize that the treasure is available to be found by all who genuinely seek the mystery of God in Jesus Christ.

The Jewish religionists who were badgering Jesus were not interested in the hidden treasure of the mystery of Christ.

They wanted a kingdom that was visible and obvious to all which allowed them to keep all their material, religious and nationalistic treasures intact. They were not about to give up everything, especially their self-centeredness, for this spiritual kingdom that Jesus was speaking about. In fact, their view of the kingdom perpetuated selfishness. The object of ultimate value to them was increased assets, power and control. So in picturing the kingdom as a hidden treasure Jesus was exposing the contrary view of the kingdom expected by the religionists.

### **Section 108**

#### **Parable of the Pearl of Great Price - Matt. 13:45,46**

The point that Jesus makes in the next pictorial parable is quite similar to that of the hidden treasure. In His Son Jesus Christ, God has invested the ultimate reality, the object of superlative importance, invaluable worth, incomparable value, and matchless beauty into the world of mankind. Jesus is the “pearl of great price.”

Whereas the world of mankind seeks reality and value in the “goodly pearls” of wisdom and philosophy or in hard-to-find material objects of value, they may discover that Jesus Christ is “the acquisition of wisdom that is above pearls” (Job 28:18). Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:24,30), the reality of most value in the universe, the essence of the kingdom of God. Jesus is the reality which every man must find in order to participate in the riches of God’s grace (Eph. 1:7; 2:7) and eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:18). Whenever a man discovers the spiritually rich pearl of Jesus Christ and His life, he will be willing to give up everything and sacrifice whatever is necessary of material things, relationships or philosophies as the “cost of discipleship.”

The Pharisaic Jews who were eavesdropping on every word of Jesus were blind to the value of the pearl of God in Jesus Christ. They thought they were the “pearl of God’s eye” by

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exclusive right of race, religion and nation. They thought they had discovered the “pearl of wisdom” in their knowledge of the Torah, legalistic adherence to the Law, and moralistic conformity of behavior. Religion inevitably ascribes value to other things, rather than discovering such in Jesus Christ.

### **Section 109**

#### **Parable of the Net - Matt. 13:47-50**

Most of the disciples of Jesus could certainly relate to the next parable, for many of them had been fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus likens the kingdom that He came to bring in Himself to a seine-net that is dragged or drawn through the water to catch fish. The Seine River that flows through France is named after such. As the net is cast into the sea, Jesus has come into the world of mankind “made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7). In like manner as the fishing net gathers fish of every kind, Jesus as the Fisher of Men “draws all men to Himself” (John 12:32) in a universality that includes all races, genders, economic strata, as well as nationalistic identifications and cultural backgrounds. Within this “big sweep” of Christ’s activity is a “mixed bag” of pluralistic amalgamation, which must not be prematurely sorted or separated (as in the parable of the weeds).

The sorting out of the good and the bad comes only at the end of the ages, and is God’s business, for He has given “all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22) and His angelic assistants. Unless you are an angel you should stay out of the business of separating and sorting. Only in the end time will the “finished work” of Jesus Christ work out in its obvious objective of perpetuity of union and expression.

This was quite an indictment upon the Pharisees who were religious “separatists,” constantly engaged in judgmental sorting of what they determined was good and bad. Their conception of God’s kingdom was a preferential fraternity wherein

goodness was first of all based on the Jewishness of nation and race, and secondly on the moralism of belief and conformity to the Law.

In like manner religion through the centuries has not wanted to accept Christ's netting of mankind once and for all by His redemptive and restorative work. Rather than accept the seine-net of Christ's "finished work," religion prefers to sport-fish for a few rainbow-trout type of people on which to feed and boast. Religionists want to pull up the net of Christ's "catch" onto their beachhead and set up shop in the "sorting business." "This one is good; it is a keeper! This one is bad; it is not our preference." Since the Garden of Eden, religion has engaged in the "good and evil game," whereby they establish their own rules and criteria for good and bad according to their own self-centered preferences of belief and behavior. The kingdom of God is then identified as their own group of "good ol' guys." They then judgmentally cast out and excommunicate all nonconformists who are regarded as bad and evil.

Based upon Christ's "finished work," there will indeed be a divine judgment at the end of the age. The "good" will be those who have identified with God through the "Good Shepherd," Jesus Christ (John 10:11,14), and have been made "righteous" by the spiritual indwelling union of the Righteous One (I John 2:1). The "bad" are those persons who have been corrupted and abused by spiritual identification and union with the Evil One, and have willfully refused God's good in Jesus Christ, settling instead for the deified substitute of religion. The sons of the Evil One will be separated by the angelic agents of God and given the consequences of their choice of unbelief in the perpetuity of discomfort and anguish.

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### Section 110

#### Parable of the Householder - Matt. 13:51-53

The final parable in this sequence of parabolic teaching is a “one-liner.” Concluding His teaching in the symbolic imagery of parables, Jesus asked, “Have you understood all these things?” “Have you grasped what I have said? Do you have a handle on it? Do you have it all figured out and put together?” His disciples, who were the closest listeners, responded by casually indicating that they had comprehended all He had said. Obviously they were only beginning to understand the spiritual realities of the kingdom Christ came to bring in Himself. Whenever a man thinks he has a complete grasp of spiritual realities, you can be sure he does not! The ways of God are unfathomable and past finding out (Rom. 11:33).

Despite such, religion repeatedly affirms that it has figured out all the intricacies of God’s kingdom. With intricate detail they will outline their understanding ecclesiologically and eschatologically, thoroughly categorized, systematized and theologized as the “fundamentals of the faith.”

“Since you think you understand, but obviously do not,” Jesus seems to have said, “Let me advise you that every wise man, smart one, scholar, academician or diligent student who becomes a genuine disciple, learner and follower of the kingdom of Christ is like a steward, house-manager, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.” Within the kingdom there will always be dialectic and antinomy, tension and balance between old and new. As “stewards of the mysteries of God” (I Cor. 4:1), we must ever be aware that the inexhaustible treasure of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 4:7) can never be figured out and stereotyped in logical fundamentals. The treasure of Jesus Christ is a dynamic and living reality which will always serve as an iconoclast of all epistemologically based religion.

Religion runs to one extreme or the other, unable to see the full perspective of divine and spiritual reality in Christ.

Revering and conserving the traditions of old, some religionists become conservatives holding on to the past, always pointing backwards to the historical and theological antiquities. Others become progressive and liberal in their emphasis on theological novelties, wanting to be relevant and modern by advocating what is new. They seem to polarize in these positions of antiquity or modernity, old or new, becoming either museums full of relics or novelty shops full of the latest trinkets.

Jesus indicates that disciples in the kingdom are stewards entrusted with the treasure of the living presence of Jesus Christ. As such they must be humbly aware of the finite incomprehensibility of God's infinite working in Christ. As long as we remain within the space and time limitations here on earth, we will never have a complete understanding of the divine perspective of things, and how the old and the new correlate perfectly in Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, we present Him for all to see and know, avoiding dogmatism, legalism, conservatism, liberalism, and all other -isms, pointing only to Christ as the King who reigns as Lord in the kingdom.



## Chapter Eight

# Training of the Twelve

When the disciples returned from their ministry throughout Galilee, they reported to Jesus all they had done. Then for a period of approximately six months, Jesus seems to have concentrated more on instructing and preparing His twelve disciples for what was yet to come. Repeatedly they withdrew from the region of Galilee into the region governed by Philip, where the Jewish population was only a minority and the religious leaders were less likely to be able to manipulate the governing authorities.

### **Section 111**

**Feeding of the Five Thousand - Matt. 14:13-21;  
Mk. 6:30-44; Lk. 9:10-17; John 6:1-14**

Jesus decided to take His disciples on a retreat so they could rest and relax from the hectic pace of ministry. The people saw Jesus and His disciples departing by boat and they hurried around the shoreline to follow Him. The people were clamoring for a leader. They were like sheep without a shepherd, like a disorganized army without a commander (I Kgs 22:17). There was a political fervor underlying the anticipation of the crowds which were following Jesus. These multitudes were not just coming to hear His sermons, for they did not understand most of what He said. They did recognize that what Jesus was saying was quite different from the regular

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religious fare. They wanted to hear something different; they were ready for “change” which would challenge the *status-quo*. Revolutionary ideas were rumbling in their minds, and they were “reading into” Jesus teaching what they wanted to hear. The fanatical fervor among them was a ground swell that could become a mass movement or a mob-action.

When Jesus saw the crowd of people who had followed Him to this deserted area at the north end of the Sea of Galilee, He had compassion upon them. Religion is often devoid of such compassion and the genuine love that seeks the highest good of the other. Some religion sees the need of people and callously declares that such is the result of bad *karma*; “they are just getting what they deserve for failing to be good enough.” Other types of religion would so focus on the spiritual needs of the people that they would refuse to meet the physical needs of hunger and disease. Some social religion sees it as the primary “duty” of religion to feed the hungry and heal the sick. Jesus sees people and their needs and knows that He, the Messiah of God, is the divine provision for the proper function of mankind, physically, psychologically and spiritually.

After questioning Philip to see whether He would recognize the solution and the provision of the needs of the people in Himself, Jesus then supernaturally supplied bread and fish for everyone present, even to an abundance that exceeded the need. The purpose of the miracle was not to fuel the aspirations of the people for a Messiah of material supply, but to indicate that in the kingdom He came to bring He would serve as the spiritual supply of the “bread of life” which would satisfy the spiritual needs of mankind “exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20).

**Section 112**

**Jesus Refuses to be Political King - Matt. 14:22,23;  
Mk. 6:45,46; Jn. 6:14,15**

The Jewish expectation in Palestine was that God was going to send a human Jewish king who would restore the physical kingdom of Israel by wielding political and military power to overcome the Romans. The antagonism of the Zealots was developing into a ground swell that would lead to the revolt of the Jews against Rome in A.D. 66 and the Roman massacre of the Jews in A.D. 70. Jesus had been explaining throughout His teaching that the kingdom He had come to inaugurate was a totally different kind of kingdom – a spiritual kingdom – a kingdom not in accord with man’s ways but of God’s ways and character.

When the people saw the miracle Jesus had done they concluded that Jesus was “the Prophet” predicted by Moses (Deut. 18:15-19); the Messianic prophet. They may have connected the similarity of Moses feeding manna to the Israelites in the wilderness to the supply of bread provided by Jesus.

The crowd was soon mobilized in a mob-action with a frenzied fervor to force Jesus into being their “change-agent” and political king. It appears that the disciples were sympathetic to, and easily swayed to join in this nationalistic desire for a physical king, failing after almost two years of instruction to understand the spiritual implication of the kingdom Jesus had come to bring. Jesus had to compel or constrain the disciples to get into the boat and leave, whereupon He dismissed the crowd and escaped into the hills. He would not allow Himself to be part of a mass movement of patriotic revolt, or a hand-maiden of a misguided religious zeal.

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### Section 113

**Walking on Water - Matt. 14:24-33; Mk. 6:47-52;**

**Jn. 6:16-21**

As the disciples were rowing across the lake a storm arose, and they battled the waves for over six hours until the next morning between three and six o'clock. They supposed that Jesus was still meditating on the mountain and unaware of their plight. Exhausted and almost despairing, they thought they saw an apparition, a ghost, walking on the water, but upon closer observation they recognized Jesus. Jesus told them not to be afraid for their well-being, for His presence was the antidote for all fear, if they would be receptive in faith to all that He could do. These were important lessons in faith which the disciples needed to learn.

Impetuous Peter requested permission to walk across the water to meet Jesus, and was invited to do so by Jesus. As long as he "fixed his eyes on Jesus as the author and perfecter of faith" (Heb. 12:2), he derived from God the divine power to do the supernatural, but when he focused on the circumstances of the stormy waters forgetting his receptive dependence, he began to sink. Peter cried out, "Lord, save me," whereupon Jesus extended His hand and chastened him for his lapse of faith.

The storm immediately ceased, and the disciples were convinced once again that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, and should be worshipped as such. Their astonishment at all that Jesus could do was but a temporary cover-up of their obtuseness about spiritual realities and unwillingness to be receptive in faith in order to derive all things from God in Christ. Despite the provision of bread for five thousand men plus women and children, and the timely appearance of Jesus in the midst of the storm, the disciples were slow learners in the lessons of faith whereby Jesus was attempting to teach them that He Himself was the provision for all the needs of mankind.

## **Section 114**

### **Visit to Gennesaret - Matt. 14:34-36; Mk. 6:53-56**

Perhaps because they were blown off course by the storm, they put ashore in the area of Gennesaret. People soon recognized that Jesus and His disciples had landed, and the word went out concerning their presence. Many sick persons were brought to Jesus that He might heal them.

## **Section 115**

### **The Bread of Life - Jn. 6:22-71**

The crowd of people who had eaten the multiplied loaves and fishes on the far side of the sea of Galilee could not find Jesus the next morning so they returned to Capernaum. Finding Jesus there, they inquired how He had been transported across the sea. Jesus did not answer their question, but cut right to the point of noting their temporal and material satisfaction in eating physical food and thinking that someone who could provide such should be their political leader. “What you need,” Jesus indicates, “is Someone who can provide more than physical sustenance which perishes; Someone who can provide satisfaction and nourishment for your spiritual needs unto eternal life. Such is available only in Me, the Son of Man, who is authorized and sealed with the mark of God’s ownership and authenticity.”

Still caught up in their concepts of religious performance, they ask, “What must we do that we may work the works of God?” Religion is inevitably performance-based, seeking meritorious benefits from God for the works and efforts of religious men. The only work necessary, Jesus explained, is the “work of God” by His grace in His Son, which is to be received by faith by “believing on Him whom He has sent.”

Again in accord with their religious aspirations that expected the Messiah-King to be able to perform miracles,

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they requested that Jesus work a miracle, perform a sign, that will serve as the basis of their believing. Their belief, like all religious belief, was either empirical and epistemological or experiential and existential, rather than the ontological receptivity that is the basis of faith in Christ's kingdom.

Having mentioned that Moses miraculously supplied manna for the Israelites in the wilderness, "a bread out of heaven" (Exod. 16:4; Neh. 9:15; Ps. 78:24), Jesus reminded them that the bread did not come from Moses, but from God "out of heaven." Even so it was not the food of immortality, for the Israelites still died. There is a greater bread, the real "bread of life," from God "out of heaven" that gives life to the world of mankind. Anticipating that Jesus was going to work another miracle that produced bread out of heaven, they asked for such bread, in similar manner as the Samaritan woman asked for the water of life that Jesus promised (John 4:15). Jesus said, "I AM the bread of life," identifying Himself with the great I AM of Yahweh, God (Exod. 3:14), explaining that He had come from God "out of heaven" in a flesh and blood physical body in order to draw all men to Himself, to provide satisfaction to all the spiritual needs of men who were willing to receive Him by faith, participate in eternal life and be raised up in a spiritual resurrection body in the last day.

The Jewish religionists reacted to His claim of heavenly origins, but even more so to the idea of the "bread of life" being provided in His flesh. Particularly offensive were Jesus' words, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and...abides in Me and I in Him." The Judaic religion had strict dietary laws about eating meat and blood, but this sounded strangely like cannibalism if taken in a strict literalistic interpretation, as religion is prone to do. Jesus was using the language of metaphor, indicating that there needed to be a reception of His very Being into a person spiritually, allowing for an ontological incorporation

and participation in His life. This would be made possible by the offering of His physical and fleshly body in crucifixion on behalf of the sins of all mankind, and the resurrection of life out of death leading to the ascension of Christ's body so that the spiritual life sustenance could be available to all men. To make clear His use of symbolic and spiritual language, Jesus explained that His words were "spirit and life," for the spiritual is the vital reality.

Knowing these bold metaphorical images would be offensive to the Jewish religionists, Jesus used them to create a decisive turning-point which repudiated all the ideas of a physical and material kingdom with political and national overtones, focusing instead on the spiritual sufficiency of His own life. The religionists were disgusted. Most of the crowd was disillusioned and walked away in a wholesale defection. Jesus asked the twelve disciples if they, too, wanted to take the opportunity to leave, but Peter spoke for the group, saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe you are the Holy One of God." Though He appreciated their confession of faith, Jesus was aware that there was unbelief within the group, for one of them would betray Him.

### **Section 116**

**Defilement is from Within - Matt. 15:1-20; Mk. 7:1-23;  
Jn. 7:1**

Sensing that Jesus had alienated many of the people and looking for a point on which to make a confrontational issue, the Pharisees and scribes noted that Jesus' disciples did not keep all the rules and regulations of the *halakah*, being the precepts and traditions of their ancestral teachers. The disciples did not engage in the ceremonial cleansings of purification of their hands and utensils prior to eating. This was not a matter of personal cleanliness, sanitation or hygiene, but a ritualistic action to take away alleged religious defilement. Many of the

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common Jewish people did not keep these traditions meticulously, but here was a point the religionists could use to attack Jesus.

Jesus knew what they were doing and identified the religious leaders as hypocrites, pretentious play-actors, indicating that Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 29:13) rightly applied to them: "They honor God with their lips, but their heart is far from God. They worship God in vain and teach the precepts of men as the teaching of God."

Religion does not care what God wants. Their first priority is to preserve and conserve their religious traditions. As an example of such Jesus referred to the misapplied practice of the *Corban* vow within Judaism. The *Corban* vow was used by Jewish religionists to evade supporting their own parents and thus to circumvent the fifth commandment of the Decalogue. Instead of "honoring their father and mother" (Exod. 20:12) by caring and supporting them, they would claim that all they had was *Corban*, "offered to God," thus keeping everything for their own utilization and depriving their own parents from any benefit thereof. Religion often seeks loopholes in God's law which serve to their own benefit, and seek to justify their own selfish aspirations. By conniving casuistry they void what God states and desires, in order to serve their own purposes.

Jesus then explained to the crowd which had gathered that defilement does not come from external touch or action, but what comes out of a man from a spiritual source can defile the purity of character that God desires to be expressed in a man. Purity is not a matter of external application achieved by religious rules of cleanliness and nicety, but is derived only from the purity of the character of God operating within the spirit of man.

The disciples noted that the Pharisees were offended by Jesus' dismissal of their religious traditions of cleanliness. Jesus does not capitulate to the religionists taking offense, however. He indicates that they are not deriving from the spiri-

tual root of God and will be uprooted, for they are blind guides of the blind, doing far more harm than good. When Paul refers to avoiding “giving offense” to the weak, it is not the same as the rigid religionists “taking offense” at what God is doing. Jesus did not “cave-in” to religious manipulation, and neither should those who are called by His name as “Christians.”

In further explanation to His disciples, they understood that Jesus was abrogating all of the old covenant purification and food laws with their external application, both ritualistic and ethical, and indicating that genuine purity must come from within the spirit of a man as the pure character of God is operative from within that person’s spirit. Defilement only comes as a result of another spiritual source, the “evil treasure” (Matt. 12:35) of the Evil One, producing evil thoughts and evil character which proceed from within the spirit or heart of man and defile the man.

### **Section 117**

#### **Daughter of Syrophenician Woman Healed - Matt. 15:21-28; Mk. 7:24-30**

Withdrawing from the increasing hostility of the religionists in Galilee, Jesus and His disciples went into the region of Phoenicia which was approximately twenty to thirty miles to the northwest. Even in this region of Tyre and Sidon Jesus was recognized. A Syrophenician woman brought her demon possessed daughter, persistently requesting that Jesus cast out the demon.

Despite the disciples’ determination to send her away as a nuisance, Jesus explained that the priority of His personal ministry was to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” to the Jewish peoples who had wandered astray from God, whose religious leaders were but false-shepherds. Jesus clearly understood the universality of His spiritual kingdom for all peoples, but there was a sense of urgency for the Jewish people in light

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of the coming catastrophe which was to come upon them later in the first century.

Jesus' words about "the children's food being cast to the dogs" are difficult to understand. In their religious exclusivism and racial intolerance the Jews often referred derogatorily to the Gentiles as "dogs," but in what sense would Jesus employ such prejudicial terminology?

It seems best to interpret Jesus' words in the context of a teasing repartee wherein He is employing cynicism and sarcasm to expose typical Jewish religious attitudes toward Gentiles. Knowing that the Gentiles were fully aware of the Jewish prejudices and attitudes of racial superiority, Jesus asked the woman, "Do you think it would be religiously acceptable for you to come requesting healing, when I am a Jewish prophet?" Perhaps with a teasing "tongue in cheek" tone of voice, along with a wink, Jesus facetiously pantomimed that He had been sent with a typical Jewish bias exclusively to the Jewish people. This could have served as a test of her sincerity and faith, revealing whether she would be offended by such statements. Again, using a proverbial analogy of the prejudicial priority, if not exclusive right, of the children to have the bread rather than casting it to the dogs, Jesus again mocked the attitude of the Jewish religionists, who would have thought that God's "children," the Jews, had exclusive right to the "bread of God," and that none should be cast to the Gentile "dogs."

The woman was not offended. She understood what Jesus was doing, and retorted that even the dogs get crumbs which fall from the table. Jesus recognized her desperation and her faith, and allowed the power of God working through Him to cast out the demon and heal the daughter.

### **Section 118**

#### **Feeding of Four Thousand - Matt. 15:29-38; Mk. 7:31-8:9**

In a radical switch of location, the next recorded incident has Jesus and His disciples far removed from Phoenicia by as many as sixty to one hundred miles, on the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee in the territory of the ten cities known as Decapolis. Even in this non-Jewish region the populace was aware of Jesus' reputation as a healer. A man who was deaf and had a speech impediment was brought to Jesus and healed.

The crowds of followers swelled, perhaps reinforced by Galilean peoples who heard that Jesus was now in this desert region to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Four thousand men, in addition to women and children, which could have swelled the crowd to more than ten thousand, followed Jesus for three days and were becoming weak with hunger. Divine compassion for the people's needs again prompted Jesus to feed them. The reality of Jesus being the "Bread of life" is reinforced again, illustrating the sufficiency of Jesus to provide for the needs of all men. The perfect provision of God for the spiritual needs of all men in Jesus Christ is the reality that is to be noted. The presence of Jesus and the receptivity of men to all that He can do allows for the provision of divine activity within mankind.

### **Section 119**

#### **Jews Continue to Seek Signs - Matt. 15:39-16:4;**

#### **Mk. 8:10-12**

Venturing again into Galilee, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee with His disciples, landing on the western shore in the area of Magadan and Dalmanutha to the south of Capernaum. During His absence the Pharisees had apparently enlisted the assistance of their more liberal Sadducean religionists to conspire to hinder and oppose the ministry of Jesus. Finding Jesus,

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they tried to enter into dispute with Him, testing and questioning Him in order to find justifiable charges against Him. Based on their commonly held expectation of the coming Messiah-King being able to perform supernatural miracles, they again (Jn. 2:18; Matt. 12:38) asked Jesus for a sign. They did so not because they were open-minded and wanted to believe, but because they wanted to depreciate Jesus in the eyes of the people who were following Him.

“You read the signs for the weather,” Jesus answered. “When the evening sky is orange, you predict fair weather in the morning, and when the morning sky has the sun reflecting off the clouds, you predict stormy weather.” “You know how to read the meteorological indicators, but you cannot discern the signs of the times,” Jesus said. “You are physiologically adept, but spiritually bankrupt. It is indicative of an evil and adulterous generation that they keep wanting God to perform physical signs for them. A believing generation does not put God on a ‘performance program.’ You claim to believe in Yahweh, but you use him like a pet monkey to do tricks for you. You are identified with the Evil One, and have prostituted the relationship that Israel once had with God.” Mark records that Jesus “sighed deeply in His spirit,” for He regretted the spiritual obduracy of the religious leaders.

The only sign that Jesus would point them to was the “sign of Jonah.” Jesus may have again been looking ahead to the likeness of His three days and three nights in the tomb to the three days and three nights that Jonah spent in the sea-creature. But more consistent with the context is the similarity of the Jewish religionists with the prophet Jonah in their resentment, bitterness and anger concerning what God was doing. The Pharisees and Sadducees, like Jonah, did not want God to be “a gracious and compassionate God” (Jonah 4:2) who was merciful to sinners. They wanted their own agenda to be enacted. They wanted God to jump through their religious hoops. Jonah had warned that God’s judgment would come upon Nineveh

and “Nineveh would be overcome” (Jonah 3:4) unless they repented and believed in God. In like manner Jesus was indicating by “the sign of Jonah” that Judaism and the Palestinian peoples would be overcome and perish if they did not give up their obstinate and evil unbelief in what God was doing. Judgment did indeed come upon them in A.D. 70, when they were decimated and destroyed in their unbelief.

### **Section 120**

**Beware the Leaven of the Pharisees - Matt. 16:4-12;**

**Mk. 8:13-26**

Jesus and His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee again, travelling to the northwest and putting ashore in Bethsaida Julias which was just outside of the borders of Galilee. The disciples discovered that they had forgotten to bring any bread. Using the occasion of their arguing about the failure to bring bread, Jesus cautioned the disciples about “the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the leaven of Herod.” The pervasive evil influence of the religionists and the governing authorities who are so often found in coalition with one another, must always be regarded with skepticism. To the very end (Rev. 17:2; 18:9) these two willing puppets of the Evil One will serve as enemies to discredit and disrupt the Christian kingdom.

The disciples, meanwhile, were preoccupied with their negligence and failure to bring physical bread, so Jesus rebuked them for their misfocus and unwillingness to recognize the provision of God for all needs in Himself. “Is your heart hardened to the spiritual realities of God I am trying to reveal? Why are you so obtuse in your willingness to see and hear spiritual things? Can’t you see that I have repetitively been trying to get you to see that I am the Bread of Life? I illustrated such in the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand, and yet you are unwilling to perceive and understand

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that the physical is illustrative of the spiritual. The pernicious and pervasive evil of religious thinking, which is concerned only with tangible things and physical responsibilities, can so easily turn your thoughts away from Me and the provision that is inherent in My presence. It would be far better if you were concerned about the leavening influence of religious teaching and governmental authority, rather than with the lack of leavened bread.”

### Section 121

**Who Do You Say That I Am? - Matt. 16:13-20;**

**Mk. 8:27-30; Lk. 9:18-21**

Taking His disciples into the villages of Caesarea Philippi to the north of Galilee and outside of the domain of Jewish religion, Jesus inquired of them what the prevailing public opinion was of His identity among the Galileans. He was quite aware that they were not accepting Him as the Messiah that He was, for their religious preconceptions and political aspirations disallowed such, and many had recently defected when Jesus emphasized the spiritual nature of His kingdom (John 6:66). The disciples explained that the opinions varied, as some thought that He is a reappearing of John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the other Jewish prophets, who in any case would be but a preliminary forerunner of the promised Messiah-King. Perhaps a bit dismayed at the populace’s failure to accept Him for who He is, Jesus inquired of His disciples, “Who do you all say that I am?” Peter, being the quickest and most presumptuous spokesperson for the group, responded by saying, “You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus pronounced a special blessing upon Peter for confessing His true identity on behalf of the group of disciples, indicating that divine revelation is necessary to come to such a conclusion and confession. “Your name is *Petros* (masculine form of the word meaning “rock”),” Jesus said to Peter, “and

upon this *petra* (feminine form of the word meaning “rock”) I will construct the community of those who are “called out” within the kingdom, and the gates of Hades (controlled by the “one having the power of death, that is the devil”- Heb. 2:14), shall not prevail against that new kingdom-community of life.” Jesus was emphasizing the idea of “rock,” but it is questionable whether there is a definite play on words between *petros* (as a pebble rock) and *petra* (as foundation rock) as some have indicated. In confessing and agreeing with God that the Son, Jesus Christ, is the Messiah, the One bringing divine life to a new community of God’s people, the spiritual Israel, Peter had exposed the foundation bedrock upon which mankind could enter into spiritual union with God in Christ and form the collective “called out” community of the kingdom in which Christ’s life reigns, and over which death cannot prevail. In like manner as Abraham personified the rock of faith in the old covenant (Isa. 51:1), Peter now was the personified expression of the receptivity of faith that allowed an individual to be spiritually and ontologically united with Jesus Christ and His spiritual Body, the new Israel. By the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, Peter would be given the authority of Christ Himself (Matt. 28:18), and along with the other disciples (Matt. 18:18) serving as apostles in the church, would prohibit and authorize details of the physical expression of that new community of God’s people in alignment with God’s heavenly and spiritual objectives. Jesus was most certainly not conferring upon Peter the personal priority and supremacy which became the foundation of the religious papacy of the Roman church.

The disciples were then solemnly instructed not to broadcast their unique understanding of Jesus as the Messiah. First of all, the disciples only had limited awareness of the spiritual realities of such. Second, the Jewish expectations of the Messiah were such that they would only be misconstrued politically and nationalistically. Third, the religionists could take such

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declarations of Messiahship and use them to indict Jesus both religiously and politically.

### **Section 122**

#### **Jesus Foretells Death and Resurrection - Matt. 16:21-23; Mk. 8:31-33; Lk. 9:22**

Alone with His disciples, Jesus began to prepare them for what was to come. He straightforwardly explained that He, the Son of Man, must go to Jerusalem, undergo physical suffering, be blatantly rejected by the prevailing religionists, even murdered, only to rise again in resurrection after three days. Such a scenario seemed so contradictory to the expectations elicited by the foregoing confession of Jesus as the Messiah that Peter blurted out a rebuke of Jesus for such a defeatist and doomsday expression. The disciples still had vestiges of the Jewish misconceptions of the Messiah, and a limited understanding of how the kingdom was going to be enacted. How could a conquering King be a suffering and dying victim? Such was inconceivable to them.

Jesus could not allow Peter to attempt to dictate how God should inaugurate His kingdom, so in the same way that He had previously rebuked the demon (Mk. 1:25), Jesus then rebuked the spirit of Satan who was personifying himself and verbalizing through Peter. This was not just a difference of personal opinion on how to implement the physical logistics of a Messianic plan. Rather, Jesus recognized that in the cosmic conflict between God and Satan, Satan through Peter was trying to thwart what God was going to do in the redemption and restoration of mankind by dissuading Jesus from submitting to what God had in store for Him. Jesus declared that Peter's unwitting personification of Satan's expression was a scandal to what God was doing, and Peter's mind had been occupied with the natural and selfish concerns of man rather than with the mind of God. How quickly Peter, the Rock, went

from expressing the bedrock of faith in Christ to serving as the stumbling-rock that would hinder the path of Jesus.

### Section 123

#### **Giving Up Self-concern - Matt. 16:24-26; Mk. 8:34-36; Lk. 9:23-25**

Jesus then declared that if any man would come after Him, that person must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Him. It was a familiar sight in Roman Palestine during the first century to see a condemned criminal carrying his own gibbet, the *patibulum* crossbeam of his own execution instrument, to the site of his own death. Such would have been the mental picture conjured up in the minds of the disciples by Jesus' words. Discipleship involvement with Jesus was like giving up your life, abandoning all hopes and ambitions, joining your own funeral procession, caring less what the onlookers thought as they mocked you. Jesus seems to be saying, "Do you still want to confess Me as Messiah and follow Me, if it means giving up all self-concerns for one's reputation and life, if it means suffering, persecution, violent death, or even execution? Self-orientation and selfishness are contrary to the complete orientation of one's life in identification and union with Jesus Christ. Jesus was certainly not advocating the religious masochism and suppressionism of "dying to self," which is but another form of religious performance.

To save one's life is to hold on to it, love it, be attached to it, to be absorbed in self-concern. To lose one's life is to let go of it, to be detached from it, to repudiate selfishness, to be willing to die. The man who holds on to the things of this world and fears death is already entombed in the parameters of this world. The man who has given up all things of this world and ceases to fear death is free to live in the spontaneous expression of the spiritual life of God.

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### Section 124

#### Coming of the Kingdom in This Generation -

**Matt. 16:27,28; Mk. 8:38–9:1; Lk. 9:26,27**

If anyone is selfishly concerned about their religious reputation of respectability, they have capitulated to the sinful mindset of the evil world system, and will of necessity be ashamed to give up everything to identify with and manifest the life and character of Jesus in the kingdom. Referring to the religious context of first century Palestine as a “sinful generation” which had prostituted and adulterated their relationship with God, Jesus indicated that concern for such social and religious respectability necessarily causes one to be ashamed of complete identification with Him, which means that Jesus will be ashamed of that person’s inconsistency with the character of God in the judgment when our works are evaluated as to whether they have been “wrought in Him.”

Jesus then assuredly explained to His disciples that some of them would not experience physical death until the Son of Man came reigning in His kingdom with the power of God. Some have interpreted this as a reference to the resurrection of Jesus when He “was declared the Son of God with power” (Rom. 1:4), while others think it refers to the spiritual reign of Christ in the power of the Spirit from Pentecost onwards (Acts 1:8; 2:2). Still other commentators have considered this as a reference to the power of God displayed in judgment upon the Jewish religion in A.D. 70 (cf. Matt. 10:23). Many of the twelve disciples witnessed all of these manifestations of kingdom power.

**Section 125**

**Transfiguration of Jesus - Matt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8;**

**Lk. 9:28-36**

While still in the north near Caesarea-Philippi, Jesus took Peter, James and John up to a high mountain, probably Mount Hermon. There Jesus was transfigured or metamorphosed into a celestial or spiritual form wherein His face shown as the sun and His garments were white as light. Moses, the leader of the exodus and the one to receive the Law in the old covenant, and Elijah, the favorite prophet of the Jews who was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire, joined Jesus and were discussing with Him what He was to accomplish by His death in Jerusalem. The three disciples were being given a visual object lesson that tied the old covenant together with the new covenant, and allowed them to recognize that the promised death of Jesus was to be the victory that allowed for His glorious resurrection and spiritual continuance of life in a spiritual kingdom.

When Moses and Elijah departed, Peter, again acting apart from spiritual understanding, suggested they build three tabernacles on the top of the mountain, one for Jesus, Moses and Elijah respectively. Throughout the centuries of man, religion has sought to build physical buildings and shrines often as memorials to “mountain-top experiences.” To commemorate the past and the ethereal is often preferred to enduring the uneasy and often unpleasant practicum of God’s outworking in man and history. Peter would have preferred to continue the heavenly fellowship on the mount to having to go to Jerusalem and see His Master die, a variation of the temptation for which he was earlier rebuked.

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### **Section 126**

#### **Disciples Puzzled About Resurrection and Elijah -**

**Matt. 17:9-13; Mk. 9:9-13; Lk. 9:36**

Coming down from the mountain, Jesus told the three disciples not to broadcast what they had seen until after He had risen from the dead. Despite a glimpse of the meaning of resurrection in the transfiguration, they still had many questions concerning the implications of Jesus' resurrection, many of which were not answered until later.

