**Matthew Commentary**

**Matthew Chapter 1**

Mat 1:1

**“a scroll.”** For why there are four Gospels, see commentary on Mark 1:1, “the good news of Jesus Christ.”

**“the son of David, the son of Abraham.”** The phrase “the Son of David” is a messianic title, and that is why it is listed before “the son of Abraham” even though Abraham lived before King David. God had promised David that his kingdom would never end (2 Sam. 7:16), and as a response to that revelation, David prayed a wonderful and heartfelt prayer to God (2 Sam. 7:18-29).

David’s kingdom would continue forever by way of the reign of the Messiah, who would live forever. People understood this, and so one of the messianic titles was “the Son of David.” When people call Jesus “the Son of David,” they are indicating that he is the Messiah.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke use the title “Son of David,” but it does not appear in the Gospel of John due to the primacy of Jesus being the Son of God (see commentary on Mark 1:1, “the good news of Jesus Christ”). In fact, Matthew, which portrays Christ as the king, shows people using the title “the Son of David” in six different records, whereas Mark and Luke only record people using the title “Son of David” in one record, the record of the blind men Jesus healed at Jericho. In the Gospels, people used the title Son of David to either indicate they thought Jesus might be the Messiah, or they believed that he was the Messiah (cf. Matt. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31 (cf. Mark 10:47-48; Luke 18:38-39); Matt. 21:9, 15; 22:42; ).

That some people called Jesus the “Son of David” indicates they believed he was the Messiah. They would not have had any other reason to call Jesus “the Son of David” except that they thought Jesus was the Messiah and thus the true Son of David and also the “King of Israel” (John 1:49; 12:13). People would not have had any reason to think that Jesus was the legitimate linear heir to the throne of David even if they knew he was, in fact, an actual descendant of David, which he was through his mother, Mary. There would have been many descendants of David alive at the time of Jesus; Mary herself had five sons including Jesus. Yet only one of all those people could be the true king of Israel during the lifetime of Jesus because there could only be one king reigning at a time. Although Joseph was also a descendant of David, the fact that Joseph adopted Jesus would not make Jesus an actual descendant of David. Many people died very young in the biblical world, and so many children were adopted into other families, but that did not make the adopted child an actual descendant of the people who adopted them.

The Kings of Judah from David to Jeconiah, a period of some 400 years, are listed in 1 Chronicles 3:1-24. But then the kingship stopped due to the Babylonian Captivity. Thus, the descendants of David who reigned as king over Israel (or Judah) stopped with Jeconiah, the last descendant of David to reign as king (Jeconiah is also known in the Bible as “Jehoiachin” and “Coniah”). One king reigned over Judah after Jeconiah, and that was Zedekiah. He was also a descendant of David but was put on the throne illegitimately by Nebuchadnezzar. Furthermore, Zedekiah did not outlive Jeconiah, the legitimate king. In fact, after Zedekiah was dead Evil-merodach, king of Babylon, set Jeconiah on a throne—but in Babylon—where he theoretically reigned until his death as the last king of Judah (2 Kings 25:27-30; Jer. 52:31-34).

After the death of Jeconiah, even if people tried to trace the lineage of King Jeconiah to determine who was the legitimate king of Judah it could not have been done. Jeconiah had seven sons who are listed in the Bible: Shealtiel, Malchiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah (1 Chron. 3:1-34). But which son was the legitimate heir to the throne of David? No one knew and there was no way to tell. Furthermore, Jeconiah’s sons had sons, who had sons, who had sons, and so on. So in the over 600 years from Jehoiachin to Christ, no one could have possibly known who was the legitimate heir to the throne of David and thus who was the true “Son of David” and king of Israel. Once Jesus was born and recognized as the true king of Israel, his genealogy can be traced backward to discover the line of those who could have been king, but from Jeconiah forward until the time of Christ, no one knew the line of the kings of Judah.