They were also curious about Elijah's presence in the transfiguration, for they had been taught in their Jewish religious instruction, in accord with Malachi 4:5,6, that Elijah would come as a forerunner of the Messiah. Believing that Jesus was the Messiah, it now seemed that Elijah had come in the transfiguration after the advent of the Messiah. Jesus explained that Elijah had already come as a forerunner in the form of John the Baptist (cf. Matt. 11:14). John the Baptist was a prophet who suffered and died, so they should not think it strange or out of order that the Messiah should suffer and die in order to accomplish what God wanted to do. Religious thinking usually regards suffering and death as incongruous to God's expression of life and victory.

### **Section 127**

#### **Disciples Could Not Heal Boy With Demons -**

**Matt. 17:14-20; Mk. 9:14-29; Lk. 9:37-43**

As Jesus and the three disciples completed their descent to where the other nine disciples were located, they observed a scene of social turmoil where some Jewish scribes were taunting and ridiculing the nine disciples for not being able to cast a demon out of a young boy who was possessed by a demon. Jesus was chagrined at "the faithless and perverse generation"

of people who failed to understand who He was, why He had come, and what He intended to do.

The man with the demoniac son was desperate to have him delivered from his plight and questioned whether Jesus was able to do what the nine disciples were unable to do. Jesus turned the question of His ability around to a question of the man's receptivity of faith, to which the man replied, "I believe; help my unbelief." He thus admitted his own inability alongside of Jesus' total ability, which is the position of all genuine faith, requiring a person to admit, "I cannot; only He can." The demon was cast out of the boy, and Jesus explained to the disciples that the prayer of faith was necessary for such divine action. The nine disciples, like much of religion, apparently thought that supernatural power was inherent in them because of their association with Jesus, failing to recognize that divine power is inherent in Jesus alone, and faith, however small, is but availability to the ability of God, receptivity of His divine activity.

### **Section 128**

#### **Jesus Again Foretells Death and Resurrection -**

**Matt. 17:22,23; Mk. 9:30-32; Lk. 9:43-45**

Travelling south and entering again into the region of Galilee, Jesus again told His disciples that He would be delivered by betrayal to the authorities and killed, but would rise again from the dead on the third day. Jesus knew that they could not keep eluding the religious and governmental authorities who were becoming increasingly fearful and annoyed at the phenomena of a recalcitrant preacher attracting great crowds who wanted Him to be their political Messiah. Beyond the declarations and explanations of the kingdom and the display of the deeds of divine power, Jesus knew that His own death would serve as the remedial action to take away the diabolic death consequences from sinful mankind and serve as the redemption

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price in order to restore divine life to the spirit of men so that He might reign as King in their lives.

Religion always seeks to do away with Jesus, silence Him, and quench the manifestations of His life. They clearly understand that Jesus Christ is antithetical to all that they represent. Christianity and religion will always be enemies because religion is linked to the “adversary” of God.

### **Section 129**

#### **Jesus Pays Half-Shekel for Temple - Matt. 17:24-27**

Returning to the community of Capernaum which had served as the primary base of operations for the ministry of Jesus and His disciples, some of the Jewish bookkeepers who meticulously collected the prescribed half-shekel temple tax inquired of Peter whether Jesus paid the obligatory tax required by the Law (Exod. 30:13-16). By this time in first century Palestine the intent of the Law had been corrupted in the Jewish religion, and the Roman government had gotten “in on the action” by levying such a tax presumably for the “Department of Religion.” Once again religion and government were serving as “strange bedfellows.”

Sure that Jesus was not an anarchist, Peter assured the religious tax-collector that Jesus was one who paid any taxes that He owed. Jesus must have overheard the conversation of Peter and the tax-collector, for He then approached Peter asking, “What do you think, Peter, do kings receive taxes from their sons or from their constituents?” When Peter replied that it was the constituents who paid taxes, Jesus provided the logical conclusion that the sons of the king were free from paying taxes. Jesus, as the Son of God, did not owe any religious taxes. He was not a subject-constituent of their religious kingdom. In the kingdom that Jesus came to reveal Christians are not taxpaying constituents either, but we are “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). Religion has no right to extract

religious taxes, tolls, tributes or tithes from those who are sons of the King who reigns in their lives. We are free from the legalistic imposition of levied religious monetary mandates. The temple in which God dwells is our individual bodies and the collective community of the Church of Christ.

Jesus then exposed the ridiculousness of the religious funding fraud. “They think they are so powerful with their authority to require such payments,” Jesus seems to say, “so to show them the real extent of divine power that so far supersedes their puny power plays, Peter, just go down to the Sea of Galilee, throw in a hook (regardless of whether it has any bait on it), pull up the first fish that bites, take out the shekel that will be in its mouth, and pay the petty religious lackeys the half-shekel tax both for yourself and for Me.” By so doing Jesus trivialized the religious game they were playing and revealed the impotence and powerlessness of religious power compared to the power of God. He voluntarily chose to avoid scandalizing them by disallowing them to make an issue out of nonpayment of a tax He did not owe, since the spiritual reasoning for such they could not have understood as natural men (I Cor. 2:14). Once again religion was confronted and exposed. Robert Capon explains that Jesus “tacks a ‘Gone Fishing’ sign over the sweatshop of religion.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Section 130**

**The Greatest is as a Child - Matt. 18:1-5; Mk. 9:33-37;  
Lk. 9:46-48**

Despite being with Him for so long, the disciples still had a limited understanding of the radical difference of the spiritual kingdom Jesus was explaining. They still conceived of the kingdom as an organization with places of position and offices of preferment and prestige, where one would be greater than another in a human hierarchical system. Human and physical religious structures are not what the kingdom is all about. The

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kingdom is dynamic and alive with the life of the King, rather than depicted on a flowchart of leadership power and control.

On the way down to Capernaum they contended about who among them would be the greatest, so when they arrived at their quarters in Capernaum Jesus addressed the issue of their disputational reasoning. Jesus took a little child as an object lesson, indicating that a complete change of attitude was in order in the kingdom.

In Palestine during the third decade of the first century, children, especially male children, were valued by Jewish families for their potential posterity, but socially the children were regarded primarily as a nuisance. Children had no rights or status. They were dirty, snot-nosed inconveniences, who were regarded as inferior, ignorant and insignificant in a religious society that valued education, learning, wisdom and intelligence along with strict propriety. Children were on the bottom of the social and religious totem-pole, the least among family members, and were “to be seen not heard.”

When Jesus told the disciples they must become like little children to enter the kingdom, and humble themselves like little children to have a greater place in the kingdom, He was turning religious and social convention upside down. The kingdom is comprised of the little, the least and the lowly. In religion they clamor after the self-importance of places, position, privileges and controlling power to “lord it over” (Mk. 10:42) other people, but in the kingdom of God the humility of Christ within us is willing to assume the lowest and last place in order to serve everyone in love which takes no thought of our status or significance. Such an expression of the character of Christ, “in His name,” is truly being receptive to what God wants to be and do in us, constituting God’s idea of success and greatness.

### **Section 131**

#### **Tolerant of Diversity - Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 9:49,50**

John recalled a previous situation where another person was unofficially casting out demons “in Jesus name,” and explained that they had forbade that person from doing so because He was not identified as a member of their group. Obviously they did not understand that in the kingdom it does not matter whether a person has an acceptable position, title, or authority. Religion is so concerned about official membership in their group, the credentials for assuming a place of responsibility and certification for leadership, as well as having an acceptable and orthodox message and methodology. They want to formulate and establish the criteria for acceptability, demanding conformity of approach, and forbidding all other methodologies. The issue of most importance in the kingdom is that God is doing what God wants to do to meet the needs of mankind through whatever available vessels might present themselves. “He that is not against us is for us,” Jesus told the disciples, “for those who are acting as My representatives are not usually acting as My adversaries.” We need to be tolerant of diversities of thought and method.

### **Section 132**

#### **Concern For Little Ones - Matt. 18:6-11; Mk. 9:42-50**

Contrary to typical methods of religious recruitment, God is interested in the little ones, the least, the lowly, the “losers,” the “lost.” Religion touts their celebrities, people with big name recognition, people with money. Religion is concerned with winners and conquerors, people who can be lifted up as trophies of success. Jesus explained that God’s grace is extended to those in need, the “have-nots,” and if we repudiate them or cause them to stumble and be scandalized by our attitudes, then it would be better if we had a millstone hung around our neck

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and should sink into the depth of the sea. Stumblingblocks to receptive faith and participation in the kingdom will surely come, Jesus indicated, but woe to the religionists who create stumblingblocks to faith. The lowly, the outcasts, the “have-nots” are not dispensable; they are not spiritual “throwaways.” In fact, Jesus noted, your physical body-parts such as hands and feet and eyes are more dispensable than are these needy people. Severe judgment, “salted with fire,” awaits all religionists who hinder the “little ones” and the “lost ones” from entering the kingdom of Christ. Salt can be good, though, and the pervasive characteristic of salt should permeate and season all of our interpersonal relationships. The seasoning of the character of Christ will preserve our kingdom interactions from the rotteness of religious contention and exclusivism.

### **Section 133**

#### **Parable of the Shepherd - Matt. 18:12-14**

God is concerned that the little and the lowly among men should not perish. “God is not willing that any should perish” (II Pt. 3:9). To illustrate His point of God’s concern for the little and the lost, Jesus employed another parable of a shepherd with one hundred sheep and one of them goes astray. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine and seeks the lost sheep. There is great joy when the “Good Shepherd” (Jn. 10:1-18) finds a lost sheep, and God’s grace is granted to the “have nots” who find all sufficiency in Christ.

### **Section 134**

#### **Forgiving Your Brother - Matt. 18:15-22**

In our interpersonal relationships within the kingdom there will be misunderstandings and wrongs against one another. Every attempt should be made to be reconciled in a relationship of love and forgiveness. Religious practice usually goes to

one extreme or the other, either engaging in harsh and vindictive church discipline that proudly assumes God's position of pronouncement and excommunication, or allowing a laxity of tolerance and indifference that glosses over problems and misrepresentative behavior. Jesus indicated that personal confrontation is necessary to resolve such interpersonal conflicts, and the entire collective body should function to heal such wounds.

Religion, then as now, tends to view forgiveness in terms of mathematics or law. Peter, trained by the rabbinic religionists to believe that three occasions of forgiveness was the maximum required by Jewish law, thought he was being quite generous by suggesting that forgiveness be granted to an offending brother seven times. Jesus used a numerical exaggeration of "seventy times seven" to show that genuine forgiveness is not a matter of mathematics, but is the unlimited character expression of God, requiring the internal and spiritual function of the divine Forgiver within us.

### **Section 135**

#### **Parable of Debt-collecting - Matt. 18:23-35**

Religion often views forgiveness as still involving some aspect of qualifying or "paying up." Thus they remain engaged in the bookkeeping and debt-collecting business. Jesus likened the kingdom to a king who found one of his subjects who had a debt to him larger than any man could ever pay. It was an exaggerated and exorbitant amount of money, since Jesus was obviously illustrating the extent of mankind's debt unto God. Initially this earthly king intended to respond with harsh and exacting consequences upon his subject. But when the subject pled for mercy and promised to repay, the king exercised compassion, forgave the debt and released the man from prison. Like many a religious man, this subject could not appreciate forgiveness and was still operating on a debt-collecting mentality, thinking that he could repay what did not need

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to be repaid. Within the kingdom of Christ we must forget all about repayment for God's grace in Jesus Christ, for such is an impossibility. The divine Forgiver now lives in us and is to function through us in our interpersonal relationships, allowing the dynamic of God's grace to be extended toward others who do not deserve such either. As God's forgiving grace functions through us, we develop greater appreciation of His grace toward and in us. Religionists who do not understand the grace and forgiveness of God despite being forgiven by God in Christ, but insist on precise retributive repayment for all wrongdoing, will find themselves facing the punitive tormentors of hell, for they cannot allow the indwelling Forgiver to forgive others as He has forgiven them (cf. Matt. 6:12).

### Section 136

#### **Total Involvement in the Kingdom - Matt. 8:19-22; Lk. 9:57-62**

A Jewish scribe who wanted to become a disciple of Jesus came and promised to follow Jesus anywhere He might go. But what this religious man did not understand is that the kingdom is not like joining a club, or signing up for a *cause celebre*. It is not a matter of volunteering for a benevolent organization, or changing one's religious affiliation.

Jesus responded metaphorically by noting that "foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." The implication is that kingdom life is not settling in to a "comfort zone" of expedience and social involvement. Religion has set up ministry as a "profession" full of benefits and perquisites. It knows nothing of the sacrifices of inconvenience and the humiliation of suffering.

Another would-be-disciple of Jesus requested permission to bury his dead father. In the Jewish religion the responsibility for burying the dead was extremely important. Death was to be covered up as soon as possible, for anything connected

with death was regarded as defiling. According to Jewish tradition, one could not recite the *Shema* unless the dead had been buried. Some have thought that Jesus was rather insensitive when He said, “Let those who are spiritually dead and involved in the ‘dead works’ of dead religion go through their religious rituals of burying the dead in fancy funerals with exaggerated eulogies.” Far from insensitivity, Jesus was being very realistic about the priority of “seeking first the kingdom and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33), and that with a sense of urgency. There was no time for “courtesy calls” when the Jewish nation and religion were heading for catastrophic destruction within a few decades.

Jesus wanted to make clear that the kingdom of God is a total involvement of one’s being, with a single-minded focus on Jesus Christ and what He wants to do. The essence of the kingdom, Jesus Christ, becomes the basis of all that we are and all that we do, and we must be available for all that He wants to do.

### **Section 137**

#### **Jesus Rejects Advice of Brothers - John 7:2-9**

Jesus’ return to Galilee had been as private as possible. The diminished antagonism of the religious leaders may have been a result of their preparations to attend the annual Feast of the Tabernacles in Jerusalem.

The unbelieving half-brothers of Jesus suggested, almost dared Him, to go to Jerusalem and “prove” Himself on the big religious stage. Jesus had been avoiding the “capital” of Jewish religion in Judea, because “the Jews were seeking to kill Him” (John 7:1), and He was not “courting” martyrdom. Religion often seeks opportunistic spectacularism, but Jesus was only going to act in accord with God’s timing. Jesus knew that the worldly religion of that region hated Him because its deeds were evil, derived from the Evil One, rather than from God. He

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also knew that the destined time of God's redemptive activity was not going to be at this feast, but at the next major Jewish holiday, the Passover.

### **Section 138**

#### **Jesus Goes to Jerusalem - Lk. 9:51-56; Jn. 7:10**

When the caravan of Jewish pilgrims had already departed for Jerusalem, Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem with His disciples inconspicuously. They would go through Samaria, for few Jewish travellers would take this most direct route because of their hatred for the half-breed Samaritans and the fear of defilement from them.

Jesus sent advance messengers to arrange lodging in a Samaritan village, but they were denied such hospitality because they were Jews on their way to Jerusalem. The bitterness and hostility between these two religious groups went both ways. James and John, the "sons of thunder," were particularly incensed at this social slight, and asked whether Jesus would have them call down fire from heaven to consume these ingrates. Jesus rebuked them for reverting to such retaliatory measures, and thinking that God would act according to their vengeful whims. The group went to another village and lodged there on their way to Judea.

## Chapter Nine

# Jesus Faces-off in Judea

Having determined to go to Jerusalem inconspicuously and without fanfare, Jesus passed through Samaria with His disciples and arrived in Jerusalem. The phenomenon of Jesus was “big news” in the entire region of Palestine at that time, and the arrival of Jesus and His disciples in Jerusalem could not go unnoticed.

### Section 139

#### Is He the Messiah? - John 7:11-36

The Jewish religionists were on the “lookout” for Jesus. The crowds of religious peoples were quite aware of the religious leaders’ antagonism toward Jesus, and their fear of the oppressive authority of these leaders quenched open discussion of His identity and ministry among those attending the festival in Jerusalem. Oppressive religious authority has quenched open discussion throughout the history of man and continues to do so to this day. But in clandestine discussions the people debated whether Jesus was a good man or a heretic, and some were convinced He was indeed the expected Messiah.

Not fearing the religious leaders, and knowing that this was not the time for the final showdown, Jesus went to the Jewish temple and taught openly. Even the Jewish leaders marveled at His knowledge since He did not have acceptable rabbinic educational credentials. Uneducated people, the *amhaares*, were

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viewed condescendingly by the religious leaders, and were regarded as incapable of genuine virtue or piety because of their ignorance and lack of proper instruction. Jesus explained that His teaching was derived from God, and anyone (especially the Jewish leaders) who really wanted to know and to do the will of God would know that this was God and not mere man speaking, for the total expression of His life, teaching and behavior was the character of divine righteousness which brought glory to God. Religion continues to be preoccupied with acceptable education and credentials, unable to recognize when divine character and ministry is derived from God.

Jesus continued to expose the religionists by noting that despite their intense reverence for the old covenant Law, they constantly violated the Law and did not keep it. His case in point was the eighth day circumcision of male infants (Gen. 17:9-14; Lev. 12:1-3) which was performed even on the Sabbath. This religious rite which was intended as a pictorial prefiguring of the cutting off of sin from the hearts of the people of God (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jere. 4:4) was allowed to supersede their Sabbath regulations, but when Jesus had completely healed a man on the Sabbath at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-17) these same religious leaders sought to kill Him (John 5:18) for Sabbath violation. Some in the crowd did not realize or remember the murderous intent of the religious leaders when their misunderstanding of the Sabbath was exposed, and concluded that Jesus was suffering from delusionary paranoia caused by a demon.

Some in Jerusalem speculated that since Jesus was allowed to speak publicly even though He was a "wanted man," perhaps the rulers recognized that He was the Messiah. This was probably a sarcastic taunt of the temerity of the religious rulers. Others in the crowd were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah based on His supernatural and miraculous activity.

Trying to take advantage of the divided opinions about Jesus, the Pharisees convinced their hated religious cohorts, the

Sadducean chief priests, to join them and send temple officers to arrest Jesus. This has always been a typical religious maneuver – to squelch opposition by whatever means possible. Jesus indicated to the crowds and to the officers who had arrived that He was only going to remain for a brief time, and then would be returning to the presence of the One who sent Him; that He would be going to a place where they could not come or find Him. In essence He was saying to the religionists that they would never find God nor come into the presence of God as long as they remained caught up in their religion.

### **Section 140**

#### **Spiritual Thirst - John 7:37-52**

On the last day of the feast of tabernacles Jesus audaciously asserted that if people were really thirsty beyond the water libations which were part of the Jewish feast, then they should receive Him into themselves spiritually, that is drink of Him. Whenever they did so “rivers of living water” would flow through them, the activity of the Spirit of God as foretold by the prophets of old concerning the activity of the Messiah (cf. Isa. 44:3; 58:11; Zech. 14:8; Joel 3:18). Religion can never satisfy the needs of mankind; only Jesus Christ can do so. Most of the crowd did not understand what Jesus was saying, although some were convinced He was a prophet and others that He was the Messiah.

The officers sent by the Jewish leaders were so enamored by the words of Jesus that they failed to arrest Him and returned empty-handed. This incensed the Pharisees who declared that no one with any intelligence would be duped by this deceiver. Their disdain for the common people, the laity, is revealed by their scornful comment about the people being ignorant of the Law and accursed of God. Religious “know-it-alls” are contemptuous of common and ignorant “know-nothings.” “Damn the people. It’s our agenda and program that

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must be promoted and preserved,” seems to be the motto of religion.

### Section 141

#### Religious Stone-throwers - John 7:53 – 8:11

Despite the absence of this account from the oldest of all extant manuscripts, the incident certainly seems indicative of the character of Christ and is consistent with Jesus’ confrontation of religion.

When Jesus came to the temple area the next morning the scribes and Pharisees barged into His teaching session dragging a poor bedraggled woman who they alleged had been caught in the very act of adultery. Were they a bunch of “peeping-Toms”? With no sensitivity for the woman and her feelings, they were now “using” the woman just as much as the man with whom she had laid. With calculating malice, they were using her as a pawn to lay a trap for Jesus. There is more than one way to “prostitute” a person, and religion often “uses” people for their own needs and service.

The religious leaders alleged that Moses had commanded them in the Law to stone such women, based on Deut. 22:22-24, but in actuality their corruptions of the Law had not exercised such a penalty for a long time and the Jewish religious authorities were not allowed by the Romans to execute anyone (cf. Jn. 18:31). In consistency with their old covenant Law (Deut. 17:7), Jesus exposed their hypocrisy by saying, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Legally they did not dare do so, and spiritually they were all indicted as an “adulterous generation” (Matt. 12:39; 16:4; Mk. 8:38). The “dirty old men” among them departed first, soon followed by the others, and the woman was left with no accusers. Case dismissed! Without diminishing the reality of her sin, Jesus explained that He did not intend to judge or condemn (Jn. 3:17), and advised her to refrain from sinning.

The religious stone-throwers are always present. They are intrusive, accusative, conniving and exploitative. They are legalistic, punitive and persistent. In their “guilt transference,” they will not face up to their own sinfulness.

### **Section 142**

#### **The Light of the World - John 8:12-20**

Standing in the area of the temple treasury, Jesus may have used the large candelabra which were lighted during the Feast of Tabernacles to commemorate the pillar of fire that was the guiding light for the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod. 13:21) as a “takeoff” to declare that He was the true “light of the world.” He could declare this because “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all” (James 1:5), and only by partaking of Him are men “delivered from the domain of darkness” (Col. 1:13) to participate in the “light of life.”

Illustrating that “the light shined in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it” (Jn. 1:5), the Pharisees raised a legal objection of self-borne witness being invalid (cf. Jn. 5:31). Jesus retorted that divine witness and judgment is always true, for God cannot lie (Titus 1:2 ; Heb. 6:18), but they adamantly refused to accept Him as who He was. Furthermore He indicated that His witness was twofold as required by Law (Deut. 17:6; 19:15), for His witness was corroborated by the witness of His Father, thus constituting two divine witnesses. In their spiritual obtuseness, the religious leaders asked, “Where is your Father?” knowing full well that He referred to God as His Father. Jesus then indicted the religious leaders for not even knowing God whom they alleged to serve, for there is an inseparable link between knowing Jesus Christ and knowing God. “No man comes to the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6). The indictment against religion and its adherents remains; they do not know God through Jesus Christ.

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### Section 143

#### Where is He Going? - John 8:21-30

In the continuing verbal confrontation that Jesus had with the Jewish religious leaders in the temple area, Jesus uttered the most blatant exposure of their religious position. Holding no punches Jesus revealed the antithesis between Himself and religion.

Again He explained that He was going where they could not come and would not find Him, that because He was going to the presence of God and their nature and character was so contrary to the nature and character of God that they could not enter into the perfect presence of God, but would die in their sinfulness. The destination and destiny of Jesus and those identified with Him as Christians is antithetical to that of those participating in religion. They are going two different directions. Christians, identified with Christ, are going to heaven, and those who remain in religion apart from Jesus Christ are going to hell.

Clearly cognizant that He was referring to His going to a spiritual place, the religionists insinuated that He was going to commit suicide and go to hell. On the contrary, Jesus indicated that it was they, the religionists, whose origin and orientation was from the nether world. Religion originates from hell, from the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4), from the "spirit of the world" (I Cor. 2:12), who has affected the whole of mankind (Eph. 2:2; I Jn. 5:19) in the world (I Jn. 4:4), working in them his "power of death" (Heb. 2:14) to cause them to die in their sins. Jesus, on the other hand, is "from above" (John 3:31), and those who are identified with Him are "born from above" (John 3:3,7) and "not of this world" (John 17:14,16), but "citizens of heaven" (Phil. 3:20). The Christianity that Jesus Christ came to bring in Himself is "worlds apart" from religion, for they are derived from two opposite spiritual sources. Christianity is derived from God; religion is derived from the devil.

“Unless you believe that I AM (Exod. 3:14),” Jesus said to the religionists; “unless you are receptive to the ontological indwelling presence of Yahweh, by My spiritual indwelling within your spirit, you will die in your sins, despite how religious you might be.” “Well, who do you think you are?” the religionists responded. Jesus explained to them that He had repeatedly affirmed that He had been sent from the God who is true (John 3:3; 7:28), the One who is ultimate Reality, and that He derived everything that He said from Him. “I do nothing of My own initiative,” from an independent exercise of divine authority or action, Jesus said, “but what I say is what the Father says, for the Father abiding in Me does His works” (John 14:10). Jesus was not “left alone” in the incarnation to do a solo performance, but was in spiritual union with God as the God-man, allowing God the Father to manifest His character and activity in the humanity of Jesus in a manner that was totally pleasing to the Father. Christians, identified in spiritual union with Christ, are likewise not relegated to being “left alone” in religious performance, but are to derive all that they are and do from His activity, for “apart from Him, we can do nothing” (John 15:5) and are “not sufficient in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves” (II Cor. 3:5).

“When you religionists lift me up in crucifixion (cf. Jn. 3:14; 12:32,34), then you will know that I AM the personification of Yahweh who has come to take your sin and give you His life,” Jesus told them. When the remedial action of Christ’s death for men’s sins is made evident in the restorative action of the very life of God restored to man by the resurrection, then the reality of God’s action in Jesus is revealed.

### **Section 144**

#### **Truth and Freedom - John 8:31-37**

Religion always asserts that it has discovered the truth in its ideological and propositional belief systems and moralistic

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codes of conduct, but Jesus asserted that the only way to be a Christian disciple and to know the reality of divine Truth is to settle in and abide in His expression of the Divine as the Word of God, thus allowing the divine Truth to make you free to be man as God intended man to be. Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6) who sets the Christian free (Gal. 5:1) and calls us to freedom (Gal. 5:13) from all the strictures and structures of religion.

Like religionists throughout the centuries, the Jewish leaders did not want to admit that they were or had been in bondage to any man, even though they had been in bondage to Egypt, Syria and Babylon, and were now reacting to the bondage of Roman rule. Jesus was not talking about being in bondage to man, though. The English word “religion” is derived from the Latin word *religare* which means “to bind up.” Religion is inevitably a bondage to rules and regulations and rituals of devotion, but deeper still it is a spiritual bondage to subservience in the expression of the character and activity of Satan. The sinful and murderous religionists who were arguing with Him were in bondage to and enslaved by the diabolic source of all sin. The one who commits sin derives what he does from the devil (I John 3:8). Religion is the sinful pastime of the devil himself as he inspires men to engage in the self-effort of subservient performance which can never please God, but only binds up the performer in a false hope.

### **Section 145**

#### **Spiritual Derivation of Religion - John 8:38-59**

Proud of their physical descendancy from Abraham within the Jewish religion, the religious leaders then reacted to Jesus’ referring to God as His Father and His being the Son who would abide in God’s house forever, while they, the religionists, were but slaves of sin who were duped into thinking that they were “working” and performing in God’s house but would have to return to the permanent quarters of their slave

master. “Abraham is our father,” the Jewish leaders asserted. “Your sinful and murderous intents to kill Me reveal that your spiritual paternity is not the same as Abraham,” Jesus charged, “for your character and deeds are contrary to those exhibited by Abraham.” In order to be blessed of God along with Abraham, one must have faith in God like Abraham (Gal. 3:6,9), and these religious antagonists did not have such. They could not see and understand what God was doing in His Son, Jesus Christ. “You must have another spiritual father other than the one that Abraham had,” Jesus said to them. Such a charge of spiritual illegitimacy, when they believed themselves to be “God’s chosen people” within a special relationship with God involving racial superiority, prompted the Jews to assert that they were not illegitimate children, but claimed God as their father. “God’s children love God and recognize what God is doing,” Jesus responded, “and you do not love Me nor accept what I am doing, so you must not be spiritually related to God.”

The boldest and most blatant indictment of the religionists was then expressed when Jesus said, “You are of your father the devil.” The children of the devil are obvious (I John 3:10) because they act like the devil! The homicidal and murderous intentions of the Jewish religionists evidenced their affinity of character with the devil, who in the beginning inspired Cain to murder his brother (I John 3:12). Though religion always thinks that they have the content of truth, it is all a pack of lies for they derive their thinking from the “father of lies.” Religion is of the devil. It is derived *ek diabolos*. It is not of God, and God hates religion. When Jesus lived sinlessly as a man expressing perfectly the righteous character of God in all that He said and did for thirty-three years, the prevailing religion of the region did not recognize God in action because they did not know God.

Having exposed the illegitimacy of their religion, the only response that the Jewish leaders could muster was to attempt to

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cast aspersion on Jesus' physical heritage and spiritual condition by hurling an insulting epithet calling Him a "Samaritan with a demon." Jesus calmly pointed out that one who has a demon does not honor God and seek His glory. Then He invited them to join Him in expressing the character of God whereby they would avoid the everlasting death consequences of sin. In scorn and derision they asserted their identification with their religious father-figure, Abraham, noting that he died and Jesus must really be demon-crazy to think that He could offer people a life that could not die. Jesus took the argument the other direction into the past by asserting that Abraham rejoiced in faith to see the day of salvation that He was bringing as the Messiah, for prior to Abraham being born He, Jesus, had pre-existed as the I AM of Yahweh, whom these Jewish religionists were now rejecting.

In this argumentative clash with the Jewish religionists, Jesus had "passed the point of no return" in His confrontation with and exposure of religion as the antithesis of everything He came to bring in Himself. Blinded with rage, the religious leaders would have killed Him themselves right there in the temple in violation of both Roman and Jewish law, had Jesus not exited expeditiously.

### **Section 146**

#### **Who is Really Blind? - John 9:1-41**

The "face-off" between Jesus and the Jewish religious authorities in Jerusalem continued. On a Sabbath day subsequent to the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus and His disciples passed by a man who had been blind since birth. The Jewish religion, and all religion in general, tends to explain physical suffering as a direct consequence of specific sins for which God is causing or allowing retributive or punitive effects. Such natural religious reasoning becomes more difficult when there is congenital blindness, but they often revert to explanations

of sin in a previous existence, prenatal sin, punishment for future sin foreknown by God, or the sin of the parents. The disciples asked Jesus about the cause of the condition of this man's congenital blindness. Jesus was not interested in the religious "cause and effect" arguments, the natural explanations of human logic, the "whys" and the "wherefores," but instead wanted to look forward to the opportunities of observing what God could do. Avoiding procedural speculations, Jesus felt a sense of urgency and priority to explain that the time of his temporary redemptive mission was brief and He was obliged to illumine mankind as to His true Being.

Consistent with the prophecies of the Messiah bringing sight to the blind (cf. Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:7), Jesus made clay from His spit, placed such on the eyes of the blind man, told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam, which he obediently did, and the man saw for the first time. Recall that John the Baptist was assured of Jesus' Messiahship by fact that "the blind receive sight" (Matt. 11:5).

Since their rules and regulations were more important than the plight of people, the Pharisees regarded the making of clay as a inexcusable violation of the prohibition of working on the Sabbath. They failed to understand God's intent for the Sabbath as a day of rest to enjoy what God had done and is doing, much less that Jesus came to make all of life a rest in the sufficiency of God's grace (Heb. 4:1-11). In their presupposition that Jesus was a "sinner" because of His Sabbath violation, they would not believe that this was a supernatural work of God in causing a congenitally blind man to see. Unable to intimidate the healed man to deny the miracle that had taken place in his body, the religionists then attempted to intimidate his parents to reject their son under the threat of excommunication. Unable to do so, the religious inquisitors returned to interrogate the man again, trying to force him to agree that Jesus was a sinner. In their narrow exclusivism religion tends to accuse all nonconformists of being "sinners."

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When the previously blind beggar outwitted the religious leaders by his honesty, the religious Pharisees fell back on their false-loyalties of being “disciples of Moses,” even though Jesus had previously said, “if you believed Moses, you would believe Me” (Jn. 5:46). Exercising their false religious authority, the religionists excommunicated the healed man, consigning him to a life of social ostracism.

Who were the ones who were really blind? Religion is blind to the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ, blinded in their unbelief by Satan himself (II Cor. 4:4). Such spiritual blindness is indicative of all natural men, but those who become aware of their blindness can have their eyes opened to turn from darkness to light (Acts 26:18) in conversion. Religion, on the other hand, is blind to their own blindness (doubly blind), adamantly claiming to “see” spiritual things in their epistemological creeds, doctrines and theologies, and to be intellectually enlightened, thereby remaining confirmed and fixed (Jn. 12:40) in their spiritual blindness, proud unbelief, and sinful spiritual condition. Jesus repeatedly referred to the religionists as “blind men” (Matt. 23:17,19,24,26; Lk. 6:39) and “blind guides of the blind” (Matt. 15:14; 23:16).

### **Section 147**

#### **The Good Shepherd and False Shepherds - John 10:1-21**

Religionists are exposed again in the allegory that Jesus used of His being the Good Shepherd of God’s sheep, which was also a Messianic expectation (Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24). In the spiritual kingdom that Jesus came to bring in Himself, He is both the door through whom all God’s people must enter, and the shepherd who leads, cares for, converses with, and lays down His life for the sheep. Religionists, on the other hand, are false prophets, wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15), self-appointed false shepherds, who steal from the people (Lk. 11:39), plunder the people (Matt. 23:14), murder

(Jn. 8:44) and destroy (II Thess. 2:3). The strange voice of religion preys upon people and destroys people, robbing them of all hope and fleecing them of their possessions. Religious leaders are hirelings and mercenaries who are not prophets, but are engaged for the profit. Having no genuine love or compassion for God's people, they have become paid professionals for their own personal interest and gain. They are not willing to invest their lives for people, but when trouble comes they bail out and flee to save their own hides; "worthless shepherds who leave the flock" (Zech. 11:17).

As the Good Shepherd of God, Jesus has an intimate relationship of spiritual union with His people, wherein they know Him and He knows them, and they listen to His voice in obedience. This is much deeper than the religious epistemology that merely "knows about" Jesus and advocates legalistic obedience and commitment to Him.

Jesus also challenged religious exclusivism and racial superiority by indicating that He had "other sheep, not of this fold," that is other than Jews. The gospel of the kingdom is a universal invitation to all peoples to become one flock, one Body (Eph. 4:4), one People (I Pt. 2:9), one humanity (Eph. 2:14) in Jesus Christ, based upon His voluntary death and resurrection for all mankind. "Jew and Gentile; all are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

The Jewish religionists were quite aware that they had been painted in a bad light by Jesus' allegory, and that their proud and exclusivistic attitudes of superiority had been challenged. They reverted to hurling the same old hackneyed charges of Jesus being insane and possessed of a demon (Jn. 7:20; 8:48).

### **Section 148** **Seventy Sent Out - Luke 10:1-24**

Whether the seventy were sent out in Judea, Galilee or elsewhere is not known. The significance of the number seventy

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has been variously correlated with the seventy elders who were selected to assist Moses, the seventy members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the seventy translators of the *Septuagint*, and the Jewish reckoning of seventy nations in the world, but there is no basis to make such correlations.

As with His instructions to the twelve disciples when sent throughout Galilee (Matt. 9:35-11:1), Jesus referred to the urgency of the spiritual harvest while there was still time to reap, and cautioned against the religious wolves who would tear them apart. Protracted oriental greetings were to be dispensed with along with all religious scruples about proper food items. The message to be shared was that “the kingdom of God has come near.” Jesus Christ had come to function as King in the lives of mankind. Those who rejected their proclamation were not rejecting them personally but rejecting Christ Who they proclaimed.

When the seventy returned they testified of demons being subject to them, and Jesus noted that Satan was indeed a defeated foe. He cautioned them about spiritual pride, encouraging them instead to rejoice that by God’s grace they were citizens of heaven. Jesus Himself rejoiced that the religious leaders who were regarded as wise and intelligent could not understand spiritual things, but the simple people who were receptive to what God was doing received the revelation of God through the Son. He reminded the sharers that many of the prophets and kings of the past had desired to see and hear the fulfillment of God’s promises, but “died without receiving the promises” (Heb. 11:13), while they had the privilege of seeing God’s restoration of life in Him.

### **Section 149**

#### **Love For Your Neighbor - Luke 10:25-29**

Perhaps feeling the sting of being portrayed as wise and intelligent yet ignorant of spiritual realities, a Jewish reli-

gious lawyer, well-versed in Jewish Law, tried to test Jesus by asking, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responded with another question, asking, “What does the Law require? How do you interpret it?” The lawyer replied by quoting the familiar Jewish *Shema*, to which Jesus countered, “Do this, and you shall live.” This religious leader understood the letter of the Law, but not the spirit of the Law (II Cor. 3:6). He did not understand that eternal life is not a consequence of religious performance, but is extended by God’s grace embodied in the person of Jesus Christ and received by faith. Jesus knew full well that to love God and one’s neighbor required the presence of the God who is Love (I John 4:8,16) and the active expression of such love toward others by God’s grace activity, manifesting the loving character of the One who is eternal life.

Trying to save face after asking such an obvious question and failing to understand the answer, the lawyer attempted to embroil Jesus in a discussion of who should be regarded as a “neighbor” and thus recipients of one’s love. “Who is my neighbor?” he asked, knowing that the Jews in their religious exclusivism did not regard anyone other than other Jews as legitimate recipients of their love. Samaritans and Gentiles did not qualify as lovable. Beyond that the Jewish religionists in their intolerance of nonconformity were not very neighborly in their love of Jesus either, as they were attempting to kill Him.

### **Section 150**

#### **Parable of the Wounded Traveller - Luke 10:30-37**

Jesus told a parable about a wounded traveler whose racial identity was not noted, though it is often assumed that he was Jewish since the majority of travelers between Jerusalem and Jericho were Jewish. He was accosted by robbers who beat him and left him for dead. A Jewish priest passed by, but would not risk being defiled by touching what might be a dead body. Then a Jewish Levite distanced himself as far as possible from

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dealing with an ailing man in distress. Neither was very neighborly in their love, and Jesus was obviously indicting religion for its insensitive and heartless lovelessness. What can you expect from those who do not know the love of God in Jesus Christ (I John 4:7,20)? To add insult to injury in the story, it is a despised half-breed Samaritan who exhibited neighborly love to the wounded traveler, evidencing the fraudulent nature of Jewish exclusivism and racial prejudice.

In contrast to the proud exclusivism and performance of the Jewish religionists, Jesus indicated that a person would only understand God's gracious love of others in the kingdom when he had made the "end-run" of religious "works," and was "down and out" and ready to die like a wounded traveler on the road of life, unable to save himself. Jesus Himself would bring eternal life out of death, when as a wounded traveler on the path of this world, He would be "despised and forsaken, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). The kingdom of God is comprised of wounded travelers who have been accosted by thieves, rejected by religionists, but often outside of the accepted religious orders they have been recipients of God's grace in Jesus Christ in order to be restored to spiritual health and functional holiness by the presence and expression of Christ's eternal life.

Jesus was not saying that the Samaritan religion was better than the Jewish religion because they knew better how to perform "good" acts for those in need. Neither was He encouraging exemplary religious imitation of the "good" acts of the "Good Samaritan," as religion has proceeded to misname this parable. Rather, Jesus was exposing the bigotry, pride and exclusivism of all religion, contrasting such with the condition of the wounded traveler who in his dying condition was a recipient of God's grace which becomes the *modus operandi* of the kingdom of Christ. The parable of "The Wounded Traveler" reveals that a basic reality of the kingdom is life out of death offered to all in need.

When Jesus asked the Jewish lawyer which character was most loving to his neighbor in the parable, the lawyer could not bring himself to admit it was a Samaritan, and replied only, “the one who showed mercy.” Jesus exhorted the Jewish lawyer to, “Go and do likewise,” not as an admonition to imitate the example of moral goodness and nicety of the Samaritan, but with the knowledge that the only way one can love in that way is when “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5) in order to “love one another” as the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22).

### **Section 151**

#### **Mary and Martha - Luke 10:38-42**

On some occasion while Jesus was in Judea, He passed through the village of Bethany and was received into the home of two sisters, Mary and Martha. The thematic connection of this incident to the previous one cited by Luke may be the common mind-set of Martha and the lawyer that the performance of good works has a meritorious benefit before God.

Though Martha seems to have issued the invitation for Jesus to dine with them, she immediately became preoccupied in the preparations for the meal. Troubled and anxious, worried and bothered, about “serving the Lord” (along with many in religion), she failed to realize that “God is not served with human hands, as though He needed anything” (Acts 17:25). Meanwhile Mary found a seat in front of Jesus and was listening attentively to His every word. Martha’s attitude soon became critical and jealous, and she began to have a personal pity-party. She chastised Jesus for being uncaring, and instructed Him to command her sister to assist her in the meal preparation. This woman was certainly out of place, for Jesus could never be legitimately charged with being uncaring about people, and it was not her place to tell the Lord what to do.

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“Martha, Martha,” the Good Shepherd called her by name, “you are fretting and fussing, distracted by many details; the one thing needed is that you should be devotedly dependent upon Me, listening receptively in obedience.” Many within religion have become preoccupied with their busyness in serving the Lord, failing to be receptive vessels focused on Jesus Christ, listening to His direction, and allowing Him to function through their behavior – involved in churchy busyness, rather than God’s business!

### **Section 152**

#### **Prayer and the Friend of Man - Luke 11:1-4**

Ever the slow-learners, the disciples of Jesus came to Him after observing Him in prayer, requesting some “how-tos” for a religious regimen of prayer, like John the Baptist offered his disciples. Religion clamors incessantly for disciplines of prayer, thinking that discovering the secret of certain techniques and procedures will put them in touch with God and prove beneficial to their lives. To rely upon God’s grace always seems so nebulous, insubstantial and undocumentable.

Jesus repeated some of the concepts of prayer enunciated to those gathered on the hillside (Matt. 6:9-13). Those having a personal, spiritual relationship with God as children of the Father, address Him as such recognizing He has provided for everything they need in Jesus Christ. They are aware of the holiness of God’s character invested within them by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Participating in the kingdom, God’s people are desirous that Jesus Christ might reign as Lord and King in their lives in the midst of every situation. Having received forgiveness by the presence of the Forgiver, Jesus Christ, they learn to appropriate and appreciate God’s forgiveness all the more as He continues to manifest His character of forgiveness through them unto others. They know that God will not allow them to be tempted beyond what they are able to

endure (I Cor. 10:13) by the sufficiency of the indwelling work of Christ. Christian prayer is Christocentric prayer that repeatedly remembers the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

### **Section 153**

#### **Parable of Friend at Midnight - Luke 11:5-13**

In the parable of the friend approached at midnight Jesus emphasized that prayer is the process of remembering that the grace of God gives us everything we need. The history of religious interpretation of this parable reveals that they have consistently misinterpreted the story, believing that human prayer prompts God into action on their behalf and that persistent nagging, begging and haranguing will cause God to concede and cater to their desires. Some have even had the audacity to suggest that we have a “right” to demand that God act in accord with our desires and “divvy-up” His blessings and prosperity. Religion tends to regard prayer as a “discipline” or “work” that we engage in, whereto God has subjected Himself to an inexorable “law of prayer” to employ the “power of prayer” when we persistently engage in the proper technique of prayer. On the contrary, Jesus was explaining the correct attitude of prayer in this parable.

God is the greatest friend that mankind has, and He is at “rest” in the sufficiency of His works. In the midst of our darkest midnight hour we approach God with our need. If God were a mere man He might be tempted to dismiss us as selfish beggars seeking more handouts, and inform us that He does not want to be troubled with our last-minute requests. But God is not a mere man! He knows our every need; and God is particularly responsive when we come before Him with an attitude that shamelessly and desperately admits our own inadequacy and inability to provide, willing to rely on Him for His provision. God’s grace sufficiently supplies as much as we need. When we ask and seek and knock, knowing that our life

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depends on such receptivity of God's grace, we can be sure that God's sufficient grace will supply. The attitude for the "prayer of faith" is expressed when we admit, "I cannot; only You can. I have not; only You have. I seek; only You can supply." The emphasis is not on persistence in prayer, but on the desperation that admits personal inability.

To cap His point about prayer being receptive to the grace of God, Jesus noted that if religious people, deriving their character from the Evil One, know how to give "goody-bags" to their children, then how much more will God in His grace give men what they really need, the dynamic of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to participate in "all things" (I Cor. 3:21-23) of God's intent, as they are receptive to such in faith.

### **Section 154**

#### **Who is of the Devil? -Luke 11:14-26**

Seeing a man who could not speak because of demon activity, Jesus cast the demon out of him. The Jewish religionists who were grasping at every opportunity to deride Jesus, again charged (cf. Matt. 12:24; Mk. 3:22) that he was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, that is by the black-magic power of Satan. Jesus noted that civil war is always self-destructive and that the diabolic destroyer is smart enough not to destroy his own kingdom. He then questioned whether they would employ the same reasoning about their Jewish colleagues who were also engaged in exorcisms and would not appreciate such critical reasoning.

The only logical conclusion to be drawn was that Jesus was casting out demons by the divine activity of "the finger of God" (cf. Exod. 8:19), evidencing that the victorious kingdom of God had come to earth in defeat of Satan (Heb. 2:14; I Jn. 3:8), allowing God to reign in His people. The diabolic strong man could hold his own in the empire of evil until the divine Strong Man of the Messiah (cf. Rev. 18:8) came and conquered

him, setting men free from his possession and control. Jesus turned the tables on the Jewish leaders, indicating that it was not He who was employing the power of the devil, but they who were allied with Satan. Using a parabolic analogy, Jesus indicates that God desired to cast the unclean spirit of Satan out of Judaism as a whole. The Messiah had come to thus exorcise Judaism and put humanity in order. The Jewish peoples, however, would not accept what God was doing in the Messiah, and because of their unbelief, pride and self-righteousness they remained spiritually thirsty, restless and unfulfilled. As a result of such Jewish rejection the demonic spirits returned to Judaism seven times worse than before, and would incur the greater judgment of God. Jesus clearly indicated that there can be no middle ground between Christianity and religion for these form a polarized antithesis. Whoever is not spiritually united with Christ is an antagonist aligned with the Evil One. Those not united in Christ often engage in religious divisiveness, sectarianism and the disunity of mankind.

### **Section 155**

#### **Blessedness - Luke 11:27,28**

In the midst of Jesus' exposure of Jewish religion an unidentified woman blurted out an adoration of Jesus' physical mother. This is consistent with religious fertility cults and their attempts at feminine deification of goddesses, which later was evidenced in the "Mariolatry" and worship of Mary in Roman Catholicism. Instead of accepting this pronouncement of the blessedness of His mother, Mary, Jesus noted that it is Christians who are blessed (Eph. 1:3) when they listen to God, receive the Word of God in Jesus Christ, and allow Him to live in and through them.

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### Section 156

#### Greater Than Jonah - Luke 11:29-36

Jesus continued to explain that the religious generation that was opposing Him was wicked in their identification with the Wicked One. They constantly tried to put Him to the test seeking supernatural signs of His Messiahship which were in essence asking God to perform on demand. Once again (cf. Matt. 12:39; 16:4) Jesus offered only the “sign of Jonah,” implying that just as Jonah proclaimed a coming judgment of God and the need of repentance, He who was greater than Jonah was doing the same. The religionists of Palestine did not have the same good sense as the Ninevites, however, and were persisting in their unbelief. The religious leaders, like Jonah, were angry at what God was doing in being gracious and compassionate through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Ninevites, therefore, stood in condemnation of the first-century Palestinians who refused to repent and participate in God’s mercy.

Even the Queen of Sheba recognized and sought after the wisdom of God expressed through Solomon (cf. I Kings 10; II Chron 9), but the first-century Jews failed to recognize and seek the wisdom of God in Christ (cf. I Cor. 1:24,30), who was greater than Solomon, seeking instead to kill Him. A heathen, Gentile queen would therefore condemn those who thought they were God’s people.

The light of the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be hidden, however. It could not be placed in the dark cellar vault of the unbelieving hearts of the Jewish people, nor covered by the baskets of their indifference. The spiritual light of Jesus Christ will inevitably serve to illuminate all mankind. Those who have spiritual vision and receptivity will allow the fullness of Christ to illuminate every part of their being as “children of light” (Eph. 5:8). Religion, on the other hand, is spiritually blind seeking false “enlightenment” that is actually spiritual darkness.

**Section 157**

**Pharisees Denounced - Luke 11:37-44**

Repudiating the false piety of religion which isolates itself in a “holier-than-thou” attitude of superiority, Jesus accepted the invitation of a Pharisee to have lunch with him. Without pretense, haughtiness or condescension Jesus accepted all peoples as equals, and was willing to have social table-fellowship with them, contrary to the religious practices of that day. The Pharisee observed, however, that Jesus did not participate in the ceremonial and ritualistic washings inculcated by Jewish religion to cleanse oneself of defilement (as if water could wash away sin or evil).

Straightforwardly and unabashedly, Jesus charges the Pharisaic religionists with cleansing the exterior of the cup, but being internally full of the rotten character of spiritual impurity. Religion is so often senselessly and socially concerned with the externalities of propriety, while totally ignorant of internal spiritual cleansing by the work of Jesus Christ. “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (I Sam. 16:7). Spiritual cleanness is only a result of the purity of God’s character indwelling a Christian person, and such can then be offered to others rather than trying to protect oneself from the defilement of others.

The second charge against the Pharisees pertained to the minutia of tithing laws which they so meticulously tried to keep, meanwhile missing the expression of God’s character of justice, love and genuine givingness. Genuine Christian giving within the kingdom of God is the expression of the givingness of God’s character, and not mandated percentages of material things.

Indicative of most religion, the Pharisees sought respectability from the laity, demanding prestige, popularity and esteem in being recognized with titles of honor. Religion does not seek the honor and glory of God, but the honor and glory of men.

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Jesus indicated that the Pharisaic religionists were like unmarked graves, full of spiritual death and defilement, into which unsuspecting people could fall unawares into the rotten hole of darkness. Religion is but a pit of death, whereas Christianity is life in Jesus Christ.

### **Section 158**

#### **Lawyers Denounced - Luke 11:45-54**

One of the Jewish lawyers who was present at this luncheon, seated in proper order of worthiness, complained that Jesus was also insulting the legal academics in his denunciation of the Pharisees. Jesus did not apologize, but rather lambasted the lawyers just as severely.

With their legalistic imposition of religious rules and regulations the lawyers caused the people to be “bound-up” and burdened with unending and confusing requirements. Meanwhile the religious lawyers found loopholes and favorable interpretations by which they considered themselves to be “above the law.” Religious leaders seldom live up to the expectations they have for others, and often mock and ridicule the people who sincerely attempt to keep all the rules they have imposed.

The religious lawyers of Jesus’ day were involved in building elaborate tombs and monuments to the prophets of the old covenant, hypocritically ignoring the fact that their Jewish ancestors had killed many of these prophets. Jesus exposed them by noting that their hearts were no different than their ancestral fathers, for they were trying to kill Him, the climactic prophet of God. The culpability of their fathers in murdering the prophets who foretold of the Messiah would be added to their own accountability for the murder of the Messiah.

A final indictment of the Jewish lawyers charged them with taking away the key to knowledge of God. Religion has traditionally engaged in obscurantism which seeks to make God

so complex and confusing that the average person cannot hope to know Him, except through the intervention and mediation of the religious leaders. Religion hinders people from the simple knowing of God through Jesus Christ (cf. John 17:3).

Not surprisingly, the hostile reaction of the religionists soon terminated the luncheon. The Jewish leaders still wanted to interrogate Jesus in order to ambush Him in a misstatement.

### **Section 159**

#### **Pharisaic Hypocrisy - Luke 12:1-12**

Luke records an extended teaching session that probably took place somewhere in Judea, though the location is not recorded. A multitude of people had gathered and Jesus employed many of the same themes that He used in the Sermon on the Mount. With a greater sense of urgency Jesus warned the people of impending judgment and the need for repentance, aware of His own imminent death and the coming destruction of Palestine by the Romans.

Jesus began by warning of the pervasive permeation of the hypocritical attitudes of the Pharisees. Hypocrisy is not just insincerity, deception, pretense and fraud, but is inclusive of the role-playing that goes through repetitive religious motions believing that they will in some way please God. Such religious play-acting will be unmasked, for such hypocrisy does not escape God's scrutiny. The hidden self-motivations of religion will be revealed. "God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus" (Rom. 2:16; cf. II Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15).

As His followers prepared to be scattered and sent out throughout the world, Jesus cautioned them not to be afraid of the persecution of the religionists who could kill the body but not the soul. They may seem to have so much power and authority, but the One to fear is God who will judge all men. In the midst of such persecution and suffering it is important to remember that nothing is insignificant to God, whether it be

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a sparrow or the number of hairs on one's head. God's people are precious to Him, and He will care for His own. Even when they are hauled before religious and governmental authorities, they need not be anxious about defending themselves, for the indwelling Holy Spirit of Christ will be the dynamic who puts words in their mouths.

To agree with God that Christ is the Messiah allows for an eternal concurrence with the character of God. To deny or reject Christ as Messiah creates an incompatibility with the character of God that can become so fixed in the defiant repudiation of apostasy that one can develop a hardened heart by which they place themselves beyond the effectiveness of God's forgiveness. The Jewish religionists attacking Jesus were in danger of such an attitude of fixed antithesis to God's activity and blasphemy of the Spirit of God that they would be irreversibly damned. All participants in religion are in danger of such as they essentially deny the ontological dynamic of the life of Jesus Christ.

### **Section 160**

#### **Parable of Rich Fool - Luke 12:13-34**

When an inquirer asked Jesus to settle a legal dispute with his brother, Jesus recognized his covetous greed and his attempt to "use" Jesus' didactic authority without submitting to His divine authority as Lord. Jesus explained that real life is not to be found in the greedy acquisition of supposed possessions, though much religion regards such prosperity as a sign of God's blessing, but life is found only in Him who is life (John 14:6).

The parable of the rich fool exposes the false security that religion often places in material things, though such false security can also be placed in correct procedures and rituals, or in orthodox belief-systems, etc. Such false placement of one's security often causes one to become self-congratulatory,

to attempt to rest on one's laurels, and to engage in hedonistic self-pleasure. Spiritual riches are found only in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 1:7,18; 2:7; 3:8,16), who alone is the basis of our security.

The life that God intended for mankind is much more than mere concern for survival sustenance. God is our provider, and we need not have an undue preoccupation of anxiety for the externalities of physical survival. Our priority should be to seek a full appreciation of the kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 6:33) wherein all our needs will be supplied (cf. Phil. 4:19) as Christ reigns in life in us. The "nations of the world" seek physical security, but the "citizens of heaven" (Phil. 3:20) find their security in Christ. The "little flock" of God's people who follow the Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and participate in the kingdom are not so much concerned about material acquisitions as they are in expressing the givingness of God's character by giving what they have been entrusted with to others, revealing that their heart is filled with the spiritual treasure of Christ. When Christ is our treasure (II Cor. 4:7), such is not vulnerable to earthly loss or destruction, and provides us with eternal security.

### **Section 161**

#### **Parable of Faithful Steward - Luke 12:35-48**

Seeking to prepare His disciples while at the same time addressing and redressing the Jewish religionists, Jesus told the parable of the faithful and alert steward. The coming judgment of God requires God's people to be on the alert, to be expectant and available to all that God wants to do. The sudden and unknown timing of the coming judgment will be like an intrusive thief who does not send calling cards with appointments. Jesus knew that a catastrophic judgment was coming upon the Palestinian peoples within a few decades. He could see that the Jewish religion was completely dilatory in preparing the people for such, and served as the primary contributor to their

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rejection of the Messiah. Consistent with all religion, they were abusing the people and engaging in self-serving pleasure. They would undoubtedly pay the punishment for such irresponsible leadership. The Son of Man did come in judgment upon the unbelief of Jewish religion in A.D. 70. Many of the Palestinians Christians were alert and prepared spiritually by faithful receptivity and expectancy, along with the repudiation of temporal materialism, while the Judaic leaders and peoples paid the consequences of their unbelief and materialistic preoccupation. Religion today continues to be unprepared for the coming of the Son of Man, engaging in the same kinds of abuse of people and pleasure-seeking. They mistakenly believe that readiness for the coming of Christ is achieved in being virtuous, living the Christian life as one ought, getting involved in religious service, and having all sins confessed. They engage in speculation of the imminence of a future coming of Christ, rather than in faithful expectation of His impending coming by alert availability and appreciation of His life. They, too, will face the consequences “with the unbelievers.”

### **Section 162**

#### **Judgment is Coming - Luke 12:49-59**

Looking forward to all that He was going to do through His death and resurrection, Jesus exclaimed, “I came to set the earth on fire, and how I wish that it were already ignited into an incendiary conflagration.” The fire of God’s activity among men was yet to be graphically illustrated on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3) after Christ’s resurrection, as well as in the fire of judgment in A.D. 70. Prior to this overwhelming of fire, Jesus knew that He had to undergo an overwhelming of suffering and death at the cross, and it weighed heavy on Him that such should be accomplished. When all of this transpired, however, it would not be in accord with the Jewish expectations of the Messiah conquering the oppressors and bringing a utopian

peace wherein the Jews would be in control of their own destiny. Rather, the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6) would bring conflict and a division of loyalties even among family members, for some will resist and refuse to receive the spiritual peace that He brings (cf. Rom. 5:1; Phil. 4:8). The priority of Jesus Christ as life demands a detachment from physical attachments, in order to find solidarity in Christ, as the family of God, the Body of Christ.

Still thinking of the coming judgment of God upon the Jews, Jesus again (cf. Matt. 16:2,3) charged the Jewish peoples with being able to evaluate the meteorological matters of the Mediterranean weather patterns, but at the same time they were spiritually ignorant and unable to discern “the present time” when a catastrophic storm was brewing wherein God would bring judgment upon them all. Jesus was explaining that the present time was a time for the Jewish people to make some important decisions. Instead, they were like a man on his way to face the judge and be indicted and sentenced to prison, but they adamantly refused to come to agreement, to give in, to change their mind in repentance, to be reconciled and to accept freedom in Christ. By their own choice, they would therefore have to pay the consequences for their own sins in full.

### **Section 163**

#### **Repent or Perish - Luke 13:1-5**

Some listeners reported to Jesus that Pilate had murdered some Galileans, probably thinking that He would sympathize with people from His own region, and denounce the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Jesus did not address the grievance, but indicated that such was a minor calamity compared to the major catastrophe that was facing the Jewish peoples of Palestine unless they repented. He brought up another incident when eighteen Jewish people were killed while they were on a work detail for Pilate, building the tower of Siloam. The preva-

## Jesus Confronts Religion

lent Jewish thinking was that they were punished by God for working for the Roman governor. Jesus foretold that all of the people of Jerusalem were going to suffer a similar plight when the walls of Jerusalem fell upon them in the destruction of the entire city. Political judgment and gravitational judgment both pictured the divine judgment that was to come upon the unbelieving Jewish people.

### **Section 164**

#### **Parable of Fig Tree - Luke 13:6-9**

The parable of the fig tree illustrates that the Jewish peoples in their Jewish religion had been unfruitful in their persistent unbelief in what God was doing. Though deserving of God's immediate judgment, they were being spared and given a last chance of a limited probationary period prior to the enactment of His judgment in order to repent and receive Jesus Christ as Messiah, Savior and Lord. This limited window of opportunity would soon be closed, and if they were not penitent and receptive to Jesus they would be "cut down" in divine judgment, as they were in A.D. 70.

### **Section 165**

#### **People are Most Important - Luke 13:10-21**

In His last recorded work in a Jewish synagogue, Jesus healed a woman who had been demonically diseased for eighteen years. She was freed from the captivity and bondage of Satan's control. Jesus did this on the Jewish Sabbath, demonstrating that He was not confined in the religious bondage of Jewish Sabbatarian scrupulosity, and that He recognized God's true intent for the Sabbath to be a day to enjoy God's work.

The Jewish synagogue official was appalled that Jesus would do such work on the Sabbath. Jesus responded by exposing the hypocrisy of having more concern for animals than

for a Satan-bound individual. The religious adversaries were ashamed, as religion ought to be, publicly humiliated by their lack of compassion for people.

Such religious insensitivity for people and legalistic pre-occupation with rules and regulations will not be able to quench the growth of the kingdom of God, however. Reiterating the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (cf. Matt. 13:31-35; Mk. 4:30-32), Jesus predicted the inevitable growth and conquest of the kingdom. Though the size of the group involved in the kingdom seemed small and insignificant at the time, just Jesus and a few disciples, like the tiny mustard seed the kingdom of God would grow into a full-sized tree, and the religious “birds” would nest in its branches. Like leaven, the dynamic reality of the life of Jesus Christ would permeate and pervade the world of mankind causing them to be “raised to newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). No power in the world will be able to stop the triumph of Jesus Christ.

### **Section 166**

#### **Observe My Works - John 10:22-39**

The Feast of Dedication was not a feast established in the Old Testament, but commemorated the purification and rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus in 164 B.C., after it was defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria, when he offered a pig on the altar of the temple (cf. I Macc. 4:52-59). This feast is still celebrated today in the Jewish *Hanukkah* which is still scheduled in the winter month of December.

The antagonistic Jewish leaders encircled Jesus in the temple and challenged Him to “lay it on the line” as to whether He was claiming to be the Messiah. Jesus knew they were not honest inquirers, but were seeking to find justifiable charges to bring Him before the authorities. He simply cited His prior claims to be doing His Father’s work.

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Picking up the theme of His being the Good Shepherd, Jesus noted that the religionists were not of His flock. Those who are Christians in Jesus' flock know Him, listen to Him, follow Him, have eternal life in Him, and will never be destroyed. The Jewish religion, along with all religion, is not in the flock of Christ. They do not have intimacy with God, obedience to God, eternal life or security, and will be destroyed. Security is in Christ, for there is no one more powerful than God. "I and the Father are one," Jesus declared. By this He did not mean that He and the Father were merely one in purpose, objective or will, but that He and the Father were ontologically one in Being, in essence, in nature. In other words, "I am God!"

The Jewish religionists clearly understood His claim. They were enraged at what they considered a blasphemous pronouncement, and were intent on stoning Him to death (Lev. 24:16) right there in the temple, which would have violated both Roman and Jewish law. The blind rage of religion knows no bounds.

When they came to Him with rocks in hand, Jesus calmly asked for the criminal charges for which they sought to kill Him. "I've never heard of anyone being stoned to death for doing good works," He said. "For which good work are you stoning Me?" The religious leaders admitted that they sought to stone Him for blasphemy, for they regarded Him as but a mere man who made Himself out to be God. Jesus then played their own game of semantic double-talk, using such as a ploy to show the absurdity of their actions. He cited Psalm 82:6 where the magistrates were regarded as having the authority of God and were called "gods," and He used such as a legal precedent for such personal designation, knowing all the while that the usages were not equivalent. While the legalistic religionists were mulling over that argument, Jesus proceeded to emphasize again that the Father God was in Him, and He was in the Father, implying that the Father was doing His works in

## Jesus Faces-off in Judea

Him (cf. John 14:10) as the God-man. Eluding His adversaries, Jesus left the temple area and the region of Judea.



## Chapter Ten

# Jesus Pulls-back in Perea

After only a few months in Judea where Jesus confronted the Jewish religionists and minced no words in His denunciation of their hypocrisy, Jesus decided to take His disciples and pull-back to let things settle down. The Jewish leaders were so red-hot in their anger toward Jesus that they might have rashly murdered Jesus in a manner not in accord with God's plan.

### **Section 167**

#### **Jesus in Perea - John 10:40-42**

Jesus went to the east side of the Jordan River in the region of Perea, the area where John the Baptist was originally preaching and baptizing. Many Jewish people journeyed out to hear Him there, just as they had gone to hear John. They noted that John the Baptist had not performed the miracles like Jesus did, but he had accurately identified Jesus as the Messiah.

### **Section 168**

#### **Exclusivity of the Kingdom - Luke 13:22-24**

Apparently Jesus ventured in and out of Judea, perhaps even making excursions into Jerusalem during the three or four month period between the Feast of Dedication in December and the Passover in the Spring. On an occasion when Jesus was going in the direction of Jerusalem, He was asked if there were

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only a few who would be saved. Religious people often preen with pride in thinking that they are the “few” who are chosen by God in an elitist and exclusivistic remnant. Jesus indicated that the exclusivism of the kingdom is not in race, religious practices or doctrinal orthodoxy, but in the exclusivism of identification and spiritual union with Himself. Whereas religion would strive and work to perform what they perceive to be God’s expectations and demands, Jesus stated that our striving should only be a genuine seeking to enter into all that is available in Him, the narrow door (cf. Matt. 7:13,14; Jn. 10:9). Religion offers a broad door in order to accommodate as many as possible, thinking that success is evaluated by the number of participants involved and contributing, but the door to participation in the saving life of Jesus Christ is narrowly and exclusively defined in the Person, life and character of Jesus (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12).

### **Section 169**

#### **The Master of the House - Luke 13:25-30**

Jesus proceeded to explain parabolically that when He, the Master of the House of God arose, alluding to His resurrection, the door would be shut to all religious attempts to come to God by performance. The people involved in Jewish religion, and all religion, will stand outside of the kingdom of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, knocking at the door and claiming to have attended Jesus’ teaching sessions and to know Jesus, but Jesus will declare that He does not know them (cf. Matt. 25:12) for knowing God in Christ (Jn. 17:3) is only possible by the receiving of the grace of God in the “finished work” of Jesus Christ. The door of the kingdom is closed to all self-effort of religious performance which is but the working of iniquity, unrighteousness and evildoing, which is forever incompatible with the grace of God in Christ. The people involved in Jewish religion will be wailing and weeping when they realize that they

are shut out of the kingdom of God, especially when they see their old covenant patriarchs and prophets within the kingdom, because they were men who were receptive in faith to God's activity. The exclusivity of Jewish blood and legalistic performance is not the criteria of participation in the kingdom, but rather the singularity of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of Christ is universally available to all mankind from north, south, east and west, who will sit down together in loving acceptance of one another at the expected Messianic banquet celebration (cf. Isa. 43:5,6; 49:12,13). Those who thought they were first in privilege and priority before God, like the Jewish religion and all religion tends to think they are, will be last and left out, while those who were regarded as last in line, as lowly losers by religion, will be foremost in the kingdom for they recognized their need and accepted the grace of God in Christ.

### **Section 170**

#### **Herod, the Fox - Luke 13:31-35**

Since Jesus was probably still in the region of Perea while these events were transpiring, He was in the territory governed by Herod Antipas, the same Herod who arrested John the Baptist (Lk. 3:19,20), ordered the murder of John the Baptist (Mk. 6:27), and was paranoid about the identity of Jesus (Mk. 6:14-17). Some Pharisees warned Jesus that Herod wanted to kill Him. Perhaps this was a scheme to frighten Jesus back into the region of Judea into the hands of the Jewish leaders. Jesus was not intimidated by the threat, however, telling them to relay the message to the crafty old fox that in accord with Messianic expectations (cf. Lk. 7:22) He was exorcising demons and allowing God to heal people through Him (Acts 2:22), and that only in the threefold perfection of God's timing would He meet His destined demise in Jerusalem where the Jewish prophets were historically rejected and murdered by the Jewish peoples

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themselves. Such an announcement might have been a relief to Herod, knowing that Jesus was soon to depart Perea.

The compassionate heart of Jesus for the Jewish peoples was again evident in His desire to gather the collective “Jerusalem” under His wings as a hen does to her chicks when they are threatened. But the Jewish peoples refused to be thus gathered, saved, and delivered from the judgment of God in repentance. Recognizing that rejection, Jesus foretold that the religious “house of cards” was going to fall, the House of God known as Israel would be abandoned by God. The religious people who reject Him will see Him again at the time of judgment when “every knee will bow and every tongue confess” (Phil. 2:10,11), and all will recognize Jesus Christ as God’s Messiah and the divine Savior having come as the exclusive expresser of the character and activity of God.

### **Section 171**

#### **God’s Banquet Invitation - Luke 14:1-24**

When invited to a meal at the home of a leading Pharisee on the Sabbath, Jesus accepted, knowing they were watching for every breach of propriety in their religious rules. A man with fluid-retention, perhaps due to a diseased heart or liver, was present, possibly employed by the religious leaders as a “set-up” to entrap Jesus. Jesus put them on the defensive by asking whether it was legal to heal on the Sabbath. Their refusal to answer revealed the silent insensitivity of religion to the real needs of mankind. An imperiled animal was more important than hurting people. Personal economic interests often supersede humanitarian concern in religion.

Observing the religionists maneuvering and jockeying for position at the table, Jesus exposed their pride of self-importance in seeking to assume proper places of prestige and honor. Like a flock of peacocks developing their pecking order, religionists are often engaged in proud politicking for position. In

what might first appear to be a lesson on guest-etiquette, Jesus explained that a kingdom-guest will gather together socially with an attitude of humility that recognizes his own poverty, lowliness and sinfulness, and does not demand any personal rights. Within the kingdom of Christ the proud will be humbled, and the humble will be elevated by God's grace.