After Jechoniah, Judah never had a Davidic king. Judah was ruled by Babylon, then Persia, then Greece, then the Hasmoneans (who were not descendants of David), then the Idumean vassal king of Rome, Herod the Great, then by a combination of Roman governors and Roman vassal kings. In fact, from Jeconiah until this day, no Davidic king has reigned in Judah. The world is awaiting the Second Coming of Christ, who is the true “Son of David” and who will set up his throne in Jerusalem and reign over the whole earth.

Because no one knew who the true Son of David was, if anyone called Jesus “the Son of David,” it was not because they knew from history and genealogy that he was the legitimate lineal heir to the throne of David, it was because they believed he was the Messiah and thus the legitimate heir to David’s throne.

Mat 1:3

**“Judah fathered Perez and Zerah of Tamar.”** The record of Judah and Tamar is in Genesis 38:6-30.

Mat 1:5

**“Rahab.”** This is Rahab the Canaanite prostitute (see commentary on Josh. 2:1).

Mat 1:6

**“(by the *wife* of Uriah)”** The parenthesis is the figure of speech epitrechon, a form of parenthesis where the statement is not itself a complete thought.[[1]](#footnote-15272)

Mat 1:8

**“Joram fathered Uzziah.”** Uzziah is also called Azariah in some places in the Old Testament. Three generations were skipped between Joram and Uzziah (cf. 1 Chron. 21:4-26:23), these were Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah.

Mat 1:11

**“and Josiah fathered Jechoniah.”** One generation was skipped here, because Josiah fathered Jehoiakim (also called Eliakim), who fathered Jeconiah (also called Jehoiachin).

Mat 1:16

**“father.”** The Greek is *anēr* (#435 ἀνήρ), and means “an adult human male.” *Anēr* is generally assumed to mean “husband” in this verse, but that cannot be the case. For one thing, the list of the three sets of 14 generations that go from Abraham to Christ (vv. 2-16), makes this impossible. If Joseph is the husband of Mary, there would only be 13 generations in the last list of “14 generations.” Also, the Aramaic text reads differently in this verse than it does in verse 19, and in verse 19 Joseph is unmistakably referred to as the “husband” of Mary. The difference in the vocabulary indicates a difference in the relationship.

The Gospel of Matthew contains the genealogy from David to Jesus via his mother Mary. In contrast, the Gospel of Luke contains the genealogy from David to Jesus via his adopted father, Joseph. There has been a lot of controversy about the genealogy of Jesus because at first reading, both Matthew 1:16 and Luke 3:23 seem to indicate a genealogy that comes through Joseph, which is confusing. For one thing, Joseph ends up with two different fathers, “Jacob” (Matt. 1:16) and “Heli” (Luke 3:23), and Mary, who is the blood link between David and Jesus, ends up having no genealogy in the Bible.

Different scholars have tried to explain how both genealogies can be Joseph’s. For example, some say that Joseph himself was adopted as a child, and thus had both a “natural” genealogy and an “adopted” genealogy. Others say that both genealogies are Joseph’s, but the contradictions between them are simply a matter of poor record-keeping in those days. Other scholars assert that both genealogies are about Joseph, but the people in them had multiple names so that the two genealogies actually refer to the same people. All these theories, and more, have been set forth to explain why Joseph seems to have two genealogies in the Bible, but they all have serious problems, which is why there are so many different theories and why none of them have been widely accepted.

As we study the genealogies, it becomes clear that Luke contains that of Joseph. Luke’s genealogy shows the ancestry of Jesus coming through King David via his son Nathan (Luke 3:31). Nathan, who is not as well-known as Solomon, was one of the four children that David fathered by Bathsheba (1 Chron. 3:5). Nothing is known about Nathan’s life except that he did have children and descendants who then multiplied in Israel, and so he is mentioned in Zechariah 12:12 as having a clan. The genealogy in Luke reads in a straightforward manner from God through Adam to Joseph the supposed father of Jesus, ending with Jesus. More evidence that Luke contains Joseph’s genealogy is that Mary is never mentioned, but the name “Joseph” appears in it three times. It often happened in the biblical culture (and modern cultures as well) that children were named after an ancestor (which was why Zechariah’s relatives wanted to name his child after him; Luke 1:59), so the fact that two ancestors in Luke’s genealogy have the name “Joseph,” but none do in the genealogy in Matthew is good support for Luke containing Joseph’s genealogy.