Jesus also noticed that the host of this gathering had invited all his cronies, cohorts and colleagues with whom he felt comfortable and from whom he could reasonably expect a reciprocal invitation. Religion often invites the respectable and dignified people of a particular social class, economic group, race and religious persuasion from whom they can "calculate the returns." Jesus indicted such a selfish motivation of personal gain and returned favors by indicating that the invitation of the kingdom is unto those who cannot give in return or reciprocate the favor. This is not just a lesson encouraging benevolent kindness to the poor and handicapped, but a revelation of the divine attitude that will enable unselfish and unconditional love in the social invitations and guest lists of those in the kingdom. The return and reward for such will be the eternal blessing and appreciation of the righteousness of the risen Lord Jesus.

One of the guests uttered a pious statement, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Perhaps he was trying to gloss over the indictment of the hosts and guests by saying, "Won't it be nice when we all get to heaven?" On the other hand, he may have been self-righteously affirming that the Jewish Pharisees were "blessed" of God and sure to be guests at God's final award ceremony. Jesus used the occasion to tell a parable about the kingdom banquet which was not just a future expectation but a present invitation.

God in Christ has made the invitation to partake with Him. Those involved in the Jewish religion were making varied excuses for not participating in God's kingdom meal in Jesus Christ, rejecting the opportunity to partake with the pretext of priority preoccupation. God proceeds to invite all men to

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partake of Christ's kingdom supper, including the unhealthy and the have-nots; the down-and-out, the diseased, the different and the socially despised; the unclean, ignorant, poor and sinful which religion often neglects. God's invitation in Jesus Christ does not overlook anyone, but draws them by His grace in order to have a "full-house" for His banquet. The religious pretensions of position, reciprocity and preoccupation will render those thus involved unfit to partake of Christ because of their unbelief.

### Section 172

#### **The Cost of Discipleship - Luke 14:25-35**

Apparently still journeying toward Jerusalem (Lk. 13:22), Jesus referred to the cost of Christian discipleship, necessitating the willingness to become detached and disentangled from all that would detract from full freedom and availability to follow Jesus. Jesus employed the exaggerated overstatement of hating physical family members in order to provide the impact necessary to challenge the binding family solidarity and expectations within the Jewish religion and culture. The psychological and religious bonds of family attachments can serve as preoccupations which constrain and forestall complete freedom to be available to Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives. Jesus did not mean that Christians are to seek rejection, alienation and estrangement from family members, but only that such relationships are to be a lesser concern and priority than the new spiritual solidarity that the Christian has with Him, and with the Body of Christ, the family of God.

Christian discipleship is no easy task, and not to be entered into halfheartedly. Perhaps thinking of what awaited Him in Jerusalem in a few months, Jesus used the familiar figure of cross-bearing where the condemned criminal was forced to endure the extremely difficult task of carrying the *patibulum* cross-beam to his own execution. Though religion empha-

sizes self-denial and commitment in the interpretation of these words, Jesus was encouraging careful deliberation of the difficulties in detachment and dependency. One must not enter into Christian discipleship “half-cocked,” without counting the cost and being prepared. Discipleship demands forethought of what is required, and the willingness to make all other attachments and encumbrances secondary in order to be free and available to Jesus Christ.

It takes spiritual discernment to recognize that just as salt without saltiness is useless, so also is a disciple not disengaged from other preoccupying concerns. Distracted disciples and seasonless salt are both ineffective.

### **Section 173**

#### **Concern for the Lost -Luke 15:1-32**

The Pharisees were separatists who in their self-righteous elitism sought to avoid defilement and maintain ceremonial cleanness by disassociating from all sinners, i.e., those who did not conform to their teaching and practices. They were scandalized that Jesus would engage in the impropriety of having table-fellowship with the down-and-outs, the social outcasts and the unacceptable, thus accepting them as equals. Jesus told three parables that explained His behavior and freedom of association with “losers” and the lost.

Though religion may be content to count the number who have remained faithful and not strayed, such is not the *modus operandi* of the kingdom. Since the Jewish religionists were not of Jesus’ flock (cf. John 10), they would not have been able to understand how the divine Shepherd functioned. “God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9). God has individual compassionate concern for the lost who are willing to repent by recognizing their lostness, changing their mind so as to admit their inability and act in reliance on God’s grace ability. The pious, self-righ-

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teous religious rule-keepers do not regard themselves as needing to repent in this way, and so remain stern and sour in their proud propriety. They never understand the celebration of joy in the divine recovery and restoration of fallen mankind. Joy (*chara*) is the attitude and expression that results only from experiencing the grace (*charis*) of God in Jesus Christ.

Religion is content to count the coins in the coffer and devise manipulative schemes to induce others to contribute additional coins. The attitude of God within the kingdom is like that of a poor woman who has lost one-tenth of her savings. Searching for the lost coin in every crook and cranny, she celebrates with joy when she finds it, just as God rejoices over the restoration of one sinner.

Birthrights were important in the Jewish religion and culture of the first-century. When a son initiated the breakdown of family solidarity by demanding his portion, and then squandered such in sin and failure, he would be much despised. The additional degradation and disgrace of tending swine was so offensive and abominable to Jewish thinking that they regarded such a person as a Gentile and a lost cause. The son in Jesus' parable of the "lost son" recognized his desperate need and inability to resolve his predicament, and was willing to confess such and become a day-laborer for his father. God's love and compassion for discredited and admitted failures is portrayed in the forgiveness of the father toward the son and the generous grace that restored him to full relationship as a son. In the Christian kingdom of Christ there is joyous celebration accompanied by the abundant lavishment of God's gifts of grace when the lost have been found.

The older brother in the parable serves as the portrayal of religion which has contempt for failures and "losers" who cannot or will not do it correctly and conform to expectations. Like the older brother, the Jewish religionists were "angry and refused to go in" to the kingdom celebration. Like Jonah, they were angry that God should exercise compassion and mercy

upon those who repented. In like manner as the older brother was recounting his propriety and rightness, religion often engages in the bookkeeping and record-keeping of their performances, obedience and correctness, assuming a moral superiority and pride of virtue that should be able to claim exclusive rights before God. In their self-righteous calculation of their self-efforts, they regard it an unfair injustice that God should extend grace to sinners and failures.

Jesus was explaining His behavior by contrasting the proud contempt of the Jewish religionists with the grace of God within the kingdom which He came to bring in Himself. Only in the admission of our inadequacy are we free to accept the adequacy of God's grace (cf. II Cor. 3:5).

### **Section 174**

#### **Materialistic Religion - Luke 16:1-18**

Continuing to expose the religionists, Jesus employed a backhanded parable that dripped with sarcasm as it revealed the *modus operandi* of religion. While some have regarded this as the most difficult of all the parables, it is completely consistent with all that Jesus said in His confrontation of religion. Jesus did not praise what the unrighteous steward did, for such would be to encourage deceitful dishonesty and defrauding of another. Rather, He was portraying the attitudes and activities of the religionists by noting that the religious leaders were like unconscionable stewards of God's estate, willing to employ every expedient means to arrange and insure their own selfish ends. Rightly charged with mismanagement of God's business, these religious stewards resorted to crafty, cunning, conniving and crooked scheming in order to set themselves up physically for the future. Thinking that it was a social disgrace to be poor or to be a common laborer, they attempted to maintain respectability and social placement even at the expense of being disreputable and unrighteous. In fact, these "sons of this

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age” regarded such worldly wisdom as a prudent virtue to be admired, and the “sons of light” (cf. Eph. 5:8; I Thess 5:5) are not always as wise and resourceful in manifesting the character of God. “If this is your worldly plane of operation, your playing field, then make your deals, buy your favors which make people indebted to you, and use the methods of ‘winning friends and influencing people’,” Jesus seems to have been saying. “Such unrighteous religious materialism will fail, but go ahead and draw others in, for misery loves company in the everlasting dwellings of torment (23,28) and agony (24,25) in hell.” The quantity of faith or fraudulence does not determine character, for the true riches (Eph. 1:18; 2:7; 3:8) of divine character are found only in Christ. Religion is engaged in the serving of materialistic mammon, and of necessity despises God, for it is impossible to serve two masters.

Religionists are “lovers of money” and full of avarice, thinking that wealth and prosperity are a sign of God’s blessing. Like the Pharisees, they laugh and scoff with contempt and disdain at what Jesus says about true riches. In self-righteous self-justification they put on appearances before men. “Men look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart” (I Sam. 16:7). The ways of religion are the ways of the world which are highly esteemed among worldly men, but are detestable, despicable, loathsome and abominable in the sight of God.

The Jewish religionists kept falling back on their identification with the Law and the prophets, but Jesus explained that these were only valid until John the Baptist, and were now past, obsolete and outmoded. Since John the Baptist the glorious gospel of the kingdom was preached; the message of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, the Messiah-King. The poor, the have-nots, and the nonreligious are crashing the gates, pressing for the privilege of participation in Christ’s kingdom of grace (cf. Matt. 11:12). This does not mean that there is not a valid connection to the old covenant religion of Judaism, and

God's original intent for the Law to express His character (cf. Matt. 5:17-20). It is religion that does not respect the Law and destroys the intent of the Law by misunderstanding the character of God and rejecting the dynamic of expressing such character in Jesus Christ. An example was the religious laxity in condoning infidelity and adultery within Judaism, failing to understand God's intent of expressing His faithfulness and purity within the marriage relationship.

### **Section 175**

#### **The Rich Man and Lazarus - Luke 16:19-31**

To contrast the religious emphasis on physical riches and the radical difference of the kingdom of Christ receiving those who did not measure up materially and socially, Jesus told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man, who was also a religious man, selfishly spent and consumed to live a life of self-indulgent luxury and extravagance. Lazarus, whose name means "God helps," was poor, hungry and diseased, a condition which religion regards as a despicable disgrace, perhaps the result of "bad *karma*," begging at the rich man's door. Both men died, for "it is appointed unto all men to die, and then comes the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Lazarus, representing the sinful failures of mankind who find grace in Jesus Christ, went to heaven, to the place of intimacy with God which the Jewish religion identified as the "bosom of Abraham" in solidarity with the one they regarded as the father of Israel. The rich man, admired by religion as having been made prosperous as a sign of God's blessing, got all his rewards on earth (Matt. 6:2,5,16) and had been paid in full (Luke 6:24). He went to the everlasting dwelling place of misery, torment (23,28) and agony (24,25) in hell; an irrevocably fixed place of hopelessness with no second chances. He cried out to Father Abraham, still condescendingly seeking to have Lazarus serve him, saying, "Send Lazarus with a cool brew," and then, "Send

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Lazarus to warn my brothers of this terrible plight.” Father Abraham explained that his brothers of like kind already had the written revelation of God clearly explaining God’s character of graciousness toward the poor in Moses and the prophets. The rich man then reverted to the common religious attitude that people need a supernatural sign to convince them, and that if Lazarus were to return raised from the dead they would repent. The fallacy of that argument is historically evident in Jesus having been raised from the dead, and the rich and the religionists remain adamant in their resistance to receiving Jesus Christ. Though poverty is not a virtue in itself, the kingdom of God is open to the poor, the have-nots, and the down-and-outs who will receive the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

### **Section 176**

#### **The Stumbling-block of Religion - Luke 17:1-10**

To His disciples Jesus then explained that religion is scandalous, an offense to God’s grace, creating more stumbling-blocks to faith in Jesus Christ than anything else. Religion abuses people, especially the simple, the poor and the lowly, by heaping on the performance standards of work and achievement. The world would be better off if religion and all religionists were thrown into the deep-blue sea!

Christians must be cautious about their attitude toward sin. Though God’s grace is for sinners, Christ’s followers must ever be aware that sin is contrary to the character of God. The subjective application of Christ’s forgiveness of sins is realized when the sinful individual repents with a change of mind that recognizes sin as a violation of God’s character and submits to Jesus Christ as Lord in order to act by allowing God’s character to be expressed in Christian behavior. Christ as the Forgiver within the Christian will repeatedly extend forgiveness to a failing sinful individual (cf. Matt. 18:21,22) when such an attitude of repentance is evident, rather than holding such

against them as religion so often does. The disciples responded by requesting an increase to their faith in order to forgive in such an unlimited manner. Jesus explained that faith is a choice of receptivity to the activity of God, or availability to divine ability. Faith itself is not a power, a principle, a “word,” or a work that can transplant a mulberry tree; rather, faith allows the Almighty God to act. This counteracts the religious emphasis on having more faith in order to accomplish more, achieve more, and do more for God.

What is a slave expected to do? Only to be available to his master and to “listen under” the direction of his master in obedience. The slave does not get praised and rewarded for his performance, achievement or productivity, nor for his commitment or dedication, nor even for his being available. These are merely what is expected of him as an expression of his master’s desire. Likewise the slave of Christ is available to Christ to allow divine grace to be expressed through him as the Master functions as the dynamic of His own demands. God is pleased with the expression of His own character and activity manifested unto His own glory.

### **Section 177**

#### **Lazarus Raised From the Dead - John 11:1-44**

Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha who lived in Bethany, just a couple of miles outside of Jerusalem. He became ill, and the sisters sent word to Jesus in Perea that Lazarus was sick. Upon hearing the report, Jesus knew that death was not going to be the final outcome and that God was going to be glorified by His activity, so he delayed two days before setting out for Judea. The disciples cautioned Jesus about the intent of the Jewish leaders to kill Him, but He overrode their concerns noting that He was still in the “day” of His Messianic ministry and the time of darkness had not yet come. Jesus explained that Lazarus had “fallen asleep,” using the

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familiar euphemism for death, but the disciples responded with a typical religious ploy of literalism, whereupon Jesus stated explicitly that “Lazarus is dead.”

When Jesus arrived in Bethany the sisters both lamented that their brother might not have died if Jesus had been there. To Martha, Jesus replied, “Your brother shall rise again.” She reverted to the Pharisaic belief in the doctrine of future bodily resurrection. Religious belief cannot go beyond the epistemological positing of a propositional, theological position of future resurrection. In affirming that “I am the resurrection and the life,” Jesus explained that life and resurrection were inherent within Himself, personally, ontologically and dynamically. Jesus is life (John 14:6) in Himself (John 5:25), and to receive Him is to have eternal life (John 3:16,36). Eternal life is not an event, experience or benefit, nor is it an entity, commodity or possession that is acquired. Jesus is resurrection-life, and such is the reality of Christianity which He came to bring in Himself. Religion may assent to Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, as Martha did, but it inevitably fails to recognize that the presence of Jesus allows for the active expression of Who He is, that His being is expressed in His acts. The glory of divine activity was manifested when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead revealing His character of life and resurrection, all the while anticipating His own historic death and resurrection which enacted the resurrection reality of Christianity.

### **Section 178**

#### **Religious Leaders Conspire Together - John 11:45-54**

The religious rivals of the Sadducean chief priests and the Pharisees responded to the raising of Lazarus by convening a consortium to determine their course of action. They agreed that Jesus was a threat to their religious security, and that if Jesus were allowed to continue His activity they might lose

control of the people and be deprived of their religious positions.

Caiaphas, the high priest of Judaism that year, explained that the issue was one of cold, calculating expedience. “It is us or Him; it cannot be both. Someone has to go, and we shall make sure it is Him.” Religion or Christianity, one or the other; it cannot be both; one eliminates the other. The Jewish religious leaders determined that their own personal end justified the means of exterminating and murdering Jesus, which they henceforth set out to accomplish.

Ironically, Caiaphas himself had been used of God to previously prophesy that Jesus was going to die for the benefit of others, even for Gentiles, so that the “children of God” would become a universal spiritual family. Indeed, the vicarious death of Jesus Christ was the remedial action required to restore God’s life in man whereby we become “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26) and part of the one Body (Eph. 2:16) of the new humanity (cf. Eph. 2:15) of God’s people.

### **Section 179**

#### **Ten Lepers - Luke 17:11-19**

Somewhere on the border of Galilee and Samaria, Jesus was recognized by ten lepers who sought His mercy. Jewish religion regarded lepers to be unclean untouchables who had to be ostracized from all social interaction, cursed because of sin. Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the Jewish priests for ceremonial cleansing (Lev. 14:1-10) and social restoration. Setting out by faith to do so, they were healed of their leprosy. Only one, a Samaritan, recognized that the religious priests of Judaism could not do anything for him, but that Jesus was the One who was God’s priest and mediator. Recognizing the good grace (*eucharis*) of God, he came back to worship Him, expressing his faith and obedience in gratitude. Jesus indicated

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that the faith-receptivity of the one man toward the grace-activity of God in Christ had made him safe from dysfunction in order to function as God intended in restored humanity, not only physically and socially, but also spiritually.

### **Section 180**

#### **God's Activity Will be Obvious - Luke 17:20-37**

The Pharisees, like the nine lepers, failed to recognize the dynamic and ontological essence of God's activity in Jesus Christ. Consistent with religionists through the centuries, they inquired concerning the timing when the kingdom of God would come, conceiving the kingdom as a futuristic phenomenon, entity or realm which would be preceded by physically observable signs which will make the timing of the coming of the kingdom calculable. Jesus explained that the kingdom of God would not be forecast with spectacular and supernatural phenomena of observable signs. The kingdom is not a concrete entity, an "it" that can be identifiably projected in terms of timing and location of a realm. The kingdom is the dynamic presence and reality of the functional reign of the Lord and King, Jesus Christ. "Because I am here as the divine King, the kingdom is among you, right in your midst," Jesus explained.

Jesus began to prepare His disciples for the time when He would be absent from them physically, and they would long for His visible presence and ministry. In His absence there would be flashes of light alleged to be the appearance and activity of Jesus, but He warned them not to chase such. Whenever He acted in divine action such would be obvious and visible everywhere, just as lightning lights up the whole sky. First, He had to suffer the rejection of the Jewish generation of first-century Palestine who would crucify Him.

When Jesus does act in devastating judgment it will be obvious and unmistakable. Just as in the days of Noah and Lot the people will be complacently preoccupied with their daily

routine and *status-quo*, unrepentant of their oblivious unbelief in what God is doing. On that day when the Son of Man is revealed in judgment, Jesus warned His disciples not to attempt to collect material things, but to be willing to be separated from loved ones, and to run the gauntlet unafraid even of forfeiting one's life in death. Those who try to save their life will lose it.

The disciples wanted to know where this scene of devastating judgment was going to take place. Jesus answered them in pictorial language indicating that it would be as obvious as a dead body to a vulture. Where there is death and decay the vultures gather. Where there is spiritual decay, judgment will follow. The vultures obviate the presence of death, and God's activity of judgment will obviate the obstinate unbelief of spiritually dead people. Where? Right there in Palestine. Those who had received Jesus Christ spiritually knew what was happening and what God was doing when judgment came in A.D. 70.

### **Section 181**

#### **Religious Judgment - Luke 18:1-8**

In the midst of the difficult times ahead for the disciples in Palestine, Jesus encouraged them not to get discouraged and lose heart, but to engage in Christocentric prayer that admits human inability and recognizes the grace-ability of God in Christ, being receptive to God's activity by faith. In the parable of the ungodly judge, Jesus was not encouraging persistent pestering, haranguing and needling of God in prayer, but was illustrating the persistent pursuit of religious people for protection, whereas there should be a response of faith prior to the just judgment of God.

The Jewish religious leaders served as judges and arbiters over the affairs of the people in Palestine. They were often corrupt and unscrupulous, making their determinations on the basis of bribes and payoffs. These religious judges "did not fear God nor respect man" in terms of administering justice

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or exhibiting mercy and compassion. Later Jesus explained that these religious leaders “devoured widow’s houses” (Matt. 23:14; Mk. 12:40; Lk. 20:47).

The poor widow could not or would not pay the bribe to the religious judge, but like many religious followers repeatedly cried out day and night seeking and demanding the protection of the religious leaders and God. The ungodly religious judge finally consented to grant her legal protection just to get her “off his back” so she would not bother him anymore.

In contrast to the ungodly religious judge, God as Judge cannot be bribed or bought-off as many religious people would be willing to do. He will not keep stalling and putting people off until they respond as He desires. Swiftly and without a long delay God would act in just judgment upon those who had been His chosen people, the elect Israel, the Jewish people, who were functioning like spiritual widows, as if God were dead. Justice would be served, for those who reject the Son of God in unbelief deserve the dire death consequences of their sin.

Jesus posed the question, “When the Son of Man comes (cf. Luke 17:30), will He find faith on the earth?” When He came in judgment a few decades later in A.D. 70, would He find people who were receptive to God’s grace in Himself by faith, people who had not “lost heart,” people who were praying in faithful receptivity despite calamitous circumstances? Jesus did not expect that most of the Jewish peoples would do so, but He was always desirous of extending grace to the desperate. If the Jewish people would recognize their desperate plight, maybe He would find faith on earth.

### **Section 182**

#### **Religious Pride - Luke 18:9-14**

Religious people have such a difficult time recognizing their desperate need for mercy and forgiveness. Jesus illus-

trated such in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector who both came to the temple to pray at the same time.

The Pharisee was the epitome of religiosity. He was a proud separatist with an attitude of superiority and privilege that made him “holier-than-thou.” His arrogant self-righteousness viewed his own self-effort and works as meritorious performance and achievement before God. In comparing his alleged righteousness with others he scornfully concluded that others were contemptuous and despicable, and he had no love or compassion for such people. He prayed to himself a “soliloquy of self-congratulation.”<sup>1</sup>

Jewish religion of that day regarded the tax-collector as a traitor and the grossest of disrespectful sinners. Indeed, he was probably guilty of extortion, embezzlement and other crimes against his own people, but he recognized his desperate need for mercy and forgiveness. He admitted his sinfulness, inability and deficiency, making himself receptive to God’s grace, the dynamic of divine activity that can restore a man to function as God intended.

Contrary to all religious attitudes of His day, Jesus indicated that the tax-collector was the one who had a right relationship with God, because he was receptive to the righteousness of the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, (Acts 3:14; 7:52; I Jn 2:1), and thus made righteous in Him. Those who religiously exalt their own righteousness will be humbled by God’s judgment, but those who humbly recognize their spiritual need will be exalted by God’s grace in the kingdom.

### **Section 183**

#### **Marriage and Divorce - Matt. 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12**

Doggedly determined to put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma in order to trap him and decrease His popularity with the people, the Pharisees brought up the age-old religious debate about divorce. Religion is inevitably polarized in their

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positions on divorce, either embedded in self-centered concerns of maintaining moral control by rules and regulations, or in the equally self-centered desire to allow all individual preferences; legalism or libertinism. The Jewish theological schools of the day represented both extremes: the conservative school of Rabbi Shammai allowed no cause for divorce except prior fornication; the liberal school of Rabbi Hillel allowed almost any cause for divorce, and such was the prevailing public attitude.

Expressing the character and activity of their father (John 8:44), the religious Pharisees tempted Jesus with a direct question of whether or not it was lawful before God for a man to divorce his wife for any cause. They knew the public sympathies for moral laxity in marriage, and were probably quite aware of Jesus' prior teaching that seemed to restrict divorce (Matt. 5:32). If Jesus were to take sides on the issue of divorce, they could generate conflict in the rabbinical schools. If His position placed restrictions on divorce, they could drive a wedge between Him and the prevailing public opinion. If Jesus were to severely denounce divorce, they could construe such as a denunciation of the divorce of Herod Antipas and his openly adulterous relationship with Herodias, the issue that led to John the Baptist being arrested, imprisoned and beheaded.

Jesus pointed the Pharisees back to the pronouncement of Moses (Deut. 24:1), where he referred to a man "finding no favor in his wife because of some indecency, and writing her a certificate of divorce." His intent was not to become embroiled in the interpretation of "indecency," but to expose the misconceptions of their enculturated religion, and to take them back to God's original intent for marriage. Jewish religion had trivialized marriage as a masculine convenience that allowed domination and abuse of women. They were convinced that Moses had sanctioned male-initiated divorce and that such was a moral duty when the wife failed to please her husband, revealing their attitudes of masculine superiority and selfishness which were always seeking an easy way out of marriage

commitment. Countering their religious misconceptions, Jesus explained that Moses did not command divorce, but realistically recognizing that “it happens” often due to the husband’s hardness of heart, he instituted a provisional protection for women by requiring a certificate of divorce. Male dominated Jewish religion was blind to Moses’ objective, seeing only what they wanted to see. Taking them back to the beginning, Jesus reminded the Pharisees that God’s original intent for marriage was an indissoluble relationship wherein two become one in a genuine union of mutuality and partnership. When two individuals, one male and one female, are indwelt by the presence of God and allowing His character to be expressed in loving unity, there will not be dictatorial dominance and forced subjugation, but a long-term relationship of mutual respect wherein they become inseparable. “God hates divorce” (Mal. 2:16); it destroys the most intimate physical picture of the spiritual relationship between Christ and the Christian (Eph. 5:23-32). On that foundation Jesus indicated that divorce and remarriage should not be considered except in cases when sexual immorality has broken the “one flesh” unity. Jesus, like Moses, realistically recognized that “it happens,” and neither of them was issuing a legal dictum about divorce. Both were revealing God’s original intent for marriage wherein both partners having the Spirit of God dwelling in their spirits might allow for the divine character of love, faithfulness and purity to be manifested in their marriage relationship.

Even Jesus’ disciples were conditioned by an enculturated male dominance and depreciation of women allowing for moral laxity, as evidenced by their reaction to Jesus’ statement in reasoning that it might be better not to marry. Jesus conceded that some might indeed forego marriage and sexual involvement in order to focus their priority on their relationship with Him in the kingdom, but He did not indicate that such celibacy is preferable or more “spiritual” or should be imposed on religious leadership.

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In contrast to the religious views of marriage, Jesus did not address marriage in terms of religious, cultural, physical or legal concerns, but emphasized the spiritual essence of marriage. A kingdom understanding of marriage recognizes the Christocentric reality of a man and a woman wherein the Spirit of Christ dwells in the spirit of both persons (cf. Rom. 8:9), and the divine character of love, faithfulness and purity is expressed toward one another in the human relationship of marriage. It is religion that always tends to focus on the “escape clauses” or “exception clauses” rather than on the Christocentric and spiritual essence of marriage.

### **Section 184**

#### **Receiving the Kingdom as a Child - Matt. 19:13-15; Mk. 10:13-16; Lk. 18:15-17**

It is a natural parental desire to have one’s children “blessed” with every advantage, and such was perhaps the reason they were bringing children to Jesus. In the religion and culture of Judaism in the first-century, children were valued for their potential posterity in racial preservation and ethnic purity. On the practical level, however, they were regarded as annoyances and inconveniences, just dirty little beings who were ignorant, inadequate and insignificant, having no standing or status in the society. Adopting this common adult attitude toward children, the disciples of Jesus were trying to forbid this nuisance of having children brought before Him.

Jesus admonishes the disciples to allow the children to come, “for of such is the kingdom of God.” The grace of God is made available to the inadequate and insignificant, who have no standing and are unable to care for themselves. All men must receive the kingdom, receive Christ the King, in trusting dependence upon God’s grace, just as a small child receives all things from his parental care-giver.

**Section 185**

**The Relativity of Religious Goodness - Matt. 19:16-26;  
Mk. 10:17-27; Lk. 18:18-27**

Religious rulers often revere one another with titles of “good,” “right,” and “reverend.” When such a one approached Jesus, he called Him, “Good Master,” and inquired what performance was necessary to have eternal life. Jesus first addressed the religious relativism of recognizing “goodness,” which could be traced all the way back to the forbidden choice of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden. In his natural condition “no good thing” (Rom. 7:18) dwells in man and there is “none good” (Rom. 3:12). Absolute goodness is an exclusive attribute of God alone, and the ruler did not recognize Jesus as such, nor did he realize that any expression of such character of goodness must be derived from Him. The one who does good derives such from God (III Jn. 11). If the religious ruler had understood such derivation of divine character expression, he might not have been so quick to claim that he had done what God required, for the Law is the expression of the character of God. God is faithful. God is the preserver of life. God is content. God is truth. God is personal and relational. God is love (I Jn. 4:8,16). What God is, only God is. Man is incapable of exhibiting such character, of keeping the Law, and must derive the expression of such character by God’s grace. Religion, like the ruler, continues to engage in the hypocrisy of pretense of doing good for God, failing to recognize human inability for such, and the necessity of deriving all from God, in grace.

If we would achieve God’s objective of perfectly functional humanity we must abandon our pious attempts at performance to please God, as well as our preoccupation with material possessions. As religion has traditionally regarded wealth and prosperity as a sign of God’s approval and blessing, this was a radical challenge to the religionist. What Jesus called for was

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not a blanket command for a vow of poverty in order to be a Christian, but an adjustment of priority and focus from material things in order to “follow Him” and allow Him to function as Lord in our lives within the kingdom. When performance and possessions are the priority of our concern, it is so difficult to divest ourselves of such in order to derive all from Jesus Christ. It is as difficult as trying to put a camel through the eye of a needle. Jesus employed the humor of hyperbole using an idiomatic truism that expressed the impossibility of putting the largest animal of the region through the smallest opening. But what is impossible to man, both the performance of the Law and the divestiture of possessions, is quite possible by the dynamic activity of the grace of God whenever a person is willing to follow Christ and allow the Savior to make him “safe” from dysfunctional humanity in order to function as intended by participating in the saving life of Jesus Christ and deriving all from Him.

### **Section 186**

**Reigning With Jesus - Matt. 19:27-30; Mk. 10:28-31;  
Lk. 18:28-30**

Vociferous Peter revealed his mercenary attitude by claiming that the disciples had abandoned all to follow Jesus, and asking, “What do we get? What is in it for us?” The answer Jesus gave was misunderstood by the disciples because of the residue of Jewish religious expectations of the kingdom. When Jesus indicated that the twelve disciples would be sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, the nationalistic sentiments and the egocentric aspirations of the disciples came into play. Many Christian religionists to this day continue to interpret Jesus’ words in an eschatological futurism of a physical or heavenly realm. Jesus was telling the disciples that in the spiritual relieving of mankind in the spiritual kingdom of Christianity, He would be sitting victoriously on the throne of

glory reigning and functioning as Lord, and the disciples would be reigning in life with Him (Rom. 5:17), judging the unbelief of Judaic Israel by their receptive belief in Jesus (cf. Rev. 21:12,14,21). Their abandonment of attachment to physical riches and relationships would be far outweighed by spiritual riches (cf. Eph. 1:18; 2:7; 3:8) and the spiritual relationships of solidarity with Christ and those in the Body of Christ who participate in the eternal life of Christ Himself. Those regarded as foremost by religion in terms of their performance, possessions, pedigree and position will be left behind in the kingdom, whereas those who recognize their inability and bankruptcy will be promoted by God's grace.

### **Section 187**

#### **Parable of the Grumbling Laborers - Matt. 20:1-16**

Countering the mercenary attitude of Peter and of religion in general, Jesus told the parable of the grumbling laborers. Failing to realize that "God is not served with human hands" (Acts 17:25), those engaged in religious service laboring for the Lord are often calculating the returns, remuneration and rewards, preoccupied with riches and monetary concerns. While religiously working for Jesus they are clocking in, keeping records, counting their hours of service, and banking on their merit-pay. They fail to understand that all that is done in the kingdom is to be derived from Christ by the dynamic of God's grace. All that God has to give is His Son, Jesus Christ. The entirety and the wholeness of who God is made available ontologically in Jesus, equally available to all and only by grace, not by merit. Grace is not proportional, nor can it be earned.

In accord with the natural, work-ethic propensity of man and religion, the laborers in the parable were griping and complaining about the social and vocational injustice of the equality of grace. The benefactor explained that their charges

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of unfairness and injustice were ungrounded, for He gave them what was promised and remained Faithful and True. It was their own selfish problem of demanding merit-pay and attempting to lay claims on God that caused them to question the generous goodness of God and miss the celebration of grace. Those who demand merit-pay create their own misery in their solicitation of selfish satisfaction. The evil eye of religion casts its selfish glance at God denying His goodness and grace, and envying those who did not labor as long and as hard. It has been said, "They that work for reward do not get as much as they want, while they that work out of love get more than they expect."

### Section 188

#### **Leadership and Authority in the Kingdom - Matt. 20:17-28; Mk. 10:32-45; Lk. 18:31-34**

As they prepared to journey to Jerusalem for the consummation of Passover, Jesus gave His disciples a more explicit preview of what was going to happen. There had been previous explanations (cf. Matt. 16:21; 17:22,23; Lk. 9:22,44), but Jesus expanded the details, again culminating the recitation in His resurrection from the dead.

The disciples were bewildered and could not comprehend what Jesus was telling them. This was due in part to their religious misconceptions of the kingdom which predicated a triumphant and victorious Messiah-conqueror who would establish a nationalistic, political and geographical kingdom realm. Had they not just been promised places of political power and prominence sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel? To speak of the defeat of the Messiah-King in shameful suffering and death was antithetical to all of their religious and personal aspirations. The disciples did not understand the spiritual reign of Christ in the kingdom, and neither does religion.

James and John were apparently being accompanied by their mother, who may have joined them for the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. She was an ambitious mother who made a presumptuous plea for preference on behalf of her sons, seeking their promotion to priority positions on the right and left hand of Jesus when the kingdom of established. They knew not for what they asked, for in the kingdom of Christ “the way to gain is to lose, the way to live is to die, and the way to lead is to serve.” Jesus would live such out in the cup of suffering and the overwhelming baptism of death, which they too were likewise promised, but He could not grant them positions of preference.

In the ensuing amplification to appease the indignation of the other disciples, Jesus explained that the leadership and authority of the world and of religion involves the assumption or placement of an individual in a role or position of privilege wherein he assumes a self-importance and power that becomes oppressive and dominating. Such leaders selfishly demand to be respected, honored, served and obeyed, asserting their power in a manner that is soon corrupted into subjugation, enslavement and tyranny of others. Jesus did not lead in such a way, and neither will those who lead in the kingdom. His was not a role or position of authority, but the inherent ontological authority of God Himself. His leadership and authority were based on divine character, whereby “out of the being” (literal meaning of the Greek word *exousia*, translated “authority”) of deity He could defer in order to serve others. This leadership of servanthood is contrary to all religious structures of hierarchy and power. Jesus came not to be served in the human effort of performance or to be bowed down before in prostration, but to minister to others by investing humanity with His divine life in order that they might function as intended in serving others. He came to give His life as a ransom payment to redeem and “buy back” mankind that they might be liberated and set free to be man as God intended, vessels of God’s activity.

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### **Section 189**

#### **Undeterred Desire to See - Matt. 20:29-34; Mk. 10:46-52; Lk. 18:34-43**

As Jesus went through Jericho toward Jerusalem with His disciples and a sizable entourage, two blind beggars along the road inquired about the commotion and were told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Perhaps they had heard that “the blind receive sight” (Lk. 7:22) in the ministry of Jesus. Bartimaeus and his fellow-sufferer recognized their deficiency and desperately cried out, asking the Messianic Son of David to have mercy on them. Though some in the crowd had no compassion and attempted to push them aside and silence them with rebuke, the blind pair would not be deterred, hollering even louder. Jesus recognized that they were receptive to God’s activity in faith and restored their physical sight, after which they followed Him, and the crowd praised God.

### **Section 190**

#### **Exclusion from the Kingdom - Luke 19:1-28**

There was popular support for God’s work in the life of a man like Bartimaeus who was blind and poor, but it is often more difficult to accept God’s work in a man who is wealthy and corrupt. Zacchaeus, whose name means “pure,” did not live up to his name. As a chief tax-collector, he was despised as a renegade and a traitor among the Jews and socially boycotted. Religion regards certain nonconformists to be such severe “sinners” that they do not deserve compassion or grace, but only the justice of God’s judgment, and should be excluded from all association with God’s people. Jesus, on the other hand, was a “friend of tax-collectors and sinners” (Lk. 5:30; 7:34), aware that they need God’s grace just as much as anyone else.

Seeing that Zacchaeus was “up a tree,” Jesus invited Himself to stay the night at Zacchaeus’ home. Zacchaeus was

receptive to the presence of Jesus, and evidenced repentance by confession of his fraud, willingness to make restitution, and a desire to give half of his possessions to the poor. Salvation had come to the house of Zacchaeus in the presence of the Savior, apart from whose present-tense activity there is no salvation. Although Zacchaeus had been one of “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6; 15:24), abandoned and excluded by the religious shepherds of Judaism, the Messianic Son of Man had come to seek and to save such religiously rejected sinners.

The only basis of exclusion from the kingdom is revealed in the parable of investment, which Jesus told to forestall the misguided enthusiasm of the Jewish populace who wanted to force Jesus into an elevation to political kingship in accord with their false religious conceptions and expectations of an imminent, immediate commencement of the kingdom. Though Jesus would soon enter Jerusalem in a somewhat royal approach, the prevailing religious opinions of the coming kingdom as a political, national, religious, material, geographical and militaristic entity were not consistent with the spiritual reality of the kingdom which Jesus came to bring in Himself. Jesus told a parable about a royal official who went away for awhile and then returned to receive his kingdom after a period of time, thus illustrating that His kingdom would not be inaugurated immediately in the manner in which they anticipated.

Jesus, the King, came to earth to receive a kingdom for Himself and to reign in people’s lives. He invests Himself in us in various ways, but does not intend that His life should be “put on hold” in “no-risk spiritual shelters” or in some religious “safety deposit box.” Religion seeks to hide the activity of Jesus in religious boxes of belief, morality and ritual. It is Christ’s objective that His grace activity be enlarged as we are receptive to such in faith. Grace is dynamic, active and alive, but therefore risky because we do not know the outcome. Religion often conceives of Jesus as an austere and tyrannical

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Judge who keeps score of their performance, but He is instead a just and compassionate Savior who desires to see His grace functioning and being enlarged, and will give more and more grace to those who are receptive to such in faith. To those who refuse such, their opportunities for the reception of grace will be removed.

The citizens of the country of the King, the Jewish peoples, hated Jesus and did not want Him to reign over them. They wanted a kingdom-realm wherein they could cash-in for themselves and calculate the physical and material returns. The Jewish peoples of Palestine had refused the grace of God in Christ. They did not want Him to reign over them as Lord in the kingdom He came to bring. Opposing Him as King and Savior, they were thus His enemies. They would suffer the ultimate loss of life, slain in God's judgment by the destruction of the Jewish nation in A.D. 70. Their exclusion from the kingdom and destruction in judgment was not based on their being particularly bad sinners, but only because they rejected the only basis of inclusion in the kingdom, the receptivity of faith and submission to His reign as Lord and King.

## Chapter Eleven

# The Show-down in Jerusalem

The time had arrived for Jesus to go to the Jewish Passover observance in Jerusalem, where He knew He would face a show-down with the religious authorities. This would provide the occasion to make an unmistakable Messianic declaration and demonstration, while at the same time explicitly exposing the religionism of Judaism.

### Section 191

**Approach and Entrance to Jerusalem - Matt. 21:1-11,14-17;  
Mk. 11:1-11; Lk. 19:29-44; John 11:55 – 12:1,9-19**

Passover, the most important annual holiday of the Jews when they gathered in Jerusalem to commemorate the passing over of the death angel prior to the exodus from Egypt (Exod. 12), was approaching, and speculation was running rampant whether Jesus would attend the feast and confront the Jewish leaders. It was now public knowledge that the Sadducean chief priests and the Pharisees had conspired together to put Jesus to death (cf. Jn. 11:53). Jesus was on the “most wanted list” of Judea, and notice was given that if anyone knew His whereabouts they should report such to the authorities. When threatened, religion will often resort to silencing its critics and opponents by any means possible.

Six days prior to Passover Jesus arrived in the village of Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem, to visit Mary, Martha and

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Lazarus. Hearing of such, the Sadducean chief priests determined to murder Lazarus also, for he was a painfully obvious documentation of Jesus' power.

On the first day of the week Jesus sent two of His disciples into a village to find a mount, the colt of a donkey who had never been ridden. This borrowed beast of burden served as a purposeful reverse symbol to contrast the kingship of Jesus with the popular royal demonstrations of that time. Victorious kings and military leaders often made triumphal entries riding atop a white Arabian stallion leading a procession of conquered foes. The prevailing religious expectations of the Jews was for just such a triumph of the Messiah-King over the Romans. To counter such expectations and to contrast the spiritual nonpolitical kingdom which He came to bring in Himself via lowliness and humility, Jesus chose to ride on the colt of a donkey. This was a fulfillment of prophecy going all the way back to Israel's prophecy of the offspring of Judah tying the donkey's colt to the choice vine (Gen. 49:10,11), amplified by Zechariah's prophecy of the "king coming, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9).

As Jesus descended from the Mount of Olives and entered into Jerusalem, the multitude of Jewish people were still attempting to cast Jesus into their nationalistic expectations of a Messiah-King. They spread their garments and palm-tree branches before Jesus and the procession of His disciples. They proclaimed that Jesus was the "King of Israel" (John 20:13), the "Son of David" (Matt. 21:9; Mk. 11:10), the "Blessed One who comes in the name of the Lord" (Ps. 118:26; Matt. 21:9; Mk. 11:9; Lk. 19:38; Jn. 12:13), crying "Hosanna" ("Save us now!").

Hearing these accolades of the people, some of the Pharisees lamented with the hyperbole that "the whole world has gone after Him" (John 12:19). Other Pharisees advised Jesus to rebuke the followers for their acclamations, to which suggestion Jesus responded that if the people were silenced even the

stones of the natural creation would cry out in proclamation of His identity.

With a broken heart of compassion, Jesus wept over Jerusalem, knowing that the people in the “city of peace” had refused to accept the peace of God available only through Him and His incarnational visitation, desiring only political peace on their own terms. He foresaw that judgment was going to come upon Jerusalem and Palestine in an unprecedented disaster which would leave “no stone upon another,” as was fulfilled in A.D. 70.

Within the city of Jerusalem and the temple itself Jesus was acclaimed as the expected Messianic prophet, and even the children were crying “Hosanna to the Son of David.” The religious authorities were indignant and livid that Jesus would allow such. Jesus simply pointed them to the words of the Psalmist that “from the mouth of infants and nursing babies God perfects praise” (Ps. 8:2). The message of God’s redemption and restoration of mankind in Jesus Christ will be proclaimed; it cannot be stopped, quenched or silenced.

Jesus returned to Bethany to lodge for the evening.

### **Section 192**

#### **Judaic Religion Will End - Matt. 21:18,19; Mk. 11:12-14**

Monday morning, Jesus and His disciples departed Bethany, and perhaps in Bethphage, the “house of figs,” Jesus noted a fig tree from which He might eat some fruit. Though it was not yet the time of year when the figs would be ripe, there should have been some immature fruit set on the tree. There was nothing but leaves, foliage without fruit, which Jesus used as a tangibilized parable to illustrate the Jewish nation and peoples (cf. Lk. 13:6-9), whose religion had the appearance of life, but they were not receptive to deriving fruitfulness in Jesus Christ. The Jewish religion and the people of Israel would

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therefore be unable to provide the fruit of God's blessing to any man henceforth forever.

### **Section 193**

#### **Religious Housecleaning - Matt. 21:12,13; Mk. 11:15-18; Lk. 19:45-48**

Entering into the Jewish temple Jesus again began to clean house as He did when He made His initial public Messianic claims (John 2:13-22). Observing the corrupt religious practices of commercialism and economic extortion, as well as the superficiality of using the temple area as a shortcut for business errands, Jesus halted the unholy usage of the temple of God. He cited the prophets' allusions to making the temple a "den of robbers" (Jere. 7:11), when it was intended to be "a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isa. 56:7). Isaiah's prophecy was an indictment on the religious exclusivism of Judaism and their failure to recognize that the physical temple was but a pictorial type of the spiritual temple of the Body of Christ wherein God would dwell and facilitate genuine worship in the manifestation of the worth-ship of His character within His people of all races, genders and economic classes.

The Sadducean chief priests and the Pharisaic scribes were outraged, and sought to destroy Jesus, acting in accord with the character of the Destroyer with whom they were aligned. Such religious destruction is often restrained only by the paranoid fear of public opinion.

### **Section 194**

#### **Dying In Order to Live - John 12:20-50**

Gentile proselytes were allowed on the periphery of the Jewish religion in the Court of the Gentiles within the temple. Some of these Gentile proselytes approached Philip requesting an interview with Jesus. Perhaps due to a religious residue of

racial prejudice against Gentiles, Philip sought the assistance of Andrew and together they reported the request to Jesus.

Speaking to the disciples, the Gentiles, and to the surrounding crowd, Jesus announced that the time had come for the Son of Man to be glorified by accomplishing what the Messiah had come to do on man's behalf, give His life a ransom for many, even universally inclusive of the Gentiles. Contrary to the self-glorification of religion, the way to be glorified in the kingdom is to be humiliated; the way to live is to die; the way to keep is to lose; and the way to be honored is to serve. Jesus would personally illustrate such when like a grain of wheat buried in the earth unto death, He would die in order that the fruit of His life might be manifested in mankind. Those identified in spiritual union with Jesus Christ must likewise be willing to be detached from personal interest in order to live, be preserved, honored and glorified into eternity.

Jesus admitted that His human soul was troubled by both the burden of the sin of mankind and the thought of personally dying, but He would not choose the flight of escapism to avoid what He came to accomplish as the Messiah, taking the death consequences of mankind in order to invest God's life in man. Jesus asserted His intent to allow God to glorify Himself through Him, saying "Father, glorify Thy name," at which time a loud voice from heaven indicated that He had glorified Himself in creation (cf. Ps. 19:1), and would now glorify Himself in the re-creation of mankind via redemption and restoration in His Son. This served as a full-disclosure and affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah. The judgment of the world would be effected by Christ's death and resurrection. The diabolic ruler of this world (cf. II Cor. 4:4) would be cast out by the victory of Christ. Though not obliterated or annihilated, Satan would be rendered powerless (Heb. 2:14) and his works destroyed (I Jn. 3:8). When lifted up on the cross in crucifixion (cf. Jn. 3:14; 8:28), dying for the sin consequences of mankind, Jesus would then in His resurrected spiritual form draw by spiritual provi-

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dence and persuasion (cf. Jn. 6:44) people from all races and nations into spiritual union with Himself.

Some in the audience voiced their misunderstanding of whether Jesus' direct prediction of His death by crucifixion contradicted the statements of the old covenant that the Messiah would remain forever (cf. II Sam 7:12,13; Isa. 9:7; Ezek. 37:25; Dan. 7:14; Micah 4:7), apparently forgetting references to the Messiah being cut-off and slaughtered (Isa. 53:7,8; Dan. 9:26). They were not completely convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and not another Messianic impostor. Jesus explained that He, the divine revelatory light (cf. Jn. 8:12; 12:35) would be in their presence a little while longer, during which time they should walk in the light, believe in the light, and become sons of light by identification with Himself. Otherwise, the spiritual darkness of unbelief and judgment would permanently overtake them.

Jesus departed and was hidden from the crowds and religious authorities. The general response to Jesus was that of unbelief, a stubborn refusal to receive Him for who He was. This fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the persistent unbelief and obstinate rejection of the Messiah by the people of Israel, whereupon God would give them over to a hardness of heart and inability to see and respond (Isa. 6:9,10; 53:1). Although some Jewish leaders assented to Jesus' Messiahship, they were men-pleasers and not willing to accept the social ostracism associated with such identification. Jesus explained that to continue to play the religious game in two-faced hypocrisy was an impossible anachronism. To believe on Him was to believe in God. To see Him was to see God. To hear Him was to hear God. To reject Him was to reject God, to reject eternal life, to abide in darkness, and to be condemned by God. The only way to know God and have the eternal life of God is to receive Jesus Christ.

**Section 195**

**Judgment Avoided By Faith - Matt. 21:19-22;**

**Mk. 11:19-25; Lk. 21:37,38**

Crossing the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem to Bethany in the evening, the disciples of Jesus noted that the fig tree that Jesus had said would never bear fruit was now withered and shriveled down to the roots. They were astonished that it was so quickly dried up. It was a picture parable of the Jewish nation and religion which was like a fruitless fig tree, unwilling to derive fruit from the character of God in Jesus Christ, and therefore would soon become lifeless, dead wood, destroyed in the judgment to come in A.D. 70.

Only the response of faith, man's receptivity of God's activity, allows the humanly impossible to be implemented to the glory of God as God does the impossible. Standing on the Mount of Olives Jesus indicated that receptive faith could request that "this mountain," the Mount of Olives, be removed, and such could transpire if it were God's will to do so. He may have been alluding to the fact that the stand of the Lord on the Mount of Olives would lead to the great divide between Christianity and religion (cf. Zech. 14:4) when all religion was judged by the activity of God in Himself. Faith is not mere cognizance or mental assent, but the reception of the forgiveness of the Forgiving Savior and the function of the divine Forgiver forgiving others through us, an attitude and action that is not natural or possible to man, but is supernaturally possible by the activity of God in man received by faith.

**Section 196**

**The Basis of Authority - Matt. 21:23-27; Mk. 11:27-33;**

**Lk. 20:1-8**

On His return to Jerusalem and the temple, Jesus was confronted by a coalition of the religious leaders who ques-

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tioned by what authority He was doing what He did. Religious authority is derived from the being and character of Satan and is based on hierarchical position and placement, whereas the authority of Jesus was derived out of the Being (Greek word *exousia* - “out of being”) of God. John the Baptist had also ministered by the authority of God, and by identifying Himself with the preliminary ministry of John, Jesus had contrasted Himself with the popular nationalistic expectations of a utopian Messianic kingdom gained through routing the Romans, calling instead for personal and collective repentance to avoid the impending catastrophe of divine judgment upon unbelieving Israel along with John. Jesus responded to the question of the Jewish leaders by promising to answer them directly if they would first answer one question from Him, “Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men?” If the religious leaders could not ascertain whether John’s ministry was derived from the authority of God, they would obviously not be able to recognize the authority of God in His ministry. Since they had rejected John’s ministry, refusing to repent and accept the Messiah John pointed to, but were quite cognizant of the popular opinion of the people that John was a prophet of God, the religious leaders fell back on agnosticism claiming to “not know” whether John was of God and refusing to answer Jesus’ question. Jesus therefore refused to answer their question directly, for if they could not admit that John the Baptist acted out of the authority of God, neither would they believe that He acted by the authority of God.

### **Section 197**

#### **Parable of Two Sons - Matt. 21:28-32**

Matthew alone records the parable of the two sons who responded differently to the request of their Father to work in the vineyard. One son, representing the Gentiles, first rejected God, but then repented by changing his mind, in similarity

to the Gentiles' repentance of claiming their own ability and choosing to act by deriving their ability from God in Christ by faith. The other son, representing the Jewish peoples and religion, first pledged his commitment to do whatever the Father wanted (cf. Exod. 19:8; 24:3,7), but then failed to follow-through in his action. Religious people often pay respect to God, but repudiate responsibility and reject obedience by refusal to be receptive to God's work.

The tax-collectors and the prostitutes, who were despised by the Jewish religionists more than any other, and regarded as having no part in their kingdom expectations, would participate in the kingdom of God before them, Jesus declared. These social outcasts believed John the Baptist, repented and were baptized, being receptive to the promised Messiah, whereas the Jewish leaders repudiated John's message and ministry, thus rejecting God and His righteousness in Jesus Christ.

### **Section 198**

#### **Parable of Murderous Tenants - Matt. 21:33-46;**

**Mk. 12:1-12; Lk. 20:9-19**

In another parable of murderous tenants, Jesus illustrated again the rejection of the Messiah by the Jewish people and the reception of the Gentiles. Israel had been entrusted with the tenancy of God's vineyard, even identified as the vineyard of the Lord (Isa. 5:7). When the time of harvest came there was no fruit because they were not receptive to God in faith. God sent His servants, the prophets, to collect the fruit of His vineyard, but they were attacked, beaten and killed (cf. Matt. 5:12; 23:29-39; Acts 7:51-53). God sent His only Son, and they killed Him also. The Jewish religion, indicative of most religion, tended to think that God was in some far away place in a detached deism, judgment was far removed in the future and reserved for others, and the kingdom/vineyard really belonged to them.

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Jesus asked the religious leaders what the owner of the vineyard should do to these scoundrels who had killed all of his representatives. They verbalized their own indictment, like David (II Sam. 12:1-7), when they said, “Destroy the wretches, and allow others to tend the vineyard.” Jesus reminded them of the Psalmist’s prophecy of “the stone which the builders rejected, being made the cornerstone” (Ps. 118:22,23), indicating that they were rejecting the One who would be the cornerstone of God’s kingdom. The vineyard and the promise of the kingdom would be taken away from the Jewish peoples who had rejected His reign, and would be given to the Gentile peoples of the world who would receive Jesus Christ and bring forth the fruit of God’s character. Alluding to the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 8:14,15; cf. I Cor. 1:23; I Pet. 2:8), Jesus proceeded to explain that those who would stumble (the Jews) over this Rock of offense (Jesus Christ) would be broken to pieces and scattered like dust, as indeed the Jewish peoples were destroyed and scattered in the divine judgment of A.D. 70. Finally, the Jewish leaders realized that Jesus was exposing them in these parables, and they sought to do what the parable had pictured, i.e., murder the Son; restrained again only by public opinion.

### **Section 199**

#### **Parable of Wedding Feast - Matt. 22:1-14**

Undaunted by their murderous intent, Jesus told another parable of the wedding feast of the king’s son, which again illustrated the rejection of the Jewish peoples and the reception of those repudiated by Jewish religion. Wanting to celebrate the kingdom of grace in Jesus Christ, God first invited the Jewish peoples, the people of promise, to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). The Jewish people declined, made excuses to avoid God’s invitation, killed His servants, the prophets, and rejected the Son. God’s judgment of wrath came in the destruc-

tion of those peoples and their city in A.D. 70. God's invitation was made available to all men universally, the good and the bad, the religious and the irreligious, who came and filled the kingdom.

One guest, in particular, stood out like a sore thumb at the wedding feast, for he had refused the wedding garment provided by the host and was not "clothed in Christ" (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27). When confronted by the absence of such he was speechless, for there is no explanation for the refusal of God's grace. Divine judgment is the just outcome for those who refuse and reject the complete provision God makes available in Jesus Christ. Many, that is all, are called and invited to God's provision of grace in His Son in the kingdom; but few are willing to receive Christ by faith alone and become chosen vessels of God's grace activity.

### **Section 200**

**Religious Subterfuge - Matt. 22:15-22; Mk. 12:13-17;  
Lk. 20:20-26**

Willing to engage in any guise or treachery to ensnare and entrap Jesus, the Pharisees joined forces with the Herodians, whom they regarded as liberal compromisers. Infiltrating the crowd, they feigned support for Jesus, complimenting Him for being a man of integrity. They were setting Him up for their "loaded question" of whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not. If Jesus said, "No," it would be a violation of Roman law, and they could report Him to the Roman authorities. If Jesus said, "Yes," it would be a violation of the contemporary interpretation of the Jewish Law and the fallacious theocratic concepts that advocated revolution against Rome. The religious leaders thought they had Jesus in a bind that would expose Him either as a rebel or a blasphemer, guilty of treason against Rome or of being a traitor to His own people.

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Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and their attempt to tempt Him in alliance with the tempter. He knew that the underlying perceptions that caused them to ask such a question were the monetary preoccupation and greed of the Jewish peoples and religion, and the galling displeasure of having to give some of their money to the Roman government in the form of taxes. Jesus was quite aware that the people of Palestine were oppressed and exploited more by the Jewish religion than they were by the Romans. So, Jesus asks the religious leaders to show Him a denarius coin which was used for paying taxes. The fact that they had such coins readily jingling in their pocket served as an indictment of their involvement and a tacit admission of the legitimacy of the authority and advantages of the Roman government.

Taking the coin they handed Him, Jesus asked, “Whose likeness and inscription is on this coin?” They replied, “Caesar’s.” Then Jesus said, “If it has Caesar’s picture and name on it, and he issued it, coined it and distributed it, then it belongs to him. Why do you want to hold on to it and hoard it? Does it reveal that you are lovers of money (Luke 16:14; I Tim. 6:10)?”

R.T. France explains that,

“The denarius was the standard silver coin issued by the Roman authorities, and required for the payment of taxes. It carried a portrait of the Emperor. But the Romans were aware of Jewish scruples about ‘graven images’, and bronze coins were minted for use in Palestine which bore no portrait. A strict Jew had no need, therefore, to defile himself by using idolatrous imperial money. The fact that Jesus’ questioners were able to produce a denarius cut the ground from under their feet: they were using Caesar’s money, so they could have no ground for refusing to pay his taxes with it.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus did not advocate political rebellion, revolution or insurrection, even though such an attitude of zealotism was

growing in Palestine, and integrated with their Messianic expectations. Rather, Jesus said, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.” For the Jewish leaders this meant that they should pay their Roman taxes willingly, give up their religious pursuits for power, prestige and possessions, and give themselves wholeheartedly to God. Despite Jesus’ clear statement about paying taxes, He was falsely accused of forbidding the paying of taxes to Caesar at His trial (cf. Lk. 23:2).

### **Section 201**

#### **Religion Divided on Resurrection - Matt. 22:23-33; Mk. 12:18-27; Lk. 20:27-40**

Some Sadducean religionists approached Jesus with an hypothetical test-case about a woman who was married to seven brothers in her earthly life according to Mosaic Law (Gen. 38:8; Deut. 25:5,6), asking whose wife she would be in the alleged resurrection existence. The Sadducees were annihilationists who did not believe in the resurrection or an afterlife. They seem to have been trying to caricature and ridicule belief in resurrection in order to show the absurdity of Pharisaic ideas, or perhaps hoping that Jesus’ answer would enflame and infuriate the Pharisees even more against Jesus.

Jesus’ response to the religionists, both the Sadducees and the Pharisees (and all subsequent varieties), was, “You are in error, not understanding the Scriptures or the power of God.” Religion misinterprets the written revelation of God and is ignorant of the divine dynamic of the living revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

The Pharisaic religionists were just as wrong as the Sadducees. They believed in the future physical resurrection of Jewish bodies which would engage in Jewish relationships of marriage, religion and nation exclusive from other races and with the benefit of materialistic abundance. Heaven was con-

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ceived of as an elitist Jewish ghetto or enclave. Resurrection was but reanimation and resuscitation of physical bodies.

Jesus countered such thinking by explaining that resurrection-bodies are not physical bodies capable of death and marital relationships of “celestial sex.” Resurrection-bodies will have no racial, sexual or nationalistic differentiation. Those who will participate in resurrection are those who are spiritual sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26), sons of resurrection by their identification with the One who is Resurrection and Life (John 11:25). By their ontological spiritual union with the One who is Life (John 14:6), Christians will participate in the perpetuity of His eternal life and immortality (cf. I Tim. 6:16; II Tim. 1:10), having resurrected-bodies which are heavenly (I Cor. 15:40), eternal (II Cor. 5:1), glorified (Phil. 3:21) and spiritual (I Cor. 15:44), like angels. Directing their attention to the self-identification of God to Moses at the burning bush, Jesus reminded the religionists that God is the eternally present-tense “I AM” (Exod. 3:16), the living reality of which cannot die. Resurrection is inherent in the Being of the Living God, and those who are spiritually united with the ontological essence of God through Jesus Christ will participate in the perpetuity of His life and resurrection. Resurrection is far more than the epistemological doctrinal tenet that religion often makes of it, as evidenced by the error of both Sadducean annihilationism and Pharisaic reanimation of the physical.

### Section 202

#### Law Fulfilled in Love - Matt. 22:34-40; Mk. 12:28-34

With relentless religious fervor, another of the scribal Pharisees ventured to tempt Jesus with a question about the Jewish Law, asking, “What commandment is foremost and of highest priority?” Religious rigorists and legalists are constantly concerned and preoccupied with the intricacies and priorities of the Law. Jesus quoted the familiar *Shema* that states that

man is to love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength (Deut. 6:4,5), following that with the commandment of loving one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18). These love commandments are the greatest of the commandments and the whole of the message of the Law and the prophets is inherent within them, for the character of God is love (I John 4:8,16). Following Jesus' pronouncement of the new commandment of loving others as He loved us (John 13:34), Paul would later write that "love is the fulfillment of the Law" (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14).

The Jewish scribe affirmed Jesus' answer about love in the Law, but added his awareness that such love was more valuable before God than religious offerings and sacrifices (I Sam. 15:22; Ps. 40:6-8; 51:16,17; Isa. 1:11-15; Mic. 6:6-8). When an individual begins to recognize the vanity and impediment of religious ritual, rules and regulations, then he is open to God's grace-activity, and not far from accepting the kingdom of God in Christ, able to differentiate between religion and Christianity.

### **Section 203**

**Messiah: Human and Divine -Matt. 22:41-46;**

**Mk. 12:35-37; Lk. 20:41-44**

Jesus posed a question to the Pharisaic scribes, asking who the Messiah was to be the son of within their Messianic expectations. He knew that they expected the Messiah to be the "son of David," a Davidic descendant who would establish the kingdom forever (II Sam. 7:12,16). A problem was posed for their preconceived religious limitations of monotheism when Jesus asked why David then referred to the Messiah as "Lord" within the Psalm that he wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. "The Lord (God the Father) said unto my Lord (the Messiah), 'Sit on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet'" (Ps. 110:1), and this was regarded by the Jews as a prophecy of Messianic victory and triumph. The question

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is: If the Messiah is David's divine "Lord," how is He David's son?

Such a question produced an inscrutable quandary for Jewish thinking, and they were unable to answer because religion is limited by human logic and wisdom to predetermined parameters of plausibility. They were unable to conceive of the Messiah being both human and divine as a God-man. Within the kingdom thinking of Christianity all of the doctrinal details do not have to be figured out with epistemological human reason, but we can be content with the apparent antinomies of divine dialectic, viewing Jesus as both eternal Deity as well as humanity from the royal lineage of Davidic descendancy, the God-man.

### **Section 204**

**Burdensome Religion - Matt. 23:1-12; Mk. 12:38-40;  
Lk. 20:45-47**

In an extended and explicit exposure of the Pharisaic religion of Judaism, Jesus denounced their hypocrisy and warned the people to beware of the scribal rule-setters who did not understand the kingdom and had rejected the Messiah. They may have occupied the legal place of Moses, and insofar as they stayed with the Law they were to be heeded, but they did not practice what they preached, imposing deeds and observances on others which they avoided. Pharisaic religionists and their perpetual ilk do not understand the provisional grace of God in Jesus Christ and inevitably place heavy burdens of religious performance on others which they do not perform (cf. Lk. 11:46). In addition, such religionists have a vain pride in visible and ostentatious theatrics, carrying enlarged Bible verse boxes, wearing religious robes and vestments, and saying pious prayers conspicuously in public (cf. Matt. 6:5). Such religion fosters personality-cults wherein mere men are esteemed and admired with special admiration and veneration, even assum-

ing pretentious honorary titles which should refer to God alone. God alone is Father and Reverend. Jesus alone is the Master and Leader. The Holy Spirit alone is Teacher and Director. When religious men accept such self-important titles of deity, they rob God of the honor, worth and esteem due only to Him. Those who would be great in the kingdom of God must have a servant-heart for others, rather than seeking veneration for themselves. Self-exaltation will cause God to bring religious leaders down, whereas humility and lowliness will lead to the exaltation of God's grace.

### **Section 205**

#### **Denunciation of Religion - Matt. 23:13-39**

Jesus pronounced a series of seven woes upon the religious leaders for various religious activities.

(1) Instead of showing people to the Door (John 10:9) and the Way (John 14:6) of the kingdom in Christ, whereby He might reign as King in their lives, religious leaders block and debar people from entering into the kingdom (Lk. 11:52), slamming the door in their face, so they can build religious kingdoms for themselves.

(2) Whereas the kingdom of God allows all believers to become a functional part of the Body of Christ, the religious leaders proselytize people to join and belong as a member of their religious group, which Jesus describes as becoming a "son of hell."

(3) Within the kingdom, truthfulness and honesty are derived from the One who is Truth (John 14:6), without the need for all the intricacies of verification via oath-swearing that are often developed in religion to cover up their falsehood (cf. Matt. 5:33-35).

(4) When the King reigns in the hearts of Christian people, the givingness of God's character will be evidenced in justice, mercy and faithfulness. The blind guides of religion major in

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the minors of insignificant and fallacious interpretations of tithing (Lk. 11:42), which Jesus illustrates with the hyperbole of “straining out gnats and swallowing camels.”

(5) God desires to cleanse people from sin by His Son, Jesus Christ, and by His indwelling presence in the Christian to manifest the purity of His character in their behavior. Religion attempts to clean-up the outside of the container by ceremonialism and behavior modification, but inside they remain full of dishonesty, greed and self-indulgence (cf. Mk. 7:4; Lk. 11:39).

(6) The life of God in Christ is to be lived out in the Christian in a beautiful expression of purity and righteousness. Religion, on the other hand, is spiritually dead within, full of putrefaction instead of purification. They are like whitewashed gravestones covering up their hypocrisy and diabolic lawlessness (cf. Lk. 11:44).

(7) Kingdom participants will appreciate the heritage of those who preceded them. Religion hypocritically builds tombs and monuments to venerate and commemorate prior prophets (cf. Lk. 11:47), when it was their religious predecessors who killed the men of God, and they are still engaging in the same acts of rejecting what God is doing.

In a scathing exposure Jesus called the religious leaders a bunch of low-down snakes (cf. Matt. 3:7; 12:34), identifying them with the serpent of old (Gen. 3:1-4), and indicated that they would be unable to avoid the judgment of hell. Religion is derived from the devil, and the destination of those participating in religion is hell (cf. Rev. 17,18).

Specifically to that generation (cf. Matt. 11:16; 12:39-45; 16:4; 17:17; 24:34) of Jewish religionists in the middle of the first century, Jesus foretold that they would persecute, beat and murder Christian prophets (cf. Acts 7:54-60), which they did. For such shedding of blood, they were judged of God in A.D. 70, when their national house of Israel and their temple-house of worship in Jerusalem were left desolate (cf. Jere. 12:7; 22:5).

F.D. Bruner remarks,

“The desolation of the temple, the devastation of the holy city, and the diaspora of the people in 70 A.D. (and again, finally, in 135) were God’s great No to Pharisaic religion.”<sup>2</sup>

“Jesus’ verdict of ‘desolate’ was finally concretized in history by the military desolation of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.”<sup>3</sup>

This did not mean that Jesus did not still have loving concern and compassion for the Jewish people. He lamented that the people identified by their central city of Jerusalem should have killed God’s prophets, but He still wished He could gather them under His wings as a hen does her chicks to protect them from disaster (cf. Lk. 13:34,35). They refused such, though, by their persistent unbelief and rejection of God’s Messiah. Only in God’s final judgment will they see and recognize that Jesus was indeed the blessed Messiah who came in the name of the Lord (cf. Ps. 118:26).

### **Section 206**

#### **Giving One’s Life - Mk. 12:41-44; Lk. 21:1-4**

Jesus observed the religious people casting in their contributions in the temple treasury. He was aware that religion exploits people’s sense of devotion, creating in them a sense of obligation to contribute, which serves religion’s own need for preservation and propagation. Many of the rich were contributing much, perhaps thinking that they could buy favors with God.

A poor widow cast in two small coins called “mites.” Jesus noted to His disciples that this woman had given more than all the others, for the rich had given out of the superfluity of their surplus, just skimming a little cream off the top, whereas the widow had given what was necessary for her livelihood. The

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widow was willing to give her whole life to God, which is the prerequisite of genuine Christian giving (cf. II Cor. 8:5).

## Chapter Twelve

# Final Instructions to the Disciples

Knowing that the “countdown” was on, and that it was only a matter of days before He would be crucified by the collaboration of the Jews and the Romans, Jesus’ restricted His ministry to the multitudes in Jerusalem in order to focus His time and attention on the final instructions that He wanted to give to His disciples.

### Section 207

#### **Prepare for Judgment - Matt. 24:1,2; Mk. 13:1,2; Lk. 21:5,6**

The extended preparatory statements of Jesus in Matthew chapters twenty-four and twenty-five have been referred to as “the little apocalypse,” and regarded as an amalgam of Jesus’ teaching due to segmented interpretations. They can, and should, be taken as sequentially intact, but there is similar movement in this passage, as in the Revelation, from reference to God’s judgment of the situation presenting itself at that particular time of historic statement and writing, to the ultimate and conclusive judgment of God.

In like manner, there is the similar use of figurative language in the Apocalypse and Jesus’ final warning to the disciples. Jesus had been speaking in metaphorical language in His parables and in other allusions to His kingdom, and continues to do so in these statements. It is impossible to interpret Matthew 24 and 25 without recognizing figurative language.

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Through the centuries Christians have arrived at differing interpretations of these verses, not only due to various preconceived theological and eschatological grids, but also based on which portions of this passage they choose to interpret directly or literally, and which portions they choose to interpret figuratively or metaphorically.

Different interpretive approaches develop divergent timelines of chronology for interpretation. For example, the preterist interpretation views all of Matthew 24 fulfilled in the past at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The arbitrary and subjective determinations of a segmented interpretation posit alternative references both to A.D. 70 and the end of time throughout the passage. The interpretive method sometimes called “prophetic perspective” fails to make a determination, allowing a double *entendre* wherein the same words can refer to both the events of A.D. 70 and the second coming of Jesus or the final judgment at the end of time, with the former a prefiguring or foreshadowing of the future, though sometimes positing primary or secondary reference to one or the other. The futurist method interprets the entire passage to refer to the *parousia* of Christ at the end of time. It must be questioned whether all of these event-oriented interpretations fail to recognize the intent of Jesus’ words.