In spite of the fact that Luke seems to give the genealogy of Joseph in a very clear and straightforward manner, some scholars assert that the genealogy in Luke is Mary’s, not Joseph’s. The main reason they say Luke has Mary’s genealogy is that they believe, and rightly so, that Mary should have a genealogy in the Bible. They then assert that because Luke says that Joseph “was thought” to be the father of Jesus (Luke 3:23), Mary is in the genealogy in Luke even though she is never named in it. But the fact is that Mary is not named in Luke, and arbitrarily trying to make Luke contain Mary’s genealogy just so Mary will have a genealogy in the Bible is not the way to solve a biblical problem. Scholars recognize this, which is why that “solution” to the genealogical problem is not widely accepted. It seems clear that if Luke did have Mary’s genealogy, as many believe, that Luke would mention Mary and not have a cryptic statement that Joseph was the supposed father of Jesus. We believe that the Gospel of Luke can be taken at face value and that it records the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph.

Mary does have a genealogy in the Bible, and it is in the Gospel of Matthew. However, it can seem like Matthew records the genealogy of Joseph. However, if Matthew’s genealogy is about Joseph, then there are some significant problems in the biblical text. One is that Joseph would then have two contradictory genealogies in the Bible while Mary had no genealogy. An even larger problem, however, is a mathematical one. If Joseph is counted as the “husband” of Mary (Matt. 1:16), there are only 13 generations from the carrying away to Babylon to Christ, and not 14 generations, as Matthew 1:17 says there are: “So all the generations from Abraham to David are 14 generations, and from David to the carrying away to Babylon *are* 14 generations, and from the carrying away to Babylon to the Christ *are* 14 generations.”

The first set of 14 generations, from Abraham to David, are: 1) Abraham, 2) Isaac, 3) Jacob, 4) Judah, 5) Perez, 6) Hezron, 7) Ram, 8) Amminadab, 9) Nahshon, 10) Salmon, 11) Boaz, 12) Obed, 13) Jesse, 14) David.

The second set of 14 generations, from David to the carrying away to Babylon, are:

1) Solomon, 2) Rehoboam, 3) Abijah, 4) Asa, 5) Jehoshaphat, 6) Jehoram, 7) Uzziah, 8) Jotham, 9) Ahaz, 10) Hezekiah, 11) Manasseh, 12) Amon, 13) Josiah, 14) Jeconiah

When it comes to the last list of 14 generations, however, if we count the generations as they are translated in most Bibles, there are only 13 generations although Scripture says there are 14 generations. 1) Shealtiel, 2) Zerubbabel, 3) Abiud, 4) Eliakim, 5) Azor, 6) Zadok, 7) Akim, 8) Eliud, 9) Eleazar, 10) Mattan, 11) Jacob, 12) Joseph (the husband of Mary), 13) Jesus.

The problem with the list is obvious and has been pointed out by many commentators: it has only 13 generations, not 14 like Scripture says. Some scholars have tried to solve the problem by doing such things as counting names twice, but that hardly does justice to the text.

It was very important that Matthew portray a pattern of three sets of 14 generations. We know that because if we count the actual generations, there were more than just 42 people (3 times 14) from Abraham to Christ. To make the pattern fit, some people had to be left out of Matthew’s list. When the genealogy in Matthew is compared with the other genealogies in the Bible, it is clear that there are people missing from Matthew’s genealogy. For example, in Matthew 1:8, between Jehoram and Uzziah, there are actually three unmentioned generations. Jehoram begat Ahaziah (2 Kings 8:25), who begat Joash (also called Jehoash; 2 Kings 11:2, 21), who begat Amaziah (2 Kings 12:21). These three names do not appear in Matthew, and there are some other unmentioned names as well.