Having been warned of the judgment of God upon the Jewish peoples which would not leave one stone upon another (Lk. 19:44), and perhaps remembering Jesus’ words about the destruction of the temple (John 2:13-22), the disciples were nonplused to think that the magnificent structures of the temple and the city of Jerusalem which they were observing would be laid desolate (Matt. 23:38). The Jerusalem buildings were an architectural marvel that had been decades in construction. The Babylonian Talmud stated that “he that never saw the temple of Herod never saw a fine building.” Still caught up in religious tangibility of structures and misunderstanding God’s spiritual objectives, the disciples could not see why all of Jerusalem had

## Final Instructions to the Disciples

to be destroyed, but Jesus reiterated that “it would all be torn down, with not one stone left upon another.” Such was fulfilled a few decades later, as Robert Stein explains that,

“doubtless most would agree that the horrors of A.D. 70 when the Roman armies under Titus destroyed Jerusalem fulfilled these words. The destruction was so massive and extensive that the Tyropoeon Valley simply disappeared as it was filled in with the rubble of the city, the temple, and the temple mount. Yet even today one can see in Jerusalem at the Wailing Wall of the temple mount some of the very courses of Herodian foundation stones to which Jesus referred. Some stones even today remain upon each other!”<sup>1</sup>

“The prophecy’s meaning was nevertheless clearly fulfilled in the destruction that befell Jerusalem in 70 A.D.”<sup>2</sup>

Josephus indicated that “Titus ordered the soldiers to dig up the foundation, both of all the city and the temple.”<sup>3</sup> Though a few stones remain to this day, Jesus was speaking figuratively of the utter and total destruction of Jerusalem, which certainly did occur. Beyond that there may have been a broader allusion to God’s ultimate tearing down of all religion and its structures, physical, material and organizational. Religion always seems to centralize in structures, whereas Christianity is Christocentric.

### **Section 208**

#### **Labor Pains - Matt. 24:3-8; Mk. 13:3-8; Lk. 21:7-11**

Alarmed at Jesus’ prophecies, the disciples inquired when these things, i.e., the killing of Christian prophets (Matt. 23:34), the desolation of the Jewish house (Matt. 23:38), and the razing of all temple stones (24:2) would occur. They also asked what would be the signs or signals of Jesus’ coming in judgment (cf. Matt. 10:23; 16:27,28; Lk. 12:35-40; 17:30; 18:8; Jn. 21:22), and the end of the age and era of Jewish religion.

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Jesus explained that many false Messiahs, full of false religious promises, would arise, as can be Biblically attested (cf. Acts 5:36; 8:9,10). “Wars and rumors of wars” is verified by Josephus’ report of “sedition and civil war throughout Judea.”<sup>4</sup> The end of the Jewish age and religion would still not have occurred in the destruction of Jerusalem, though. There would be insurrections of nation against nations and kingdom against kingdom, as verified by the historians of that time. Famines were widespread in the Mediterranean area and earthquakes occurred in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Samos, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colossae, Rome and Pompeii. These would be but the beginning of the labor pains for the grave crisis that would come upon the Jewish peoples.

### **Section 209**

#### **Tribulation - Matt. 24:9-14; Mk. 13:9-13; Lk. 21:12-19**

Continuing His explanation of what was soon to happen, Jesus told the disciples that Christians would be delivered to tribulation (cf. Jn. 16:33), especially by religion which is so destructive and murderous in seeking to annihilate its opponents and adversaries (cf. Acts 4:5; 7:59; 8:1; 18:12). Peoples of many nations would hate Christians because of their identification with the name of Jesus (cf. Matt. 10:22). Religious false prophets would flourish (cf. II Cor. 11:13-15; II Tim. 2:17,18). Lawlessness and anarchy would set in as Jewish zealotism increased. The first love (Rev. 2:4) of many Christians would grow cold as they were drawn away by religion and succumbed to the social pressures that would even cause them to hate and betray fellow-Christians. To those Christians who endured (Matt. 10:22) to the end of the Jewish age, Jesus promised that they would be made safe to function as intended. The gospel would be preached to the whole of the known world (cf. Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:6,23), and then the end of the prototypical Jewish

era would come to pass in the destruction of the Palestinian peoples and the Jewish religion.

### **Section 210**

#### **Abomination of Desolation - Matt. 24:15-28; Mk. 13:14-23; Lk. 21:20-24**

Becoming more specific, Jesus explained that when they saw the “abomination of desolation” referred to by Daniel (cf. Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:1), standing in the Jerusalem temple, those in Judea should flee to the mountains. The Roman army, representing idolatrous emperor worship, did indeed desecrate and destroy the Jewish temple. Not hindered by materialism, social relationships, or Sabbatarianism, most of the Christians of Judea escaped to Pella across the Jordan in the region of the Decapolis. Great tribulation and calamity then came upon the Jews of Jerusalem in the form of rape, murder, starvation, etc. Josephus laments that

“Our city was advanced to the highest felicity, and was thrust down again to the extremest misery; for if the misfortunes of all, from the beginning of the world, were compared with those of the Jews, they would appear much inferior upon the comparison.”<sup>5</sup>

“No other city ever suffered such things, as no other generation from the beginning of the world was ever more fruitful of wickedness.”<sup>6</sup>

The Roman siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 lasted five months, and were it not for God’s providential care of the Christian “elect” (cf. Matt. 24:22,24,31), the Romans would have continued to pursue to their death even the Christians. Some of the Christian elect were indeed misled and deceived by religious impostors claiming to be prophets and the Messiah, but Jesus noted that His coming would be as obvious as the lightning

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which reveals in all directions (cf. Lk. 17:23). His coming in judgment would be as evident as vultures circling round the rotten carcass of Jewish religion.

### **Section 211**

#### **Cosmic Catastrophe - Matt. 24:29-31; Mk. 13:24-27; Lk. 21:25-28**

Jesus figuratively explained that immediately after the tribulation promised to Christians prior to the judgment of A.D. 70 (cf. Isa. 13:10; 24:23; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Zeph. 1:15; Rev. 6:12; 8:12), “the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.” According to C.E.B. Cranfield, “this is picture-language which we must not attempt to compress into a literal interpretation.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus was referring to an astronomical disruption and dissolution of the present order of things, a cosmic catastrophe to the known order of the Jewish world. Those with spiritual vision would see the Son of Man (cf. Dan. 7:13), the Messiah, coming before God the Father in the heavenly realm to vindicate and exalt God’s power, authority and glory (cf. Matt. 16:27). All the tribes of Israel on earth would mourn (cf. Zech 12:10-14) that Jerusalem had been trodden down by Roman Gentiles, and that their Judaic religion had been destroyed. But God would send forth Christian messengers and missionaries to trumpet (cf. Isa. 27:13; Zech. 9:14; Rev. 8:2; 11:15), broadcast and announce the kingdom (cf. Isa. 61:1-3), gathering together the true Israel (Rom.; Gal. 6:15), the elect People of God (I Pet. 2:10), from all nations and peoples, assembled and united to receive the promises of God in Jesus Christ. Redemption draws near (Lk. 21:28) as the old covenant priesthood and sacrifices come to an end, and mankind is restored, both individually and collectively, in Jesus Christ.

### **Section 212**

#### **Watchfulness - Matt. 24:32-44; Mk. 13:28-37; Lk. 21:29-36**

The imminence of these climactic events was parabolically illustrated by a fig tree, whereupon the spring growth evidences that summer is near. When the perilous times and persecution come, the disciples should recognize that the Messianic judgment was near. Speaking directly to the disciples, Jesus clarified their question of timing by explicitly stating that “this generation will not pass away until these things take place” (cf. Matt. 10:23; 11:16; 12:41,42,45; 23:36). You can count on it because God is as good as His word, and neither God nor His words will pass away (cf. Matt. 5:18) or prove false.

Jesus inculcated watchfulness for these events indicating that no man knew the exact day or hour of their occurrence. Jesus, the Son of Man, would come in judgment when people were unconcerned about the situation, preoccupied with making a living, and refusing to recognize the peril, just like in the days of Noah (cf. Lk. 17:26,27). In the midst of ordinary activities they would be taken by surprise when the Messianic Judge came suddenly and unannounced like a thief. Thus Christians were cautioned to be alert and watchful, not falling into careless neglect and inattention like the parabolic doorkeeper (Mk. 13:33-37).

### **Section 213**

#### **Parable of Faithful/Unfaithful Slave - Matt. 24:45-51**

In the midst of His discourse Jesus seems to have transitioned from reference to the particular response and rejection of the Jewish religion and their judgment in A.D. 70, to the general response of religion and the conclusive judgment of God upon all religious rejection of God’s activity in Christ. Judgment on Jerusalem was thus a precursor or type to the judgment of God on all religion. It is difficult to ascertain where this tran-

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sition begins in the discourse. Some would identify Matt. 24:36 as the point of transition, others would select verse 42 or 45, or the chapter break between chapters 24 and 25. In this study we will place the transition point at vs. 45, noting that the transition is not so much a turn from a first century event to a future event, i.e., the fall of Jerusalem to the coming *Parousia*, as it is a transition from a specified judgment on Jewish religion to a generalized judgment on all religion.

In the parable of the faithful/unfaithful slave (cf. Lk. 12:42-46), Jesus pointed out that Christians are to be faithful, hopeful and expectant in the interim before He comes in judgment, and they are to be engaged in mutual nurturing and support of one another. They become evil slaves when they revert to religion which is unconcerned with Jesus' coming, abusive to others, and intoxicated with false factors of success. Such unfaithful religious hypocrites (cf. Matt. 23:13,14,15,23,25,27,28,29) will be surprised at Jesus' coming, judged by Christ, and assigned to hell.

### Section 214

#### Parable of Ten Virgins - Matt. 25:1-13

Continuing His parabolic explanation of the necessity of preparedness and readiness, Jesus told the parable of the ten virgins. Five of the virgins were wise with the wisdom of Christ (I Cor. 1:24,30), and prepared for the unexpected. Recognizing that faith is not presumption, nor passivistic quietism, they took extra oil. The five foolish virgins represent religious activity which so often calculates the odds and attempts to get by with as little as possible. When the Bridegroom came later than expected at the dawn of a new day, the foolish and faithless religionists were unprepared, had to go buy additional oil, and were shut out of the wedding feast. Meanwhile those prepared with the wisdom of faith were participating in the celebration of grace in the kingdom. When the five foolish virgins

returned, they begged, “Lord, Lord, open up,” and Jesus seems to say, “If I was your Lord, you would have relied on My wisdom and been prepared. I do not know you, because you never knew Me by a faithful, dependent and receptive development of an intimate relationship.” Not knowing the day or hour of Christ’s coming in judgment, Christians are to be on the alert, prepared to participate in the consummation of Christ’s activity by faithful reception of the finished work of Christ made available in the first advent.

### **Section 215**

#### **Parable of Talents - Matt. 25:14-30**

The parable of the talents has many similarities to the parable of investment (Lk. 19:12-27). Jesus was about to go on a journey through death, resurrection, ascension, etc. He entrusts all that He has, Himself, to His servants in grace. Two of His servants are receptive to the availability of God’s grace activity and allow His grace to enlarge and expand, grow and multiply through their endeavors. As good and faithful servants who have functioned as God intended, they enjoy the joy (*chara*) of participating in God’s grace (*charis*), available to even greater expansion of such grace through their lives. Another servant is like the religionists who view God as an exacting and tyrannical bookkeeper, living in fearful expectation of a divine audit. They will not even allow for a minimal operation of grace, attempting instead to box and bundle God’s activity in secure epistemological doctrines and creeds, or in moral and ritual activities. All they can do is dig up the archaeological remnants of historical and theological tenets. Such religious hoarders who cover up God’s grace will have to face the judgment of Christ’s coming and the consequences of hell.

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### Section 216

#### **Ultimate Judgment -Matt. 25:31-46**

Indeed, there will be an ultimate and determinative judgment when the Shepherd/King in the line of David, the Messianic Son of Man, comes in the triumph of His glory. All nations and peoples will be gathered before Him and separated as sheep or goats, to the right or to the left, judged already by their belief or unbelief (John 3:16-21). The sheep represent Christians who were receptive to the grace of God in Jesus, allowing divine compassion to be expressed to people in need, the lowly, the poor, the have-nots, those who recognize they do not have what it takes. Unaware of what God has done through them, they participate in the blessings of God (cf. Eph. 1:3), inheriting the kingdom and eternal life in perpetuity of union with the One who is King and Life. The goats, on the other hand, represent religionists who establish their own criteria of people's acceptability based on requirements and reciprocation. The poor, the lowly, the untaught, the unsuccessful do not usually measure up to their rules and regulations. Religionists always think that they will get the blessings of God, while others will get the cursings and judgment of God. Having kept records of all their self-righteousness, they will be aghast that they should be accursed and separated from God in eternal punishment and fire. In perpetuity of their spiritual connection with Satan, they will go to the place prepared and reserved for the devil and his messenger/agents.

### Section 217

#### **Religion Conspires Against Jesus - Matt. 26:1-5;**

**Mk. 14:1,2; Lk. 22:1,2**

Two days prior to the Passover, Jesus informed His disciples that He was going to be delivered up by the religious authorities in order to be crucified. At that very time the chief

priests and the leaders of the Jewish Sanhedrin were assembling in the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas, to plot the death of Jesus. In a cunning conspiracy of religious intolerance and persecution, they planned the details of their dastardly deed, careful to choose their timing in order to avoid a backlash of public opinion among their religious adherents.

### **Section 218**

**Mary's Memorial Act of Worship - Matt. 26:6-13;**

**Mk. 14:3-9; Jn. 12:2-8**

While dining in the evening at the home of Simon, the former leper, in Bethany, along with Lazarus, Mary and Martha, Mary took a flask of expensive perfume and poured it over His head and feet, wiping His feet with her hair. The cost of the gift and the act of adoration were fit for a king. John identifies Judas Iscariot as the disciple who reacted most vehemently against this act of adoration, protesting on the pretense that the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor. The other disciples joined him in criticism. Judas was not really concerned about the poor, though; his materialistic concern belied the fact that he was the treasurer of the band of disciples and was embezzling funds. Many have been the religious frauds who have posed a concern for the poor while siphoning the funds for themselves.

Jesus explained that Mary's action was a genuinely good work of adoration and worship expressed in recognition of His true identity while He was still physically alive. The poor are always present in every society during every age, and the compassion of Christ will minister to them, but the physical Messiah would not always be present to be ministered unto. Mary's action could be viewed as a preparatory prefiguring of Jesus' anointing with spices for burial, in which case her act of worship would forever be a memorial of her recognition of the Messiah and the manner of His spiritual victory through death.

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### **Section 219**

#### **Judas Sells Out - Matt. 26:14-16; Mk. 14:10,11; Lk. 22:3-6**

Feeling the rebuke of his mercenary motives, and recognizing that Jesus was never going to be the conquering Messiah-King that he had zealously sought, Judas submitted to the diabolic temptation to be the personified pawn of Satan to betray Jesus unto the religious authorities. Negotiating a payment of thirty pieces of silver in fulfillment of Zechariah 11:12, Judas conspired to treacherously deliver Jesus into the hands of the religionists at a time when the crowds were not present to react in tumult. Countless are the times religion has conspired with a willing dupe to betray the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Section 220**

#### **Preparation for Passover - Matt. 26:17-19; Mk. 14:12-16; Lk. 22:7-13**

On the first day of unleavened bread during the Jewish Passover observance a lamb was to be sacrificed in the temple to commemorate the lamb slain by each Israelite family in Egypt allowing for the “passover” of the death angel (Exod. 12). Later, in the evening, portions of the slain animal would be served, along with unleavened bread and wine, in the Passover meal.

Aware of the treachery of Judas to direct the authorities to Him, Jesus asked Peter and John to quietly make preparation for the Passover meal. In somewhat clandestine manner the two disciples encountered the social unconventionality of a male person carrying a pitcher, and they followed him to his house, requesting to use his guest-room. The unidentified man showed them a large upper room with adequate furnishing for such a meal. Peter and John probably arranged for the sacrifice of the lamb at the temple, purchased the necessary food items, and barbecued the meat. They then returned to Bethany to advise

Jesus and the other disciples of the completed preparations, but Judas did not know where the feast would be observed in order to advise the authorities.

### **Section 221**

**Disputational Disciples - Matt. 26:20; Mk. 14:17;  
Lk. 22:14-16, 24-30**

Entering into Jerusalem at dusk without fanfare, Jesus and the twelve disciples went to the upper room that had been prepared. Though this was a most important Jewish religious observance, the disciples evidenced their selfish fleshly tendencies by contending for positions closest to Jesus to indicate personal preference and honor. Religion cannot remedy the corrupt character of the selfish and sinful man.

Jesus noted the solemnity of the occasion by expressing His personal deep-seated desire to eat the Passover meal with them before He suffered and died, knowing that He would serve as the sacrificial Paschal lamb allowing for the spiritual exodus of God's People from sin and death to life prior to His celebrating the fulfillment of the Passover meal again with the disciples within the kingdom in the form of the Lord's Supper.

Within that Christian kingdom the egocentric aspirations for placement, position and prestige would be replaced by Christ's character of a servant-heart (cf. Matt. 20:26-28; Mk. 10:43-45). The way to lead others in the kingdom is to serve others. Though the guest is socially accounted as greater than the servant of the household, Jesus explained that He was present as a servant, having "emptied Himself, taken the form of a bond-servant" who would "humble Himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7,8).

Despite their residue of Jewish nationalistic and religious conceptions of the kingdom, Jesus again assured the disciples that they would participate in His kingdom, enjoying the intimacy of table-fellowship with Him and the memorial celebra-

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tion of God's great deliverance of His People. Along with Him the disciples would sit on thrones (cf. Matt. 19:38) which were not physical or religious, but representative of the victorious reign of Christ as Lord in the spiritual kingdom of Christianity. By their submitted receptivity of Christ's Lordship they would judge the unbelief of Judaic Israel, who though they had the privileged heritage of God's activity in their midst, rejected the Messiah.

### **Section 222**

#### **Serving by Washing - John 13:1-20**

Seeking to illustrate that the character of the kingdom was antithetical to all forms of pride and egocentricity, even those subtle forms of religious and spiritual pride, Jesus acted out His message of how divine love humbly serves others. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matt. 20:28), and was willing to perform the function reserved for the lowest servant, that of washing the guests' feet.

Fully cognizant of the betrayal plot of Judas (cf. Matt. 18:7; Lk. 22:22; Jn. 6:70), Jesus washed his feet in love, knowing that God's objective could not be thwarted.

It was Peter who reacted to the perceived incongruity of the Messiah functioning as the lowest slave washing people's feet. In mock humility he refused to submit to Jesus' washing of his feet, failing to understand that Jesus was symbolically and parabolically acting out the humiliation of sacrificial serving of others which He would do even unto death, allowing for the spiritual "washing away of sins" (Acts 22:16) and the "washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). Like Peter, much of religion still fails to understand that God's exaltation comes via man's humiliation, rather than in arrogant and aggressive action. The attitude of Christ that led Him to the cross is to be perpetuated in Christians (cf. Phil. 2:5) as the living Lord Jesus continues to serve others through us.

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In response to Jesus' explanation of the essentiality of spiritual cleansing by way of humiliating servanthood, Peter impulsively went to the opposite extreme of requesting a complete physical bath, having failed to recognize the spiritual implications of Jesus' comments. Jesus patiently pointed out that Peter and the other disciples were clean, physically and spiritually, with the exception of one in their midst who was not receptive to spiritual cleansing, namely Judas.

The betrayal of Judas would fulfill the statement of the psalmist David about a close friend who enjoyed the intimacy of table-fellowship with him and then kicked him in the face (Ps. 41:9). Wanting to avoid panic among the disciples when the betrayal occurred, Jesus told the disciples beforehand what was going to happen so that they would recognize that He was the divine Messiah, the I AM of Deity, the receptivity of Whom is the receptivity of God.

### **Section 223**

**Betrayer Identified and Dismissed - Matt. 26:21-25;  
Mk. 14:18-21; Lk. 22:21-23; Jn. 13:21-30**

“A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3), Jesus was deeply wounded by Judas' betrayal of Him. He was aware that this was part of God's determined plan (cf. Acts 2:23; 4:28) for man's redemption and restoration, but nevertheless Judas was responsible for exercising his freedom of choice to engage in the act of betrayal for which he would be judged.

The other disciples were astonished at the announcement of personal betrayal, anxiously evaluating and examining themselves whether they were capable of such. Jesus indicated that indeed someone who was enjoying table-fellowship on that occasion would be the betrayer.

Peter in some manner requested John, who was apparently closer to Jesus at the table, to ascertain from Jesus some inside information about who it was that Jesus was referring to as the

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betrayer. Jesus told John that the betrayer would be the one whom He would honor with a courtesy “toast,” whereupon He dipped the bread and gave it to Judas.

The die was cast! Judas became the functional pawn possessed by Satan, and was anxious to depart. Jesus seems to say to him, “You’re dismissed. Discharge your demonic duty. Don’t delay!” The other disciples did not understand these instructions to Judas, thinking that Jesus had made other arrangements for some activity for Judas. When he departed, Judas apparently went straight to the Jewish religious authorities to inform them of Jesus’ location.

### **Section 224**

#### **A New Commandment - Jn. 13:31-38**

At Judas’ departure, the events were set in motion so that the Son of Man would be glorified by the ultimate humiliation of death by crucifixion and the resurrection of life out of death in order to restore divine life to mankind and allow deity to function within humanity to manifest the all-glorious character of God in man’s behavior to the glory of God. Religion seems to inevitably have a misunderstanding of what is glorifying to God.

Jesus began to express His farewell to the remaining disciples, indicating that the time was short. In similarity to what He had earlier said to the Jewish religionists (Jn. 7:33,34; 8:21), Jesus told the disciples that they would seek His physical presence but would be unable to find Him. The journey He had to take, they could not take with Him, i.e., to the cross.

Since the totality of His life and action were the expression of God’s love, Jesus gave the disciples a new commandment to “love one another as I have loved you.” This was not an inculcation to imitate the example of Jesus’ love in a self-generated love that “loves like Jesus loved.” Religion has failed to understand the dynamic of God’s love in the Christian, “poured

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out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5) and expressed as the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22). Only when God’s divine love is expressed in our behavior do we evidence that we are disciples of Christ. The evidence of Christian discipleship is not in charismatic experiences, orthodox doctrinal positions, submission to various rites and rituals of the church, consistent ethical proprieties, or conformity to ecclesiastical expectation, but only when the character of God’s love (I Jn. 4:8,16) is expressed in Christians.

### **Section 225**

**Arrogant Self-resolve - Matt. 26:31-35; Mk. 14:27-31;  
Lk. 22:31-34**

Explaining that His departure would leave them alarmed and offended, Jesus indicated that it would be a fulfillment of Zechariah 13:7: “Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” He promised them that after He was resurrected He would precede them into Galilee again.

To Simon Peter specifically, Jesus revealed that Satan had requested the opportunity to sift him like wheat in temptation, but He had prayed that his faith would not fail, and that he would strengthen others after his lapse. Peter wanted to know where Jesus was going. “You cannot go where I am going now, Peter,” Jesus replied, “but later you will take such a journey” to your own crucifixion. Impatient and persistent, Peter asked, “Why can I not go now? Even if all the other disciples fail you, I will do anything for you regardless of the danger. I am willing to die for You.” Religion still persists in fallaciously thinking that such dedication and commitment is faith, when in reality it is nothing but proud self-resolve. Such pride goes before a fall (cf. Prov. 16:18; I Cor. 10:12), as it did with Peter. Jesus told Peter that by 3:00 A.M. the next morning, when the rooster crowed, he would already have denied Him three times.

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### **Section 226**

#### **Difficult Witness - Lk. 22:35-38**

Jesus went on to tell the eleven disciples that in contrast to the ease of ministry in Galilee (Lk. 10:1-9), they should now expect the worst, taking with them adequate baggage, clothing and even a sword for self-defense if they were attacked, a common occurrence among travelers in those days. Jesus would be treated violently as a criminal, in fulfillment of Isa. 53:12, and the disciples would likewise suffer such adverse treatment. Failing to understand Jesus' intent, the disciples were ludicrously ready to go on the offense and do battle with the two swords they located among them. "That's enough of such militaristic mind-set," Jesus seems to say. Though Jesus never advocated violence and aggression, much of religion throughout human history has engaged in militaristic conquest and advancement under the banner of an holy war, a just war, or revolution against oppressors. The kingdom that Jesus came to bring in His spiritual reign in Christian lives cannot be established or advanced by armed force.

### **Section 227**

#### **A New Memorial Meal - Matt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-25; Lk. 22:17-20; I Cor. 11:2-26**

In the midst of the Passover meal, which commemorated the deliverance of Israel from Egypt in the Exodus, Jesus instituted a new memorial meal that celebrated God's greater deliverance of His People in an exodus from spiritual death to life. The Passover bread which had symbolized "the bread of affliction" (Deut. 16:3), was now to symbolize the affliction of Jesus' body in death. The Passover wine which had represented the shed blood of the Passover lamb would now represent the shed blood of the Messianic Passover Lamb. It would now be a memorial of the new covenant arrangement between God and

man, wherein the Son of God has taken the death consequences of man's sin in order to deliver man from the death sentence and restore God's life to man. Such a new covenant had been promised by the prophets (Jere. 31:31-34; 32:40; Ezek. 37:26; II Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-12; 10:16,17), and was enacted in the shedding of blood in Christ's death. How regrettable that religion has allowed the memorial meal of the Lord's Supper to become a ritualized rite, sometimes regarded to have saving significance, sacramentally literalizing Jesus' words in conceptions of transubstantiation or consubstantiation. Jesus intended the new covenant community of the kingdom to remember Him in the memorial meal which is referred to as the "Lord's Supper." He indicated to the disciples at that initial transformed Passover meal that the next occasion of His celebrating with them at the table would be in the context of the kingdom after His death and resurrection, as indeed He did (Lk. 24:35; Acts 10:41).

### **Section 228**

#### **Not Left Alone - John 14:1-31**

While still in the upper room, Jesus attempted to settle the unsettled hearts of the disciples after the foreboding news of His departure unto death. Since the antidote to fear is faith, they were encouraged to believe in Him, trust Him, and be receptive to all that He is in Himself.

In returning to God's presence Jesus was not going to a physical building or a localized space/time place (cf. Isa. 66:1,2; Acts 7:49). The habitation of God has room enough for all who desire to settle in and be secure in Him. "I have not misled you," Jesus told the disciples. "You are not going to miss out." By going through death, burial, resurrection, ascension and the Pentecostal outpouring, Jesus prepared a place "near to the heart of God" for those who would identify with Him and be reconciled to God. Religion is not content with the

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abstraction of dwelling in the spiritual presence of God, and is often preoccupied with physical places, even conceiving of heaven in mercenary and self-serving expectations of tangibilized “mansions.”

“We will not be separated, but will remain spiritually united,” Jesus promised His disciples. “I will come again in Spirit form (cf. vss. 18, 23, 28) at Pentecost, to receive you as joint-heirs with Myself in the kingdom.” “The way that I must take to get there, you already know,” Jesus told them, for He had advised them of His coming crucifixion. Thomas expressed the befuddlement of the other disciples when he said, “We do not know the destination. How can we know the way?” Jesus responded, “All you have to know is Me. I am the way of God, the truth of God, the life of God.” The disciples of Jesus do not have to know the procedures and techniques of an arduous religious way. Nor do they have to know the propositional statements of epistemological religious truth. Nor do they have to know the programmed principles of religious activity. The Christian kingdom is totally and exclusively Christocentric. It is not just one of many acceptable religious paths to God. Jesus is the “living way” (Heb. 10:20), and “through Him we have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18).

To know Jesus is to know God. This is not the religious knowledge of empirical observation or education in history or theology, but is the knowledge of personal spiritual intimacy. The disciple Philip wanted visible confirmation of God, substituting sight for faith as have many in religion who have sought visible manifestations of healings, miracles, and calculable success. In response Jesus reaffirmed the ontological unity of Father and Son, indicating that through the activity of the Son one can see and know the Father. As the Messianic Son, Jesus did not function by His own independent prerogative, but derived all from the Father. How did Jesus do what He did and live the way He lived? He explained, “The Father abiding in Me does His works.” Contrary to the alleged independent exer-

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cise and performance of religion, the Christian life is derived from God as His divine works are manifested in character and ministry in our lives, as we are receptive to His activity in faith. All prayer that seeks the sufficiency of God to manifest His character will be answered by divine supply.

The Christian life is not a religious effort to generate and manufacture obedience to rules and regulations or commandments of conformational conduct. Jesus Christ is the dynamic of His own demands. The dynamic of Christian life in the kingdom is provided by the Holy Spirit. We are not left on our own as orphans trying to provide for ourselves and do our best to turn out presentable, despite the fact that many churches are but religious orphanages of helpless spiritual babies who have never understood their provision in Jesus Christ. Jesus promised the disciples to send “Another” like unto Himself, of the same Being, for the Holy Spirit is Himself in Spirit-form, the Spirit of Christ. On Pentecost the Spirit of Christ was made available to indwell and abide in Christians as the Spirit of God was indwelling and abiding in the man, Christ Jesus. Jesus abides in us “by the Spirit whom He has given us” (I John 3:24). “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts” (Gal. 4:6).

Christ is our life (Col. 3:4), and lives in and through the Christian (Gal. 2:20). In the Christian kingdom we have spiritual union with the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit comes alongside to encourage and disclose Jesus to us. This is not a bombastic spectacular demonstration and disclosure as religion desires and expects, but is a personal, spiritual and intimate disclosure of Jesus. The encouraging Spirit of Christ teaches us all things that God wants us to know and brings spiritual understanding (cf. John 16:13; I John 2:27).

Though the disciples of Jesus may be tempted to be fearful and unsettled by the inevitable conflict with the world and religion, they can have the “peace of Christ” (Col. 3:15) that “surpasses comprehension” (Phil. 4:7), by the indwelling pres-

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ence of the Holy Spirit who is one with the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). This does not mean that there will be a panacea that allows for the absence of all external conflict, but the presence and sufficiency of the Spirit of Christ for every situation.

It was only in the physical departure of Jesus by death and ascension that the spiritual presence of Jesus Christ could be facilitated in the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost. Jesus tried to prepare His disciples to understand that His physical absence would not preclude His presence.

Sensing that Judas, into whom Satan had entered with his spirit of deceit, would soon be leading the religious authorities, who were also the pawns of the “ruler of this world” (cf. Jn. 12:31; I Cor. 4:4), to the upper room, Jesus paused the instruction in that location, and indicated that they should depart. Though Satan had no stronghold of indwelling presence or patterning in Jesus, the diabolic adversary would soon utilize his religious and governmental agents to come against the Messiah in putting Him to death. Jesus had accepted such in loving submission.

### **Section 229**

#### **Spiritual Sufficiency -John 15:1-17**

Though the remainder of Jesus’ instruction to the eleven disciples in John chapters fifteen and sixteen is often included in the designation of “the upper room discourse,” these words were apparently uttered as Jesus led His disciples through Jerusalem after dark, perhaps even stopping in the temple area.

A growing vine along the way may have prompted the analogy that Jesus made between the vine and the branch. The religion of Judaic Israel had brought forth only “sour grapes” of self-righteousness (cf. Isa. 5:1-7), but Jesus is the true vine with the substance of God’s life. Like branches united to the vine, Christians are to be the conduits of His life. Apart from Jesus Christians can do nothing that manifests the character

or activity of God. There may be much religious activity, but the fruit of God's character does not come from the self-generated manufacture of self-effort and human performance. Religion has a tendency to set up fruit stands to dispense the detached fruit of merit and rewards, falsely thinking that "fruit" is numerical success or behavior modification. Jesus was explaining to the disciples that everything in the Christian life is Christo-dynamic, to be derived from Him by the receptivity of faith. Out of an ontological spiritual union with the Spirit of Christ, the Christian maintains an abiding and settled receptivity that derives all from Him in order to bear (not produce) the fruit of God's character and activity in his or her behavior. The failure to remain in this relationship of derivative receptivity disallows the vital flow of Christ's life and necessarily severs the dynamic union and expression of the divine.

As the Christian settles into the sufficiency of the expression of Christ in his life, his desires coincide with the intent of God. When the fruitfulness (cf. Gal. 5:22,23) of the all-glorious character of God is exhibited in Christian behavior God is glorified thereby, and Christians demonstrate that they are disciples of Christ willing to derive all from Him. Jesus serves as the dynamic of His own demands expressing divine love (cf. Rom. 5:5), and the Christian experiences the joy (*chara*) of the Lord realized only by the grace (*charis*) dynamic of God. In the intimacy of this receptive relationship Christians are not religious slaves engaged in mechanical obedience, but are friends of Christ who are "in on what God is up to," having the inner confidence of knowing God's will and direction.

### **Section 230**

#### **The Provision of the Holy Spirit - John 15:18 – 16:15**

Jesus was careful to explain to His disciples that the sufficiency of His Christo-dynamic grace would not forestall external conflict, antagonism, hostility and hatred. The religious

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ideal of a utopian environment which is cozy, rosy and sweet, with no problems, no trials, no buffetings and no discipline is contrary to the realistic appraisal that Jesus gave of functioning as a Christian in the world. He told His disciples not to be shocked (cf. I Pet. 4:12), surprised or scandalized at the opposition, hatred and mistreatment of the world of religion. The world-system of mankind and its religion hates Christians because the satanic “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4), the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30) hates Jesus Who has become the life of the Christian. Despite often affirming theistic belief, religion does not know God because they have not received Jesus. Religion is particularly persecutive of Christians because the work of Jesus makes them accountable for their sin, and the grace of God in Jesus Christ makes all their religious performance for naught. Jesus forewarned His disciples that those in the Jewish religion would hate them, ostracize them, persecute them, excommunicate them, and even kill them. They would do so with the perverse idea that they were serving God in so doing (cf. Acts 26:9-11), but in actuality they would be ignorant of God and His Messiah. Such hatred of the Jewish religion toward Jesus and His followers is a fulfillment of the prophecy of the Psalmist that “They hated Me without a cause” (Psalm 69:4). Jesus reminded His disciples, though, that they would not be left alone, for the Encourager, the divine Holy Spirit, would draw their attention back to Him and the sufficient dynamic of His grace.