Although there are some names missing from Matthew’s list, it was not essential to give every name in a biblical genealogy of kings. Many genealogical lists in the Bible have names missing for various reasons. What was important to Matthew is that he set forth the genealogy of Jesus in a pattern of three sets of 14 generations from Abraham to Christ. Therefore, to have only 13 names in the last set of 14 tells us something is very wrong. But if we closely examine the list, we see that it does have 14 names, and thus 14 generations if each name represents a generation.

Mary is not usually counted in the list of 14 because she and Joseph are usually thought of as husband and wife and thus in the same generation. However, there is good evidence that “Joseph” is not only the name of Mary’s husband, but also the name of her father as well. That would not be unusual in the biblical culture, because Joseph was a common name. For example, in the Roman Catholic Bible, which includes the Apocrypha, there are 16 different people named Joseph, not counting Mary’s father, who would make 17.

If the “Joseph” in Matthew 1:16 was the father of Mary, not her husband, then there would be 14 generations from Babylon to Christ, just like Scripture says there is: 1) Shealtiel, 2) Zerubbabel, 3) Abiud, 4) Eliakim, 5) Azor, 6) Zadok, 7) Akim, 8) Eliud, 9) Eleazar, 10) Mattan, 11) Jacob, 12) Joseph (the father of Mary), 13) Mary, 14) Jesus.

That Matthew contains Mary’s genealogy and Luke contains Joseph’s genealogy makes sense because Mary’s genealogy in Matthew does not mention Joseph, her husband, who was not part of her genealogy anyway, nor does Joseph’s genealogy in Luke mention Mary, who had nothing to do with his genealogy. In Mary’s genealogy in Matthew, four other women are mentioned, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and “Uriah’s wife,” emphasizing the role that women play in a genealogy. Joseph’s genealogy in Luke does not include any women but does include two of his ancestors who were also named Joseph.

There is still one important thing to resolve. Most versions translate Matthew 1:16 to say that Joseph was the “husband” of Mary, not the “father” of Mary. However, we believe that “husband” is a mistranslation. The Greek word translated “husband” is *anēr*, and means an adult male. Usually when *anēr* is used with the phrase “of [a woman’s name], such as in “Joseph, the *anēr* of Mary,” it refers to the woman’s husband. But there is good evidence that in this verse *anēr* should be translated “father.” First, translating it “husband” creates a contradiction in the Word of God because then there are not 14 generations from Babylon to Christ. Second, it creates a confusing situation in the Word because both Matthew and Luke then refer to Joseph’s genealogy, such that Joseph ends up with two different fathers.

Thankfully, the Aramaic text of Matthew has good evidence that Matthew 1:16 should read “father.” In the Greek text, both Matthew 1:16 and 1:19 use the word *anēr* (“man” or “husband”). Matthew 1:19 clearly refers to Joseph as the “husband” of Mary because it speaks of Joseph thinking of divorcing her. However, the Aramaic text of Matthew does not use the same word in Matthew 1:16 and 1:19, but has two different words, and thus makes a distinction between the two men. In Matthew 1:16, the Aramaic word is *gavra*, which means “mighty man,” “father,” or “husband,” while in Matthew 1:19 the word is *bala*, which is “man” or “husband.” Thus the Aramaic text preserves the truth that there is a difference between the “Joseph” of verse 16, the “mighty man” of Mary, and the “Joseph” of verse 19, the “husband” of Mary.

Once we realize that “Joseph” is the name of both the father and the husband of Mary, the Word of God fits together perfectly. Both the genealogies of Mary and Joseph are in the Bible so that everyone could see they were both descendants of David and thus Jesus was indeed, “the Son of David.” Scripture also shows in other places that both Joseph and Mary are from David (Joseph: Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:27; 2:4. Mary: Acts 2:30; Rom. 1:3). Luke contains the genealogy of Jesus via his adopted father, Joseph, and never mentions Mary, who was not part of Joseph’s genealogy. Matthew contains the genealogy of Jesus through his mother Mary, and never mentions her husband Joseph. Joseph has two ancestors also named Joseph in his genealogy, while four other women are included in Mary’s genealogy. Last but not least, the three sets of 14 generations mentioned in Matthew are all complete when we realize Joseph in Matthew 1:16 is Mary’s father.

In closing, it should be mentioned that each of the Four Gospels emphasizes a different aspect of Christ’s life. Matthew portrays Jesus as the *King*, Mark as the *Servant*, Luke as the *Man*, and John as the *Son of God*. Thus it perfectly fits that Matthew traces Jesus’ royal bloodline and emphasizes Abraham who was promised the land and David the king, continuing the royal line down through David’s son Solomon. Luke, on the other hand, emphasizes the human side of Jesus, including being adopted by Joseph, and records his genealogy all the way back to Adam, the first human being.

**“Mary.”** The first time her name occurs in the NT. Here she is said to be of royal birth, and her father’s (and thus her) line is traced from none other than King David himself. Yet there is another, unspoken truth that needs to be weighed. Her “relative” was Elizabeth, who was a daughter of Aaron, the Priest (Luke 1:5). Elizabeth had to be related to Mary through Mary’s mother, who may have even been the sister of Elizabeth’s father.[[2]](#footnote-10782) Thus, in Mary we see the meeting of the King and the Priest, Jesus himself being the ultimate fulfillment of those offices.

Mat 1:17

**“are 14 generations.”** The pattern of the number 14 occurring three times is important in Matthew 1, so important in fact that it is more important than giving the accurate genealogy from Abraham to Christ, because in several places generations have been skipped (cf. Matt. 1:8, 11, 12). When we count the last 14 generations, Mary is number 13 and Jesus Christ is number 14, showing us that Matthew is giving Mary’s genealogy, while Luke 3 gives us Joseph’s genealogy.

Mat 1:18

**“Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way.”** The record of the events surrounding the birth of Christ occurs in Matthew and Luke, and the two Gospels interweave when it comes to the chronology of the events. If you want to read about the birth of Christ in chronological order, it is: Luke 1:5-80; Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-38; Matt. 2:1-22. Then Matt. 2:23 and Luke 2:39-40 are both summary statements about Jesus growing up in Nazareth.

**“birth.”** The Greek noun is *genesis* (#1078 γένεσις), and strictly speaking, it means “origin, source, or beginning.”[[3]](#footnote-26919) It is from the verb, *ginomai* (#1096 γίνομαι, pronounced 'gin-o-my), which means “to become, to come into existence, begin to be.” We get the English word “genesis” from *genesis*. *Genesis* also became used for that which flows from what is begun, hence it was used to express the concept of “nature,” or “natural” (cf. James 1:23; 3:6). Since we usually think of the birth of a person as his or her “beginning,” *genesis* was used by the Greeks of birth. However, there is a much more accurate Greek verb for “birth,” and that is *gennaō* (#1080 γεννάω, pronounced ghen-'nah-o), and the nouns associated with it are *gennētos* (#1084 γεννητός, pronounced ghen-nay-'tos, meaning “born”) and *gennēsis* (#1083 γέννησις, pronounced 'ghen-nay-sis; meaning, “a birth”). The two words, *genesis* and *gennēsis*, are very similar, which has led to some confusion in Matthew 1:18, because although the earliest and best Greek texts have *genesis*, origin, some later manuscripts, have *gennēsis*, birth.