Despite His coming departure via death, burial and ascension which would produce sorrow in His disciples, it would be to their spiritual advantage because the encouraging Spirit of Christ would be made available to dwell within them. Contrary to the mealy-mouthed, sugarcoated nonjudgmentalism of religion, the Holy Spirit would convict the world through Christians of their sin of unbelief, that righteousness is derived only from God in Christ, and that divine judgment has been effected upon Satan and his religious adherents by the victory of Jesus

on the cross (cf. Heb. 2:14; I John 3:8). Rather than propagandizing people with religious information and doctrinal data, the Holy Spirit would direct Christians into the Truth and Reality of God in Christ. Without speculating calculations of time-tables the Holy Spirit would disclose what was to come. Not concentrating on Himself, the Holy Spirit would glorify Jesus and disclose Him to Christians. When Christians are dreary, discouraged and down in the mouth, they usually fail to understand the Holy Spirit advantage.

### **Section 231**

#### **Sorrow Turned to Joy - John 16:16-33**

The disciples were perplexed when Jesus said, “Now you see Me; then you will not see Me; then again you will see Me.” Jesus’ additional explanation of how they would weep and mourn for the dead while the world rejoiced, but would then find their sorrow turned to joy, did not seem to make any more sense to the disciples. Employing a simile, Jesus illustrated how the same event that causes sorrow can produce joy, for just as the anguish of childbirth allows for the joy of a newborn child, the anguish of the cross would allow for the joy of spiritual new birth causing Christians to “glory in the cross” (Gal. 6:14). Though the disciples presently saw Him physically as He was teaching them, they would not see Him when He was dead and buried and/or ascended, but would see Him again physically after the resurrection and spiritually after the Pentecostal outpouring. The sorrow of seeing Jesus crucified would become the permanent and abiding joy of realizing that the cross was the remedial redemptive action necessary for the restorative action that allows God’s life to dwell again in mankind. Then their questions would be answered; they could ask God for anything and He would supply their every need; and their joy would be made full.

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Admitting that He had used much figurative language, both for the purpose of teaching abstract concepts which needed to be simplified, and for the purpose of confusing the religionists, Jesus then explained to the disciples that the complete context of what God was doing in the Messiah would be made explicitly evident after He had departed. After Pentecost God's complete restorational intent for mankind was indeed made clear – the Spirit of Christ could indwell the spirit of man in order to live and function through man to the glory of God. This is not an indirect system of continually mediated and relayed requests, but a direct and immediate personal relationship that the Christian has with God the Father. When Jesus explicitly stated that He had come from God the Father to earth and would be returning to the Father, the disciples affirmed their belief in Him as the Messiah. Jesus knew, though, that the big test was coming in the crisis of the crucifixion, when the disciples would flee like scattered sheep (cf. Matt. 26:31), leaving Him alone on the human plane, but not abandoned by the Father. Despite their coming tribulation, Jesus wanted the disciples to know His peace, and to know that He was the triumphant victor over the world system and all of its religion.

### **Section 232**

#### **Jesus Prays for Himself and His Disciples - John 17:1-26**

In the assurance of His victory over Satan, Jesus solicited God the Father in personal prayer to implement the glorious purpose of His coming to earth, i.e., to restore divine eternal life to mankind in the intimacy of reconciled personal relationship. The character and activity of God was exemplified perfectly in the life and work of Jesus Christ on earth. Jesus accomplished and completed all that God wanted to do through Him, as was His previously stated intent (Jn. 4:34) and His subsequent cry of triumph (Jn. 19:30). The redemptive mission had been set in motion unto the inevitability of God's intent,

and the Son of God was desirous of returning to the uncorrupted heavenly glory of God's presence that He had known in His preexistence.

Jesus regarded His disciples as having been divinely selected, not randomly recruited or picked on the basis of personality, scholarship or good looks, as religion so often does. Praying particularly for His disciples, Jesus affirmed that He had exhibited God's character in His behavior and taught the disciples as God had directed His thinking, so that they believed that He was the Messiah sent from God. As He prepared to physical depart from their presence, Jesus was desirous that the remaining disciples would be preserved by God's power, and that they would maintain their unity in love, like unto the spiritual unity of Father and Son. Religion inevitably breeds divisiveness and disputation (cf. Gal. 5:20), and then sets about to effect organizational unity in ecumenical ecclesiasticism. Jesus had preserved the unity of the disciples during His physical presence, and only Judas, the "son of perdition," had perished in fulfillment of prophecy (cf. Ps. 41:9).

Jesus wanted His disciples to experience His joy, even though they would be devastated by His coming crucifixion and departure. Despite remaining in the world, they would not be deriving their identity and activity from the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4), and thus would be hated and despised by the world and its religion (cf. I Jn. 3:13). It would not serve God's purpose to have Christians isolated in escapism and separatism, but Jesus prayed that God would protect them from the Evil One (cf. II Thess 3:3; II Pet. 2:9; I John 5:18). He prayed that the disciples might be set apart to function as holy people (cf. I Thess. 5:23), willing Himself to be set apart to function dynamically and intercessionally on their behalf. On behalf of His disciples, and all subsequent Christians in every age, Jesus prayed that they would recognize and be preserved in spiritual unity that was indicative of divine unity. The visible unity of Christians serves as an unspoken proclamation of the unity

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of God and His love (cf. Col. 3:14) expressed in His people, whereas religious divisions only reflect divided loyalties of idolatry. Christian unity is not rigid uniformity or conformity of thought, opinion, doctrine, polity, practice or worship patterns, but entails being “united in spirit” (Phil. 2:2) and “preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). As He anticipated His return to heavenly glory, Jesus also prayed that Christians might join Him in the timeless and unhindered glory of God’s presence.

### Section 233

**Jesus’ Anguishes in Prayer - Matt. 26:30, 36-46;**

**Mk. 14:26, 32-42; Lk. 22:39-46; Jn. 18:1**

Jesus led His disciples through the Kedron Valley to a garden-grove on the Mount of Olives, known as Gethsemane. Eight of the disciples were left on guard while Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him to pray. Jesus admitted to these three disciples the psychological anguish and sorrow of His soul. He then asked them to pray for Him as He went about a stone’s throw away to pray. The disciples heard Him ask the Father if it were possible that the coming cup of suffering and spiritual death might be avoided, but not at the expense of thwarting God’s will. Before they fell asleep in exhaustion, they also saw that an angel ministered unto Jesus while He was sweating profusely.

When Jesus came back to the three disciples He found them sleeping. He asked them, and particularly Peter, why they could not stay alert for just one hour to support Him in His agony. He knew that their spirit was willing but their flesh was weak, and encouraged them to pray that they not succumb to the temptation of inattention. Three times Jesus removed Himself to pray and returned to find the three disciples sleeping. On the third occasion He told the disciples to keep on sleeping. It did not matter any longer.

## Final Instructions to the Disciples

Perhaps He saw the approaching lanterns of the religious authorities, being led by Judas to the familiar meeting place of Jesus and His disciples in the garden, after having failed to find Him in the upper room. “The time has come,” Jesus said, “for the Son of Man to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.” Religious authorities never like to be identified as “sinners,” but such they are, perpetually involved in the betrayal of Jesus Christ.



## Chapter Thirteen

# The Arrest, Trials and Execution of Jesus

The time for Jesus' submitting to the ultimate physical abuses of religion had come. In accord with God's design the Son of God would be acquainted with grief, smitten and afflicted, stricken and chastened, oppressed and judged, scourged for our healing, and pierced through for our transgressions (cf. Isa. 53:3-12), in order to bring life out of death.

### Section 234

**The Religionists Arrest Him - Matt. 26:47-56;  
Mk. 14:43-52; Lk. 22:47-53; Jn. 18:2-12**

The representatives of militant religion arrived in the garden of Gethsemane to overcome their foe. They carried weapons with which to intimidate and kill, as religious representatives have done throughout the centuries of mankind's existence.

Jesus faced the approaching religionists, went forward to them and asked, "Who are you looking for?" knowing quite well that they were looking for Him. The religious authorities indicated they were looking for "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I AM" (cf. Exod. 3:14), identifying Himself as the individual they were looking for, and also as God. They were bowled over, and fell backwards to the ground. Again Jesus asked, "Who are you looking for?" They repeated, "Jesus of Nazareth." "I told you that I AM," Jesus reiterated, and

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voluntarily surrendered Himself, saying, “if it is Me that you seek, then let My disciples go their way,” for such would be the answer to His prayer (Jn. 17:12; Ps. 109:8) to preserve His own.

Judas and the religious authorities had determined that the cue for identifying Jesus would be that Judas would give Him their customary kiss of friendship greeting. When Judas did so, Jesus asked, “Judas, how can you betray the Son of man with a kiss?”, for such is the ultimate of disloyalty and hypocrisy enacted toward the One who he knew to be the personification of divine Truth. Still addressing him as “friend,” Jesus advised Judas to complete what he had come to do.

As the religious authorities arrested Jesus, the disciples questioned whether they should react with armed resistance. Simon Peter, the impulsive activist of the group, drew his sword, and being a better fisherman than swordsman, cut off the right ear of the high priest’s servant, Malchus. Not pleased with Peter’s action, Jesus healed the servant’s ear, and told Peter to sheath his sword, for such militant aggression was not consistent with the kingdom He came to bring in Himself. Religious militancy brings the destructive consequences of its own actions, Jesus explained (cf. Rev. 13:10). “If I needed to fight or to be defended, I could request twelve legions of angels from My Father,” Jesus said, “but rather, it is the Father’s intent that I drink the cup of suffering and of death” (Matt. 20:22; 26:39), i.e., take upon Himself the dregs of humanity’s sin consequences.

When the Temple police seized Jesus and bound Him, Jesus chided them for the irony of approaching Him with the overkill of weaponry and force as if He were a dangerous criminal, rather than approaching Him when He was publicly teaching in the temple every day. Such action evidenced they were operating out of the Satanic power of darkness (Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:13), yet in accord with God’s intent (cf. Acts 2:23; 4:27,28).

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The eleven disciples took the opportunity to flee into the dark. Mark alone records that an unidentified young man was also present with a linen cloth wrapped around him. When the religious authorities tried to apprehend him also, he slipped out of the cloth and escaped naked. Many have speculated that this young man was John Mark himself, who alone would have known of his presence and attire in the garden that night.

### **Section 235**

#### **A Preliminary Hearing Before Annas - Jn. 18:12-14, 19-23**

The religious authorities were accompanied by Roman authorities for they would have been required to have permission and oversight to arrest an antagonist. Religion and government have often become diabolic allies to serve their own purposes.

During the night Jesus was led to the residence of Annas, the *ex officio* Jewish high priest, who had served as high priest between A.D. 7 and 14, but had turned over the responsibilities to his sons, sons-in-law, and grandson. His son-in-law, Caiaphas, was now the acting high priest in Jerusalem, the same one who earlier argued for the expedience of Jesus' death (Jn. 11:49-52). Annas conducted the preliminary hearing, seeking evidence that could be used against Jesus, questioning whether His teaching was subversive or heretical, and whether His disciples were a band of insurgents. Jesus replied that He was not a conspirator, that His teaching was not clandestine or occult, and that He had taught openly and publicly in the accepted venues of the Jewish synagogues and the temple. Questioning their practice of attempting to cause Him to self-incriminate Himself, Jesus suggested they seek witnesses who had heard Him teach. One of the officers of the temple police struck Jesus, suggesting that He had been disrespectful of the high priest in requesting such legalities. Jesus asked him to specify

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the charges of His wrongdoing, questioning the legitimacy of thus treating prisoners violently.

### Section 236

**A Religious Inquisition - Matt. 26:57, 59-68;**

**Mk. 14:53, 55-65; Lk. 22:54, 63-65; Jn. 18:24**

Fairness, justice, and judicial propriety are soon dispensed with when religion is dead-set on allowing the end to justify the means. Still in violation of their own Jewish regulations, the religious authorities took Jesus to the house of Caiaphas, the ruling high priest, in the midst of the night. There Caiaphas had hastily gathered an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin, and found false witnesses to testify against Jesus. The testimony of these bribed informants did not agree, and they could not find agreement of two witnesses as required by Jewish law (Deut. 19:15), until two witnesses agreed they had heard Jesus say that He would destroy the temple and rebuilt it in three days, a misunderstanding of Jesus' words when He cleansed the temple at the beginning of His public ministry (Jn. 2:19-22).

The evidence was shaky, so Caiaphas decided to try to intimidate the prisoner into self-incriminating statements. "What do you say for yourself? Do you have any rebuttal to these charges?" Caiaphas asked. Jesus remained silent, knowing that His comments would serve no purpose. The high priest then demanded that Jesus answer under oath whether He was "the Messiah, the Son of God." To have remained silent would have been to deny who He was, so Jesus clearly made the affirmation of His identity which He had carefully avoided previously due to the misconceptions of Jewish religious Messianic expectations. Jesus replied, "I AM" (cf. Exod. 3:14), unreservedly identifying Himself with the name of Jehovah God, and in addition He prophesied that the expectations of the Messiah as the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13) and the Messiah sitting exalted at the right hand of God judg-

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ing His enemies (Ps. 110:1) would be fulfilled by Him. Little did they realize that though they thought they had religious authority to judge Him to death, Jesus was indicating that He and His people would someday judge the unbelief of Judaism and the physical nation of Israel unto everlasting death.

In affirming that He was the Messiah, Jesus knew that the religious leaders with their presuppositions of a physical Messiah deliverer would never understand the spiritual kingdom He came to bring in Himself. In claiming to be the Son of God, Jesus also was aware that such would be regarded as blasphemy by their religious interpretations (cf. Lev. 24:16). But neither of these accusations would stand as a legitimate treasonous charge on which to ask the Roman government to sentence Him to death. They would have to wait until they could bring such a charge, because the Roman government would not allow the Jewish religionists to administer the death penalty. In the meantime, in defiance of their own religious rules of fair treatment of prisoners, they allowed some to cruelly revile Jesus (cf. I Pet. 2:23) and brutally beat Him, mocking His prophetic power.

### **Section 237**

**Peter's Denials of Jesus - Matt. 26:58, 69-75;**

**Mk. 14:53,54, 66-72; Lk. 22:54-62; Jn. 18:15-18, 25-27**

Though the disciples of Jesus had been given opportunity to flee into the dark, two of them turned back to follow the arresting party. Apparently John was acquainted with the high priest and was allowed into the courtroom during the religious interrogation of Jesus. Peter, on the other hand, was keeping his distance, lurking outside the door of the courtyard. When John saw Peter outside, he requested of the young lady who was on security duty that she allow Peter inside. Something about Peter's demeanor or accent caused her to question whether

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Peter was one of Jesus' disciples. Peter denied such with the disclaimer, "I am not."

The servants of the high priest and the arresting officers of the temple police were warming themselves in the courtyard around a fire. Peter was attempting to meld in with them in order to keep an eye on what was transpiring in the courtroom. A female servant of the high priest thought she recognized that Peter had been with Jesus. Peter disavowed having been associated with Jesus, indicating that he did not know what she was talking about. Then he heard the cock crow for the first time.

As Peter continued to try to get lost in the shadows, the persistent female servant informed others that Peter was one of Jesus' disciples. Over the course of an hour, several began to suspect that Peter was one of Jesus' Galilean followers, but he kept denying such. Finally, one of the servants who was a relative of Malchus, whose ear Peter had severed with his sword (Matt. 26:51), identified Peter as the one who had been in the garden of Gethsemane. Peter vehemently cursed and swore in his denunciation of any association with Jesus. It was then that he heard the cock crow for the second time. Through the open doorway he saw Jesus glance at him. Peter remembered his proud boast in the upper room just a few hours earlier to defend Jesus unto death (Lk. 22:33), the comment of Jesus that Satan would sift him like wheat in temptation (Lk. 22:31), and the prophecy that before the cock crowed twice he would deny the Lord Jesus three times (Mk. 14:30). His courage had turned to cowardice. His fanaticism had melted into failure. His pride had preceded his downfall (I Cor. 10:12). Peter felt the piercing pangs of conscience, and left the courtyard to weep alone and repent before God.

**Section 238**

**Formal Charges Before the Sanhedrin - Matt. 27:1;  
Mk. 15:1; Lk. 22:66-71**

First thing in the morning, the religious leaders of the Jewish Sanhedrin attempted to legitimize the illegalities of their late-night injustices outside of the temple by conducting a formal assembly to ratify their predetermined objective to put Jesus to death. Legalities are irrelevant to religion when it seeks to justify its own actions. Religion attempts to gloss over and cover up its illegalities with a veneer of propriety.

Using the illegal ploy of Annas, the Sanhedrin asks Jesus to indict Himself by affirming that He claims to be the Messiah. Jesus reveals the injustice of the entire situation by explaining that it does not matter what He says or asks, for their minds are already made up to falsely convict Him. As He did before Annas the night before, Jesus amplified His Messianic claim by indicating that they would see the Son of man (cf. Dan. 7:13) sitting on the right hand of the power of God (cf. Ps. 110:1), serving as the Judge over their sin and unbelief. Religion itself was on trial there that morning, even more than Jesus.

Specifically and directly the religious leaders ask Jesus, “Are you the Son of God? Is that what you are claiming to be?” Jesus seems to say, “You have correctly surmised and articulated such an affirmation; I AM” (cf. Exod. 3:14). Regarding such as blasphemy (Lev. 24:16), they decided they needed no more witnesses to condemn and convict Jesus, even though such a charge would never suffice in the Roman court.

**Section 239**

**Judas Commits Suicide - Matt. 27:3-10; Acts 1:18,19**

Judas Iscariot had been following the proceedings, and once he realized that Jesus was condemned to die by the religious council, his remorse caused him to come to the Sanhe-

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drin and confess that he had sinned in betraying an innocent man, willing to return the thirty pieces of silver they had paid him. Hypocritically the religious leaders sneer that they are not concerned with Judas' protestations, for "the blood is on his hands." Judas threw the thirty shekels of "blood money" at their feet, and went out to commit suicide by hanging himself. Many have sought the refuge of self-imposed death to avoid the guilt of religious indictment, while religion refuses to accept any blame for their actions.

The religious chief priests of Judaism were faced with the problem of disposing with the thirty pieces of "blood money" scattered at their feet. Determining that it was not proper to put it into the religious treasury, they decided to purchase a potter's field outside of the city walls of Jerusalem with the money, thus benevolently providing a burial plot for any poor Gentiles who might happen to die in their holy city, and assuaging their guilt. The field may have been the very location where Judas killed himself (cf. Acts 1:18,19), and was later referred to as *Akel-dama*, the field of blood. Matthew indicates that the purchase of the field with the thirty pieces of silver was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah, but the words that he quotes seem to be taken from the prophecy of Zechariah 11:13, even though there are allusions to the potter in Jeremiah 18:2; 19:2; 32:6-15. The Jewish religionists revealed that they did not value the blood of Jesus in their rejection of Him, and that the price paid would predominantly benefit the Gentiles instead.

### Section 240

**Jesus Brought to Pilate - Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mk. 15:1-5;  
Lk. 23:1-5; Jn. 18:28-38**

The Sanhedrin collectively escorted Jesus early in the morning hours from the temple to the Praetorium, the palace that Herod the Great had built, which served as the residence of the Roman procurator. The Jewish leaders refused to enter the

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Roman residence so as not to ceremonially defile themselves in the place of a Gentile, and disallow themselves from participating in their religious Passover later in the day. Like most religion, they were scrupulous in their ceremonial trivia, yet unscrupulous in their moral turpitude; concerned about ritual purification while conniving to commit murder.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea from A.D. 26 - 36, was a weak-willed and incompetent Roman governor. The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had previously upstaged Pilate when they found emblems of Emperor worship in Herod's palace. Pilate refused to remove them, and the religious leaders appealed to Emperor Tiberius, who reprimanded Pilate. Thenceforth the Jewish religionists knew they could manipulate Pilate for their own ends.

The Sanhedrin, with a gathering retinue of Jewish people, brought Jesus to Pilate, wanting an unqualified, *carte-blanche* ratification of their determination to execute Jesus. Despite the violations of both Jewish and Roman law, they wanted Pilate to sanction their illegal machinations and issue the death warrant.

Pilate was not so willing to be used as a stooge in this manner, and attempted to require some semblance of Roman jurisprudence by asking what formal charges they were bringing against this man Jesus. Since the religious rulers had only an inadequate allegation of blasphemy (Matt. 26:55; Lk. 22:71), they tried to intimidate Pilate to push this false indictment through without delay or interference, indicating that if their prisoner were not sufficiently evil, they would not have brought him for formal condemnation. Suspecting their sinister motives and balking at this violation of Roman justice, Pilate told the religious leaders to take their prisoner and judge him according to their own Law. To this the Jewish lynch mob rightly replied, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death," for the Romans forbade the Jewish leaders to exercise their traditional executions by stoning.

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Quickly calculating their strategy, the religious leaders presented trumped up charges that would be more apt to convey treasonous sedition against Rome. They accused Jesus of perverting their Jewish nation, forbidding the paying of taxes to Rome, and claiming to be the Messiah, a king. These charges were purposefully politicized and imprecise, meant to convey the idea of undermining Roman authority. In actuality, the religious leaders were projecting their own guilt upon Jesus. It was they who had perverted the nation of Israel. It was they who hated paying taxes to Rome, and hated Jesus for saying, "Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's" (Matt. 22:21). The Jewish leaders wanted a political and militaristic Messiah-King, and Jesus had constantly refused to function as such a king. Their half-truths revealed their own deceitful and desperately wicked hearts (Jere. 17:9).

Keying off of the third charge of claiming to be a king, Pilate returned into the Praetorium to question Jesus. "Are you the King of the Jews?", he asked. Knowing the varied concepts of kingship among the peoples of the first century, Jesus asked Pilate whether this was a question of personal interest to him, or simply a charge from the Jews. His answer would be contingent on whether the inquiry pertained to the Roman perspective of political kingship, the Jewish perspective of theological kingship, or His own Messianic perspective of spiritual kingship. Pilate snidely remarked that he was not a Jew and did not care about such matters, but noted that the leaders of Jesus' own Jewish nation had delivered Him, and questioned, "What have you done?"

Jesus explained that His kingdom was not of this world. Contrary to the Roman political view of a world kingdom, Jesus was not a militaristic monarch exercising human authority within a geographical royal realm. Neither did He have anything to do with the kingdom of religion which employs the principles and values of the world system, governed by the "ruler of this world" (Jn. 12:31; 14:30), the "god of this world"

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(II Cor. 4:4), and permeated by evil. The spiritual kingdom of Jesus invests mankind with the spiritual presence and character of God in order that Christ might reign as Lord in their lives both now, here on earth, and forever.

Hearing Jesus refer to His “kingdom,” Pilate injected, “Then you are a king?” Jesus explained that it was correct to state that He was a king. He was incarnated into this physical world to effect the spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of divine Truth or reality, wherein mankind would listen to Him in obedience and allow Him to reign as Lord in their lives. “What is truth?” Pilate asked rhetorically, uninterested in knowing the answer to his question.

Convinced that Jesus was nothing more than a religious enthusiast, Pilate went out to the waiting Jewish crowd and stated his verdict that he found Jesus to be innocent, not guilty. The religious leaders vehemently hurled additional false accusations against Jesus, to which Jesus responded in dignified silence, “as a lamb led to slaughter” (Isa. 53:7). Pilate marveled that Jesus was not counter-defensive. When Pilate heard the accusation of the religionists that Jesus had fomented sedition in Galilee, he thought of another loophole that could serve as a convenient pretext to avoid having to deal with the issue of Jesus.

### **Section 241**

#### **Jesus Before Herod - Lk. 23:6-12**

Questioning whether Jesus was indeed a Galilean, Pilate determined to weasel out of this embarrassing situation by sending Jesus to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, who was in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Despite the personal animosity between the two Roman rulers, Pilate decided to defer to Herod, under whose jurisdiction such a Galilean would fall.

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Herod was quite pleased that Pilate would recognize his rights and authority, and was desirous of seeing this Jesus whose fame had spread through the land, hoping to see Him perform a miracle on demand. When Herod questioned Jesus, He remained silent (cf. Isa. 53:7), despite the barrage of false accusations from the Jewish authorities. Peeved at what he perceived to be impudent insolence on the part of Jesus, Herod joined His soldiers in mocking Jesus as a King, before sending Him back to Pilate. Herod also found Jesus to be innocent of all charges, and decided it was best not to get involved.

### Section 242

**Jesus Returned to Pilate - Matt. 27:15-26; Mk. 15:6-15;  
Lk. 23:13-25; Jn. 18:39-19:16**

Pilate called the religious authorities together again and reiterated that neither he nor Herod could find Jesus guilty of any charges. As a concession to their concerns though, he agreed to illegally beat Jesus before releasing Him. This was not acceptable to the Jewish leaders, who in their bloodthirsty hatred of Jesus, could not be placated or prevented from achieving their objective of His death.

It was brought to Pilate's remembrance that there was a custom of the Roman procurator to grant clemency to a prisoner during the Passover. Knowing that in their sentiment of hatred they would not choose to release Jesus, Pilate plotted to play upon their sense of decency, deciding to offer a ridiculous contrast between the most heinous criminal presently incarcerated on death-row in Judea and the innocent man, Jesus, hoping that they would see their folly and release Jesus instead of Barabbas. "Shall I release Barabbas or Jesus, who is called the Messiah?" Pilate asked the crowd. "Should I release the one who claims to be King of the Jews?"

Meanwhile Pilate's wife sent him a message noting that she had a dream about Jesus, and he should have nothing to do with

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“that righteous man.” The heat was on as advice came from all sides.

The religious leaders would not be deterred. They incited the growing crowd to seek the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus, desiring the release of the region’s most violent criminal, rather than the world’s most innocent man. When Pilate asked, “Which one shall I release?” the mob yelled, “Barabbas!”

Seeking still to evade the inevitable, Pilate decided to carry out his previous scheme to whip Jesus with a scourge that would tear open the flesh of His body. He was still hoping for some sympathy and compassion on the part of these religious people. The soldiers were allowed to abuse their prisoner with barbarous acts which included physical pummeling and spitting in His face. With reprehensible mockery they placed a royal robe over His lacerated body, put a crown of thorns on His head, and derided Him as “King of the Jews.”

Pilate then presented Jesus to the Jewish crowd again, a pale, beaten and bleeding man clothed as a mock-king. Seeking their sympathy, Pilate said, “Look at this man! What shall I do with this so-called Messiah?” The religious leaders had already orchestrated the reply of the crowd, “Let Him be crucified!” “Why?” Pilate asked, “What evil has He done?” They continued to scream, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” When whipped up into an emotional frenzy, religion knows no reason and attempts to exterminate its problems, allowing the end to justify the means. The history of religion is a bloody trail of murderous elimination of their dissenters.

Exasperated, Pilate exclaimed, “Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.” The Jews themselves could not execute anyone by crucifixion, for such would be contrary to their own Law and Roman law. At the instigation of their leaders, the Jews returned to their original charge of blasphemy, and declared that by their Law He should die, because He called Himself ‘the Son of God’.” Pilate began to question himself: “What if Jesus is the Son of God? What if my

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wife is correct?" He returned into the Praetorium to question Jesus again, asking, "Where are you from?" Jesus remained silent (cf. Isa. 53:7), effectively demonstrating the unreality and illegality of the whole situation. "Why do you not speak to me?" queried Pilate. "Do you not realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?" Jesus responded, "You would have no power against Me, unless it were given to you by the ultimate Power above. Be assured, though, that the chief priest, and all those he represents in the Jewish religion, are guilty of the greater sin." Jesus, Himself, pinpointed the greater culpability for His death upon the religious leaders. Religion was responsible for Jesus' death. Religion always has, and always will, seek to destroy Jesus in one way or another.

Pilate was still vacillating, but he was rapidly running out of options. He feared that if he did not capitulate to the religious rulers, they would again appeal to Caesar. He was being blackmailed. Pilate tried one last time to release Jesus, but the Jewish crowd played their trump card, saying, "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar, for when anyone claims to be a king he speaks against Caesar."

Pressured and coerced, with his back against the wall, Pilate brought Jesus before the crowd of religionists, sat down on the judgment seat, and presented Jesus to them, saying, "Behold, your King!" It was a final appeal to reason and compassion by using the irony of presenting a beaten and bedraggled man as a king. The religious crowd adamantly demanded that Jesus be put away and crucified. "Shall I crucify your King?" Pilate asked. It was then and there that the Sadducean religious leaders with the silent consent of the Pharisees sealed the doom of their nation, race and religion. They repudiated, forsook and denounced the theocratic kingship of God, declaring, "We have no king, but Caesar!" They were an apostate people, rejecting God as King and Jesus as Messiah.

Failing to have the courage to stand up for justice and to say "No" to religious pressure and coercion, Pilate is forever

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linked with the greatest injustice known in human history. The mob continued to call for crucifixion. Pilate feared that the people would riot as increased numbers joined the crowd in the early morning light. Caving in to the crowd, Pilate symbolically washed his hands before them, declaring, “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man,” all the while knowing that he was capitulating to the murder of an innocent man.

The Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jewish nation and the hierarchical leadership of the Jewish religion, along with the crowd of Jewish people then accepted the culpability for Jesus’ death. It was a tragic self-indictment and sentencing when the Jewish people said, “His blood be on us, and on our children.” They could not imagine the judgment of God that would come upon them in their own generation (cf. Matt. 12:39,45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; 24:34) when the Romans killed thousands and thousands of them in unparalleled bloodshed, many of them crucified in the same manner that they had effected the death of Jesus, or the judgment of God that would come upon them in generations to come. To affirm the culpability of the Jewish nation and Jewish religion for the death of Jesus is not necessarily to assume an anti-Semitic attitude as some have charged throughout subsequent history. Jesus had indicated the culpability of the Jewish leaders and people (Jn. 19:11), and the Jewish people accepted the responsibility for such and the devastating consequences which would ensue. Misguided is the religion that still seeks to emphasize and sympathize with the Jews rather than Jesus, seeking to diminish the culpability of the Jewish people, nation and religion, denying that God’s judgment has been pronounced upon them, and continuing to seek to elevate the Jewish people to a favored and privileged status before God.

Surrendering to the murderous wishes of the religious crowd, Pilate released the notorious criminal, Barabbas. Ordering Jesus to be beaten one more time, Pilate delivered the death warrant that allowed Jesus to be crucified.

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### Section 243

#### **Mocked Again - Matt. 27:27-30; Mk. 15:16-19**

When Jesus was led back into the Praetorium, the whole unit of Roman soldiers was allowed to abuse the prisoner again. They played the same perverse “game” of dressing Him up as a king in royal garb with a crown of thorns. They saluted Him, and kneeled down before Him in mock worship, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” It was a travesty of justice, as they were allowed to strike Him on the head and spit in His face.

### Section 244

#### **Proceeding to Golgotha - Matt. 27:31-34; Mk. 15:20-23; Lk. 23:26-33; Jn. 19:16,17**

Taking off the apparel of mockery, the Roman officers led Jesus outside of the city to be crucified. The procession was headed toward the location called Golgotha, the “place of the skull,” probably so named because of a rock formation that approximated a cranium. It is not likely that there was a field of skulls, as some have suggested, since the Jews had strict laws about dead bodies. Jesus began by carrying the cross, or at least the *patibulum* cross-beam by Himself, but weakened as He was by several beatings, He was apparently not able to continue. A man named Simon, who was from Cyrene in North Africa where there was a large colony of Jews, was drafted to carry the cross for Jesus.

There seems to have been a gradual awareness among the Jewish people of their complicity in sentencing an innocent man to death. Some of the spectators, especially women, seem to have been distressed by what they saw. Jesus told the women not to weep for Him, but for themselves and their children, having assumed culpability for what was transpiring (Matt. 27:25). An unprecedented and catastrophic judgment of God was coming upon the Jewish people, which was partially

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fulfilled in A.D. 70. This judgment would be so severe that what was regarded by their religion as a curse of childlessness and barrenness would be considered a blessing (cf. Lk. 21:23). Those denied motherhood would consider themselves fortunate. People would pray that the mountains might fall on them (cf. Hosea 10:8) in order to be spared the torture and the misery. “If the Romans crucify Me,” Jesus said, “a green tree” who eschewed all attempts to foster the revolution of zealotism against Rome, then what will they do to “the dry wood” of seasoned zealotism when they revolt against Rome, as they did in A.D. 66. What happened to Jesus in His crucifixion could not begin to compare with the gruesome brutality inflicted upon the Jewish people at large in A.D. 70.

As Jesus proceeded to Golgotha, He was accompanied by two criminals who would also be crucified at the same time, fulfilling the prophecy that He would be “numbered with the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). Prior to His being lifted up on the cross Jesus was offered wine mixed with gall or myrrh (cf. Prov. 31:6; Ps. 69:21), but tasting such He would not drink the narcotic drink, preferring to drink the “cup” of the dregs of human suffering and death fully cognizant of what was happening.

### Section 245

**Executioners and Observers - Matt. 27:35-44;**

**Mk. 15:24-32; Lk. 23:33-43; Jn. 19:18-27**

The Romans reserved the use of the cross as an execution instrument for criminal slaves and foreigners, unwilling to employ such cruel and unusual punishment on their own citizens. Without recrimination or retribution Jesus prayed for those engaged in His crucifixion, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” They were unaware they were serving God’s purpose of redemption.

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The distribution of the executed person's personal belongings was one of the perquisites of serving on the Roman execution squad. The four Roman soldiers thus divided whatever belongings Jesus had, but decided to cast lots for the seamless tunic, thus fulfilling Ps. 22:18.

Oftentimes the crime of the accused was written on a plaque and affixed to their cross, so Pilate had inscribed a plaque which was to be affixed to the cross above Jesus, reading, "King of the Jews." It was written in three languages: Hebrew, the language of the Jews; Latin, the official language of the Roman Empire; and Greek, the common language of communication in the region. Pilate had probably done this to spite the Jewish leaders, who in turn objected to the inscription, but he would capitulate no more to their demands.

With abominable contempt, the Jewish religious leaders incited observers at the cross to sneer and jeer at Jesus, wagging their heads in derision (cf. Ps. 22:7). They taunted Him to save Himself and come down from the cross if He was really the Son of God. One of the crucified criminals joined in the abusive mocking, but the other was sympathetic to the plight of Jesus as an innocent man and rebuked the other criminal. "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom," pled the softened criminal. Jesus assured him that on that very day he would join him in paradise, the place regarded by the Pharisees as the place of the privileged dead prior to the resurrection.

Four saddened women were standing by the cross in dying devotion that dreary morning: Jesus' mother, Mary; her sister, Salome (possibly James and John's mother who was earlier rebuked, cf. Matt. 20:20); Mary, the wife or widow of Clopas; and Mary Magdalene (cf. Mk. 16:9; Lk. 8:2). To His mother, Jesus spoke with the utmost respect, saying, "Woman, behold your son," indicating that the disciple John would assume responsibility for caring for her. To John, Jesus said, "Behold, your mother." John thereafter took Mary to his own home.

### Section 246

#### **The Victory of His Death - Matt. 27:45-50; Mk. 15:33-37; Lk. 23:44-46; Jn. 19:28-30**

Between noon and three o'clock in the afternoon a darkness settled over the entire scene. A solar eclipse would have been an astronomical impossibility because the Passover was always held at the time of the full moon. Whether the phenomena was natural or supernatural it apparently evidenced the spiritual darkness of the working of Satan.

At approximately three o'clock Jesus exclaimed, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" an Aramaic rendition of the Psalmist's question, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Ps. 22:1). Though some thought He was calling for Elijah, Jesus was lamenting the withdrawal of God's life from Him. In this separation from God, Jesus was "made to be sin" (II Cor. 5:21) and "became a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13), becoming the personification of all sin, as the sin of all mankind was imputed to Him. This experience of spiritual death far surpassed the agony of physical death, though the subsequent physiological focus of religion on the gory details of Jesus' physical death has often superseded any understanding of the spiritual realities effected on that occasion.

Knowing that He could now incur all of the death consequences of sin that had occurred in Adam, assuming them upon Himself in order to heal and restore God's life to man, Jesus declared, "I thirst." One of the soldiers offered Jesus some cheap vinegar-wine from his flask, and Jesus accepted such and drank, moistening his lips and throat for His declaration of triumph.

"It is finished!" Jesus declared. This was not a sigh of relief, or a moan of resignation, or a cry of defeat. Rather it was a shout of victory indicating that the mission of God for man was accomplished. Earlier Jesus had expressed His intent to accomplish the work of God (John 4:34) and confidently

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prayed about such accomplishment (John 17:4). Now Jesus asserts that all that needed to be done for man has been done. The price of mankind's sin has been "paid in full." Everything needed to accomplish redemption, regeneration and the restoration of man to God's original intent has been set in motion. The religious perversion of Christianity denies this "finished work" of Jesus Christ, insisting and demanding additional activities, performances and "works" which man must do to complete God's pleasure, accomplish God's intent, and satisfy God. Such a denial of the triumphant accomplishment of Jesus and His subsequent grace activity is a denial of the gospel.

Jesus then died physically by voluntarily surrendering His spirit to God the Father (cf. Ps. 31:5). As James, the Lord's brother later wrote, "the body apart from the spirit is dead" (James 2:26). The Roman executioners had not taken his life from Him, but He laid it down on His own accord (cf. Jn. 10:17), on behalf of all humanity.

### Section 247

**Tearing and Shaking - Matt. 27:51-56; Mk. 15:38-41;  
Lk. 23:45, 47-49**

When Jesus died on the cross the veil in the Jewish temple that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was torn in two from top to bottom. This curtain was approximately 60 feet long and 30 feet high. The significance of this supernatural rending was to illustrate the termination of all religion. The Jewish religionists, like most involved in religion, thought they had God captured "in the box" of the Holy of Holies. God cannot be contained in such "holy places," for He "does not dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48; 17:24). The personal presence of God has been opened to all men that they might "enter within the veil" (Heb. 6:19) "into the holy place" (Heb. 10:19) through the activity of Jesus Christ. By the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ the bodies of

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Christians become the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 6:19) and collectively we are “the temple of the living God” (II Cor. 6:16) in whom Christ reigns and functions as King and Lord.

The natural phenomena of an earthquake also occurred at the time of Jesus death with supernatural timing. Jesus’ death had enacted a complete shaking up of all physical and spiritual entities. Some of the Jewish people, including the centurion at the cross, when they had witnessed the supernatural actions of God, became very fearful, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God.” Many were smiting their breasts in remorse at their tragic mistake.

### **Section 248**

#### **Attestation of Death - Jn. 19:31-37**

Whereas the Romans often left executed bodies on display to serve as a deterrent to crime among the populace, the Jewish law forbade such a practice of leaving a body hanging overnight (Deut. 21:22,23), much less on a Sabbath day. The religious leaders of the Jews requested Pilate to implement the procedure of *crurifragium*, the breaking of the dying prisoner’s legs with a heavy mallet to facilitate quick suffocation when they could no longer hold themselves up with their legs in order to relieve the pressure. The Roman soldiers broke the legs of the two accompanying criminals, but when they came to Jesus they were surprised that He was already dead since crucifixion usually involved a slow, agonizing death. These soldiers on crucifixion detail knew death when they saw it; it was their business. They would not have violated the orders of their superior officer if they were not certain that the requested action was not absolutely futile. The failure to break any of Jesus’ bones was a fulfillment of the Psalmist’s prophecy (Ps. 34:20), that as the “Passover Lamb” (I Cor. 5:7) Jesus would not have a broken bone (cf. Exod. 12:46; Numb. 9:12).

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To attest to the death of Jesus, the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear and made a gaping wound (cf. Jn. 20:27). This piercing of Jesus' body was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah (Zech. 12:10). The presentation of blood from Jesus' aortic veins and water from His pericardium or thoracic cavity verified His physical death, and would serve as an argument against later docetic teaching.

### **Section 249**

**Preparation for Burial - Matt. 27:57-60; Mk. 15:42-46;  
Lk. 23:50-54; John 19:38-42**

There were at least two sympathizers of Jesus among the Jewish leaders. Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin who was an honest seeker of the kingdom of God and had become a secret follower of Jesus. He asked Pilate if he could assume responsibility for the corpse, and after first ascertaining if Jesus were indeed dead, Pilate granted his request. This made it convenient for Pilate since he did not have to deal with disposal of the body. Nicodemus, who was also a member of the Sanhedrin, was likewise sympathetic to Jesus (cf. Jn. 7:50,51), and had come to Jesus at night to inquire about His teaching (Jn. 3:1-6). Nicodemus brought a large quantity of expensive perfumed spices to prepare the dead body with Joseph of Arimathea. Together they risked religious defilement and wrapped the corpse in a linen cloth, perfuming it with an abundance of spices of myrrh and aloes to keep down the offensive odors of death. The body was placed in an unused tomb that belonged to Joseph, located in a nearby garden. This was all completed hurriedly because the Jewish day of Preparation for the Passover was quickly approaching at sunset.

**Section 250**

**Security Arrangements - Matt. 27:61-66; Mk. 15:47;  
Lk. 23:55,56**

Just prior to the commencement of the Jewish Sabbath at sunset, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, came and observed the location of the tomb where the corpse was laid, and determined to prepare perfumed spices and ointments for the body. They returned to their residences to observe the Jewish Sabbath of rest (Exod. 12:16; 20:8-11).

Meanwhile the religious Pharisees remembered that Jesus had intimated that He would rise from the dead on the third day (Matt. 12:40; 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Jn. 2:19,20). They requested of Pilate that he authorize a security detail of Roman soldiers at the tomb to seal the entrance stone, and then guard the tomb until three days had passed. In their paranoia they conjectured that Jesus' disciples might steal His corpse and claim He had risen from the dead. Pilate granted their request and sent the guards to the tomb.



## Chapter Fourteen

# The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus

When all circumstances appeared to indicate defeat, the victory of Jesus' kingdom was poised to be expressed in a manner impossible apart from God's supernatural power. Throughout His life and ministry Jesus had sought to explain that what He came to bring was contradictory to the *modus operandi* of the entire world-system of mankind and the religion engendered therein. Jesus' kingdom was "not of this world" (Jn. 18:36). His kingdom would not operate on the principle that "might is right," but by the empowering of God's Spirit (Zech. 4:6), in accord with His divine character. In the kingdom of God in Christ the last shall be first (Matt. 19:30; 20:16), the poor will be rich (Lk. 6:20); leadership will come through servanthood (Mk. 10:43; Lk. 22:26), exaltation through humility (Lk. 14:11; 18:14), gaining out of losing (Lk. 9:24; 17:23), and life out of death (Matt. 10:30; Jn. 12:25). Such is obviously contradictory to the world's principles of power and success which the religions of the world employ.

"The new thing that Jesus brought into the world was Himself," remarked Marcion, despite his theological deficiencies. Jesus came to reveal the kingdom which was inherent in Himself. Contrary to the religious expectations of a material and militaristic Messianic kingdom prevalent in the first century, Jesus came to functionally reign as Lord and King in the lives of spiritually receptive believers. In order to thus reign spiritually and ontologically in the lives of receptive humanity,

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Jesus had to take the death consequences of sin for mankind, and then make His divine life available by resurrection and ascension. This dynamic resurrection reality of Christ's life was progressively realized by the first observers of the resurrection of Jesus as they began to participate in and express His life from Pentecost onwards.

### **Section 251**

#### **Dealing with Death - Matt. 28:1; Mk. 16:1**

Early Saturday evening, after the Sabbath observance concluded at sunset, several faithful women purchased spices to anoint the corpse of Jesus. They did so in accord with the Jewish religious customs pertaining to dead bodies. Either they were not aware of the abundant applications of perfumed ointment made by Joseph and Nicodemus, or wanted to do so as a supplement to the hurried work of Joseph and Nicodemus late Friday afternoon.

There does not appear to be any anticipation of resurrection among these ladies, despite Jesus' clear statements of such (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 26:32). To fulfill their religious duties, they approached with a funereal mind-set. Religion often has a necromaniacal emphasis which focuses on death and specializes in the funeral details of corpse preparation and disposal.

### **Section 252**

#### **Disrupted Guards - Matt. 28:2-4**

Prior to sunrise on Sunday, another earthquake (cf. Matt. 27:54) occurred, apparently at the same time as an angelic messenger rolled away the stone from the tomb. The only ones present to observe these events were the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb. They must have told the early Christians that the angel appeared like lightning with glowing white garments,

## The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus

and admitted that they fell over like dead men at the supernatural phenomenon (cf. Jn. 18:6).

### Section 253

**“He is Risen” - Matt. 28:5-8; Mk. 16:2-8; Lk. 24:1-8;  
Jn. 20:1**

Mary Magdalene and some other women arrived at the tomb at sunrise on the first day of week, Sunday. They were prepared to administer additional perfumed spices on the corpse, and had wondered how they would be able to remove the entrance stone. When they arrived they noticed that the large stone had been rolled back. They were quite frightened when they observed one or two angelic messengers, one of whom chided them for seeking the “living” among the dead. There are many today who are likewise seeking the “living” among the dead tombs of religion, unaware that Jesus is “risen” to become the life of the Christian and the Church.

It is the natural propensity of man and his religion to establish an act of violence and a victim of violence as the focal point of their belief system, and to use such to control the collective social unit formed thereby.<sup>1</sup> The religious perversion of Christianity, therefore, prefers to focus on the event of the crucifixion, rather than on the ramifications of the resurrection. The cross was the prerequisite remedial action required for the restorative action of God effected in the resurrection. In the resurrection the risen Lord Jesus becomes the unique dynamic of God as the ontological essence of Christianity. Jesus had earlier declared, “I AM the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). His resurrection-life is the dynamic reality of all that Christianity is, as He indwells those who receive His Spirit and allow Him to be the basis of their identity and activity. Religion often perceives the resurrection as but an historical event or a theological tenet without recognizing that the ontological dynamic of

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the very resurrection-life of the risen Lord Jesus is the reality of Christianity.

When the angelic messenger informed the women that Jesus was “risen” from the dead, he also reminded them that Jesus had said he would be crucified and would raise the third day (Lk. 9:22,44; 18:31,32), and then would meet them back in Galilee (Matt. 26:32). The women fled from the tomb in silence, trembling with both fear and joy at the same time.

### **Section 254**

#### **Closer Investigation - Lk. 24:9-12; Jn. 20:2-10**

The women who had seen the angels at the tomb ran to file a “missing person’s report” with the disciples. Jumping to a false, naturalistic conclusion, Mary Magdalene reported, “They have taken the Lord’s body from the tomb, and we do not know where they took it,” trying to blame either the Jewish religionists or the Roman governmentalsists as the perpetrators of the theft of the corpse.

The male disciples, retaining the social attitudes toward women that existed in Jewish religion and culture, dismissed the women’s report as female emotional hysteria; unbelievable idle talk, without substance.

Peter and John were prompted, though, to do their own investigation. John, probably the younger of the two, outran Peter to the tomb, but was skittish about entering into the place of death, as there were many religious regulations about dead bodies and the impurity of defilement by contact with such. Peter, true to his character of direct action, barged right into the tomb. He saw the cloth strips with which Jesus’ body had been wrapped and the cloth which was wrapped around His head carefully placed in a position separated from the other cloths. Quickly he realized that what he was observing was not the work of grave-robbers. Apparently the body had disappeared out of the cloth wrappings, perhaps forming somewhat

## The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus

of a cocoon. Since the cloth wrappings with their layers of perfumed ointments would have adhered like glue, there was no conceivable way that grave-robbers could have removed the wrappings and carted away a naked body.

John cautiously observed the evidence in the tomb also, recognizing and believing that something supernatural had occurred. He admits in the writing of his gospel record (Jn. 20:9) that he was not at that time cognizant of all of the Old Testament Scriptures with their types and prophecies pointing to, and finding their fulfillment in, the resurrection of the Messiah.

### Section 255

#### **A Woman is the First to See the Resurrected Jesus - Matt. 28:9,10; Mk. 16:9-11; Jn. 20:11-18**

Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus had cast seven demons, was the first to see the resurrected Jesus, when she returned to the sepulcher and was weeping outside of it. Man-made, male-dominated religion, as most religion is, would have projected a strong male figure to be first to see and believe in the resurrected Messiah, but Christianity commenced with an event that posited the equality of men and women.

Two angels inquired why Mary was weeping. Still holding to her false conclusion, she repeated, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they laid Him." The resurrected Jesus was also standing outside the tomb, and said, "Woman, why do you weep?" Mary thought it was the gardener, and being preoccupied with recovering the corpse, replied, "Sir, if you took Him, tell me where you put Him." Jesus spoke her name, "Mary!" whereupon she recognized the accent or the tone of His voice, and exclaimed in Hebrew, *Rabboni!* meaning, "Teacher!"

Perhaps because she sought to embrace and enclasp Him, Jesus exhorted her not to cling to or grasp onto His physical

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and visible presence, for He had not yet ascended unto the Father. It was as if He were saying, “Do not be satisfied simply with physical re-embodiment, for I must ascend to God the Father in order to be poured out at Pentecost in Spirit form in a completely new kind of relationship.” The ascension is the completion of the resurrection. Jesus told Mary to go back to the brethren and tell them He would ascend to God.

When Jesus vanished from visibility, Mary went to tell the disciples, as instructed, and found them mourning. They did not believe the report of the empty tomb from the other women, nor did they believe her report of having met the resurrected Lord.

### **Section 256**

#### **False Report of Religion - Matt. 28:11-15**

Meanwhile, some of Roman guardsmen went into the city of Jerusalem and informed the religious officials of the Jews what they had observed when the angel came and the tomb was opened. The religious leaders of the Jewish Sanhedrin bribed the soldiers with a large sum of money to make a false report of Jesus’ disciples having come to steal the body, even though such a report would incriminate themselves for a failure to fulfill their duty. The religious authorities indicated that they would make sure that no personal recrimination would come upon them.

Religion and its unbelief have often been guilty of fabricating falsehoods, and engaging in historical revisionism to suit its own purposes. The payment of large sums of money to propagate such falsehoods is regarded as justifiable, for they believe that the end justifies the means.

**Section 257**

**Travelers on the Road to Emmaus - Mk. 16:12,13;**

**Lk. 24:13-32**

Many people were leaving Jerusalem after the Pass-over holiday. Two followers of Jesus, Cleophas and another unnamed person, were walking on the road to the village of Emmaus. The resurrected Jesus joined them incognito. Failing to recognize Him, Jesus allows the travelers to tell Him the news of what has happened in Jerusalem in the past three days. They still believed that Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet who was murdered by Jewish leaders, but explained that they had hoped that He was the Messiah who would redeem Israel. Their religious misconceptions of how the Messiah would function had undermined their faith. It has already been three days, they explained, so there was little hope that anything would come of this. They were telling the living Lord Jesus about how the dead Jesus meant the death of their Messianic expectations. Jesus seems to have rebuked them for not understanding how the Old Testament scriptures anticipated the death and vindication of the Messiah, proceeding then to recite the scriptures of Moses and the prophets which spoke of Him, and to interpret them.

When they arrived in the village where they intended to lodge, they invited Jesus to join them (Heb. 13:2). Accepting their hospitality, Jesus then plays host. In the midst of their table-fellowship they recognized Jesus, perhaps as His pierced hands broke the bread. He then vanished. Together they remembered the intensity of that time when Jesus was interpreting the scriptures to them and showing how they pointed to Himself.

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### Section 258

#### **Returning to Report - Lk. 24:33-35**

The two disciples who had been on the road to Emmaus returned to Jerusalem to report their experience to the ten disciples who were gathered there. It was approximately a seven mile return journey. Apparently they knew where the disciples were located, cowering in fear that the religious authorities would arrest them and perhaps put them to death also. The disciples had barricaded the doors, and were refusing to admit any strangers, but they must have been acquainted with these two gentlemen, for they admitted them, and they all shared reports of the alleged appearances of Jesus that day.

### Section 259

#### **Jesus Appears to the Disciples - Mk. 16:14; Lk. 24:36-43; Jn. 20:19-25**

It was still Sunday evening and ten of the disciples were huddled together in Jerusalem behind closed doors, fearful of the temple police. After hearing the report from the two who had been on their way to Emmaus, Jesus appeared to the ten disciples in the room without entering through the door. Though Jesus gave them a greeting of “peace,” they were quite “spooked” by what they thought might be an apparition or a ghost, and they were not disposed toward peacefulness.

The disciples of Jesus were obviously not anticipating the resurrection of Jesus, even though He had told them that he would raise from the dead. Despite the reports they had heard that day, they were hard to convince! Jesus rebuked the eight disciples who had not believed Peter and John’s report of the empty tomb. He then proceeded to convince the disciples that He had returned from the dead by inviting them to see and touch the crucifixion wounds on His physical body. What they were seeing was not an apparition, but a tangible “flesh and

## The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus

blood” body. Additional attestation of such was given when He joined them in eating some fish. The question of whether Jesus’ physical resurrection body was prototypical of the resurrection body of Christians has long been debated, but it appears that most of the explanations of the scriptures indicate that the resurrection body of Christians will not be physical (cf. Rom. 8:21; I Cor. 15:39-54; II Cor. 5:1-8).

To the ten disciples present that evening, Jesus said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Although some have interpreted this to be a full impartation of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, and thus the commencement of the Church,<sup>2</sup> it is more likely that Jesus was exhorting and admonishing the disciples to be receptive to the Holy Spirit when He was made available in a full indwelling manner at Pentecost. Only at Pentecost would the “promise of the Father” (Lk. 24:49; Jn. 14:26; Acts 1:4) imbue them with divine power (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8) by the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ in order to live out and declare the resurrection reality of Christianity, and form the beginning of the Church (Acts 11:15).

Jesus also explained that in the context of having received the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples would be commissioned to announce the terms of God’s forgiveness. Only God can forgive sins (cf. Mk. 2:7), but He has done so in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), and on the basis of the resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus the disciples would proclaim such forgiveness to mankind (cf. Acts 13:38).

Despite the recitation of the events of the evening to the pessimistic Thomas, who had not been present, he was unconvinced by the reports of the other disciples. He wanted to conduct his own sensory and empirical observation of touching and feeling the crucifixion wounds in order to be convinced that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead.

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### **Section 260**

#### **Thomas is Convinced - Jn. 20:26-31**

Eight days later, the disciples were gathered again, probably in the same room in Jerusalem. Thomas was with the other ten on this occasion. The resurrected Jesus again appeared in their midst without coming through the closed door. He invited Thomas specifically to touch and feel His crucifixion wounds, and to thus cease from his unbelief. Thomas was convinced, exclaiming, “My Lord, and my God.”

Jesus went on to explain that the highest form of faith is not based on empirical, sensory evidence. By the receptivity of the Spirit of Christ, Christians through the ages have expressed faith and received Jesus as their Lord without visible evidence observable with physical eyesight.

### **Section 261**

#### **Breakfast on the Shore - Jn. 21:1-14**

Sometime in the thirty-two day period of time between the eighth day and fortieth day after His resurrection, Jesus appeared again to seven of the disciples at the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. Simon, the natural-born leader of the group had indicated that he was going fishing, and the other six disciples who were with him decided to join him. Returning from the night of fishing with no catch, they saw a figure standing on the beach. They did not recognize that it was Jesus. Jesus inquired, “Hey fellows, do you have any fish?” They might have thought that He was a fish merchant, and they answered concisely, “No.” Jesus advised them to cast the net on the starboard side in order to catch some fish. When they did so in the obedience of faith, they could not pull in the net because it was full of fish.

John, perhaps remembering a prior fishing venture (Lk. 5:4-10), told Peter that the figure on the beach was the Lord, Jesus,

and impulsive Peter jumped into the water to swim to shore. When the other disciples made shore in the boat, they all found Jesus, Who had already set a charcoal fire and prepared fish and bread. Cooking some of the 153 fish they had caught, they had breakfast with Jesus on the shore.

### **Section 262**

#### **Peter's Love Affirmed - John 21:15-23**

After breakfast Jesus asked Peter, "Simon, do you love Me more than these?" Peter must have been dreading this humiliating confrontation. He had arrogantly boasted that in comparison with the other disciples, "they might fall away, but I will always defend You" (Matt. 26:33; Mk. 14:29). Peter responded, "Yes, Lord; You know I have great affection for You," changing the Greek word for "love" in the response. Again Jesus asked, "Simon, do you love Me?" leaving off the comparison. Peter answered, "Yes, Lord: You know I have great affection for You." Peter was subdued and not willing to over-speak in false confidence. A third time Jesus asked, "Do you have great affection for Me? Peter was grieved that Jesus should question such, and said, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I have great affection for You." The purpose of this triple questioning after the triple denial of Peter would seem to be Jesus' reinstating and recommissioning of Peter in light of his failures and denials, so that none would think that he had forfeited his right to be a disciple and an apostle.

Jesus continued to explain that Peter's commissioning to be a "fisher of men" and a "shepherd of the sheep" would not be an easy task. Contrary to the unrestraint of his younger years, Peter would find himself constrained and stretched out on a cross in death. Just as He had initially invited Peter to follow Him in discipleship (cf. Matt. 4:18,19), Jesus was now calling Peter to follow Him even to the ignominious death of crucifixion (cf. Jn. 13:36,37). Tradition reports that Peter was martyred

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by crucifixion and requested that he be hung upside down rather than in the same position as his Lord.

Seeing his friend and fellow-disciple, John, Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, what about this man? What is his destiny?” Jesus politely explained that such was none of Peter’s business. Peter’s responsibility was only to be and do what Jesus demanded of him in following the Lord. If Jesus wanted John to remain alive until He returned to earth, such an hypothetical possibility would not be impossible, though Jesus was not inferring that such would be the case, as was later rumored in the early Christian community.

### Section 263

#### **The Authority of an Invested Commission - Matt. 28:16-20; Mk. 16:15-18**

Having previously designated a particular mountain on which He would meet them, the disciples kept the appointment and met Jesus there. They continued to revere Him as the resurrected Messiah, but there was still some skepticism.

Knowing that He would soon be physically departing in the ascension, Jesus commissioned the disciples to “make disciples” of all nations of people on earth. The authoritative basis for such a commissioning was inherent in His own deity, but also in the investiture of power (Rom. 1:4) that came by His mediatorial work (I Tim. 2:5) in the crucifixion and resurrection. Religion wants to invest authority in ecclesiastical leaders or in the propositional statements of an inspired book, but Jesus said that, “All authority has been given unto Me.” Authority (Greek word *exousia*) is derived “out of the Being” of the Person of the Lord Jesus, not out of positional placement of persons or propositional pronouncement. By the contingency of His authoritative Being the original disciples, and all disciples henceforth, are charged to “make disciples” who are Christians, “Christ-ones.” This is only possible as the “I AM” of the onto-

logical presence of the Spirit of Christ functions with us and in us as the dynamic provision of God unto the consummation of the age. Religion has mistakenly warped Christ's commission into a mandate of evangelistic involvement that proceduralizes the "going" and the "baptizing" and the "teaching" into proselytizing and propagandizing.

The questionable ending of Mark's gospel record indicates that supernatural authentication in the form of exorcisms, utterances, healings, etc. will accompany the spiritual transformation of men in Jesus Christ. Religion has often sought to counterfeit such as self-authentication of their endeavors.

### **Section 264**

#### **The Promise of the Father - Lk. 24:44-49; cf. Acts 1:3-8**

Meeting again in Jerusalem, Jesus taught the disciples how all things that had been written in the writings of Moses and the prophets and the psalms concerning Him had been fulfilled. All the promises of God in the old covenant have been fulfilled, realized and affirmed in the person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. II Cor. 1:20), including reference to His suffering (Isa. 53) and His being raised on the third day (cf. Hosea 6:2). Religion has often posited unfulfilled old covenant promises that have yet to be fulfilled in their variant schemes of futuristic expectation.

Jesus also sought to clarify to the disciples the meaning of the "kingdom of God" (Acts 1:4), since the disciples seemed to retain some of their traditional religious concepts of the kingdom as invested in physical Israel. There would still be a progressive realization by the disciples of the dynamic implications of the reign of Jesus Christ as King and Lord in His spiritual people.

Fuller understanding would come, though, when the "promise of the Father" in the provision of the Holy Spirit would bring all things to their remembrance (Jn. 14:26). The

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indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from Pentecost onwards would provide the divine empowering (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8) required to allow for the restoration of mankind in Jesus Christ. Declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection (Rom. 1:4), Jesus would by the power of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 15:19) cause men to be “born again to a living hope” (I Pet. 1:3) by His resurrection-life.

### **Section 265**

#### **Ascension - Mk. 16:19-20; Lk. 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12**

Jesus led His disciples up the Mount of Olives to a location near Bethany, and there He spoke words of blessing. Perhaps He was expressing His desire that they might be “blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Him” (Eph. 1:3), as would be made possible at Pentecost. The ascension departure of Jesus allowed for the Pentecostal dynamic of the Spirit of Christ to become operative in all Christians.

While speaking to His disciples, Jesus was taken up into heaven in the ascension. The disciples were still looking at the atmospheric void which was His physical departure point, when two angelic messengers appeared and explained that Jesus would someday return to earth in a second physical advent, in like manner as He had departed.

Still with limited apprehension of the spiritual realities that Jesus came to bring in Himself, the disciples worshipped Him on the mountain, and then returned joyously to Jerusalem. They made themselves available as witnesses of Christ, whereby He by the Spirit might empower them and work through them to restore mankind in Himself.

### **Section 266**

#### **Conclusion - John 20:30,31; 21:24,25**

The gospel records of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are not exhaustive biographical accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ on earth. Jesus did and said many other things which are not recorded (Jn. 20:30), and if written out in detail the world could not contain the books pertaining thereto (Jn. 21:25). What is recorded in the gospel narratives was written that mankind might “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing they might have life in His name” (Jn. 20:31).

It is not religion that man needs, but the life of Jesus Christ. He came that we might have life (Jn 10:10). He is that life (Jn. 11:25; 14:6; Col. 3:4). Jesus confronted and exposed the illegitimacy of all religion by the revealing of Himself as the only ontological reality that restores man to function as God intended man to function. Christianity is Christ!



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# Endnotes

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# HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS

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2.	The Word of God				1:1-3
3.	Light and Life				1:3-11
4.	Children of God				1:12,13
5.	Incarnation				1:14-18
6.	Genealogies of Jesus			3:23-38	
7.	Birth of John the Baptist Foretold	1:1-17		1:5-25	
8.	Jesus' Birth Foretold to Mary			1:26-38	
9.	Mary Visits Elizabeth			1:39-45	
10.	The Magnificat of Mary			1:46-56	
11.	Birth of John and Zacharias' Prophecy			1:57-80	
12.	Announcement to Joseph	1:18-25			
13.	Birth of Jesus			2:1-7	
14.	The Angels and Shepherds Praise Jesus			2:8-20	
15.	The Circumcision of Jesus			2:21	
16.	Jesus Presented at Temple			2:22-38	
17.	The Visit of the Wise Men	2:1-12			
18.	The Flight to Egypt	2:13-18			
19.	Joseph and Mary Return to Nazareth	2:19-23		2:39	

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No.	Description	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
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21.	Jesus Visits Jerusalem			2:41-50	
<b>JESUS BEGINS TO REVEAL HIMSELF</b>					
22.	Jesus Begins to Preach		1:1	3:1,2	
23.	John Preaches Repentance		1:2-6	3:3-6	
24.	John Denounces Religionists	3:1-6		3:7-14	
25.	The Coming One will Baptize and Judge	3:7-10		3:15-18	
26.	Jesus is Baptized by John	3:11,12	1:7,8	3:21-23	
27.	Temptation of Jesus in Wilderness	3:13-17	1:9-11		
28.	John Explains His Role	4:1-11	1:12,13	4:1-13	1:19-28
29.	John Introduces Jesus				1:29-34
30.	Jesus Calls First Disciples				1:35-51
31.	Miracle of Turning Water into Wine				2:1-11
32.	Jesus Goes to Capernaum				2:12
33.	Cleansing the Temple in Jerusalem				2:13-22
34.	Nicodemus Needs New Birth				2:23-3:21
35.	John Explains Jesus to His Disciples				3:22-36
36.	Jesus Goes to Galilee	4:12	1:14	3:19,20	4:1-4
37.	The Woman at the Well in Samaria				4:5-42
38.	Jesus Returns to Galilee				4:43-45
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40.	Healing a Royal Official's Son at Capernaum				4:16-30	4:46-54
41.	Rejection at the Synagogue in Nazareth					
42.	Residing in Capernaum	4:13-16				
43.	Four Fishermen Called to Follow	4:18-22				
44.	Man with Unclean Spirit Healed on Sabbath				1:16-20	
45.	Peter's Mother-in-law and Others Healed	8:14-17			1:21-28	5:1-11
46.	Preaching in the Synagogues of Galilee	4:23-25			1:29-34	4:31-37
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48.	Paralytic Lowered Through Roof and Healed	9:1-8			1:40-45	4:42-44
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51.	Why Jesus' Disciples Don't Fast like John's Disciples	9:14-17			2:15-17	5:27,28
52.	Man Healed at Pool of Bethesda				2:18-22	5:29-32
53.	Violation of Religious Sabbath					5:33-39
54.	The Works of the Father					
55.	Disciples Pick Grain on Sabbath	12:1-8				5:1-9
56.	Man With Withered Hand Healed on Sabbath	12:9-14				5:10-18
57.	Teaching and Healing by the Sea of Galilee	12:15-21				5:19-47
58.	Selecting the Twelve Disciples					
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59.	The Setting of the Sermon	5:1,2				
60.	Kingdom Blessing and Witness	5:3-12				6:17-19
61.	Kingdom Visibility	5:13-16				6:20-26
62.	Kingdom Righteousness	5:17-20				
63.	Reconciliation; Not Murder	5:21-26				
64.	Faithfulness; Not Adultery	5:27-31				

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No.	Description	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
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66.	Truth; Not Oaths	5:33-37			
67.	Grace; Not Retaliation	5:38-42			
68.	Love; Not Hate	5:43-48		6:27-30, 32-36	
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77.	Two Trees	7:15-20		6:43-45	
78.	Two Claims	7:21-23		6:46	
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106.	Parable of the Leaven	13:33-35	4:33,34	
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No.	Description	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
<b>TRAINING OF THE TWELVE</b>					
111.	Feeding of the Five Thousand	14:13-21	6:30-44	9:10-17	6:1-14
112.	Jesus Refuses to be Political King	14:22,23	6:45,46		6:14,15
113.	Walking on Water	14:24-33	6:47-52		6:16-21
114.	Visit to Gennesaret	14:34-36	6:53-56		
115.	The Bread of Life				6:22-71
116.	Defilement is From Within	15:1-20	7:1-23		7:1
117.	Daughter of Syrophenician Woman Healed	15:21-28	7:24-30		
118.	Feeding of the Four Thousand	15:29-38	7:31-8:9		
119.	Jews Continue to Seek Signs	15:39-16:4	8:10-12		
120.	Beware the Leaven of the Pharisees	16:4-12	8:13-26		
121.	Who Do You Say That I Am?	16:13-20	8:27-30	9:18-21	
122.	Jesus Foretells Death and Resurrection	16:21-23	8:31-33	9:22	
123.	Giving Up Self-concern	16:24-26	8:34-36	9:23-25	
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125.	Transfiguration of Jesus	17:1-8	9:2-8	9:28-36	
126.	Disciples Puzzled About Resurrection and Elijah	17:9-13	9:9-13	9:36	
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130.	The Greatest is as a Child	18:1-5	9:33-37	9:46-48	
131.	Tolerant of Diversity		9:38-41	9:49,50	
132.	Concern for Little Ones	18:6-11			
133.	Parable of the Shepherd	18:12-14	9:42-50		
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135.	Parable of Debt-collecting	18:23-35	
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152.	Prayer and the Friend of Man		11:1-4
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154.	Who is of the Devil?		11:14-26
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156.	Greater Than Jonah		11:29-36
157.	Pharisees Denounced		11:37-44
158.	Lawyers Denounced		11:45-54

# Jesus Confronts Religion

No.	Description	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
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160.	Parable of Rich Fool			12:13-34	
161.	Parable of Faithful Steward			12:35-48	
162.	Judgment is Coming			12:49-59	
163.	Repent or Perish			13:1-5	
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165.	People are Most Important			13:10-21	
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169.	The Master of the House			13:25-30	
170.	Herod the Fox			13:31-35	
171.	God's Banquet Invitation			14:1-24	
172.	The Cost of Discipleship			14:25-35	
173.	Concern for the Lost			15:1-32	
174.	Materialistic Religion			16:1-18	
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182.	Religious Pride				18:9-14
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No.	Description	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
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209.	Tribulations	24:9-14	13:9-13	21:12-19	
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219.	Judas Sells Out	26:14-16	14:10,11	22:3-6	
220.	Preparation for Passover	26:17-19	14:12-16	22:7-13	
221.	Disputational Disciples	26:20	14:17	22:14-16, 24-30	
222.	Serving by Washing				13:1-20
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