Textual scholars have concluded that the most original reading of the Greek text of Matthew 1:18 is *genesis*, meaning, beginning or origin. Bruce Metzger writes:

“Both γένeσις [*genesis*] and γέννησις [*gennēsis*] mean “birth,” but the former also means “creation,” “generation,” and “genealogy” (compare 1.1), whereas the latter means more strictly “engendering”…. In the present passage not only do the earlier representatives of several text-types support γένεσις [*genesis*], but the tendency of copyists would have been to substitute a word of more specialized meaning for one that had been used in a different sense in verse 1, particularly since γέννησις [*gennēsis*] corresponds more nearly with the verb γεννᾶν [*gennan*] used so frequently in the previous genealogy.”[[4]](#footnote-22920)

Although the substitution of *gennēsis* for *genesis* in some Greek texts (which led to *gennēsis* being the Greek word in the text from which the King James Version was translated) may have been completely accidental, it might also have been purposeful. Trinitarian scribes may have been uncomfortable with the idea that Jesus’ “origin” was when God impregnated Mary, and so might have substituted what was to them a much clearer word, *gennēsis*, which would then clearly make the subject of Matthew 1:18 be only Jesus’ birth, not his real “beginning.” The word *genesis* points to the fact that God impregnating Mary not only led to Jesus’ birth but was in fact his “origin” or “beginning.” He had been in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world but did not exist in any form except as part of God’s plan. When God impregnated Mary, Jesus “began” in reality, not just in the mind of God.

It is part of the doctrine of the Trinity, and also the teaching of some other people such as Arians, that Jesus existed in some form before he was physically conceived in Mary. They teach that Jesus existed either as a spirit like God or an angel or even as a physical being. That is not the case. Jesus was in the mind of God before his birth. He was part of God’s plan, but he did not exist in any other form than that. The theological term, “preexistence” was coined to support the doctrine of the Trinity and describe Jesus’ state before his birth, but “preexistence” is not in the Bible and is an invented nonsense term. Things either exist or they don’t; there is no such thing as “preexistence,” that is, something existing before it exists.

Theologians could use a different term to support Jesus’ existence before his conception in Mary, such as “preincarnate,” but that is also an invented non-biblical term, and they would still have to prove that Jesus existed as the Son of God before he was physically created when God impregnated Mary. But Scripture does not support the claim that Jesus existed before his conception in Mary.

Part of that lack of support is that Jesus is called “the Son of God.” Jesus is the Son of God, so He could not exist until God had a Son, and the conception of God’s Son occurred when God impregnated Mary. There is no other verse of Scripture anywhere that says that Jesus was conceived at any other time or place than when he was conceived in the womb of Mary. Trinitarians say that Jesus was “eternally begotten,” but that is also an invented nonsense term and unsupported by Scripture. The term “eternally begotten” is internally contradictory because, by definition, anything “begotten” (i.e., “born”) had a time at which it was born. Nothing eternal is “born.” If Jesus is eternal, then he was never born. If he was born, then he is not eternal. The term “eternally begotten” was invented to support the Trinity and is never used in any other context.

Since the Bible clearly calls Jesus the “Son,” and even the only begotten Son, there has to be a time when he was begotten. That being the case, we can search the Scripture and see when Jesus was begotten. When we search, we find that there is only one time when Jesus was conceived, and that was when God impregnated Mary, and only one time when Jesus was “begotten,” and that was when Mary gave birth to Jesus, making Mary the mother of Jesus.

That leads us to another proof that Jesus did not exist before his conception in the womb of Mary: for Jesus to be the “begotten Son,” there had to be a mother. If Jesus was “eternally begotten,” or born at any other time besides when Mary gave birth to him, who gave birth to him? Jesus cannot be “eternally begotten,” or even begotten at all if no one gave birth to him. “Begotten” means “born,” and if no one gave birth to him, then he was never “begotten.” But then who would be the mother that gave birth to him before Mary? There is no such mother-being and no such birth in Scripture.

It would be possible for God to create Jesus without there being a mother, just as He created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. However, that would make Jesus the first being of God’s creation. But that would be problematic because the Bible says that Jesus “was born from the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3). But if Jesus preexisted his earthly life as God, and then “incarnated” into Mary, then he would not have been an actual descendant of David.

Matthew 1:18 is very clear that the origin “of Jesus Christ happened this way,” which is that God impregnated Mary who later gave birth to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. If Christ was born before Mary gave birth to him, then the Scripture should say, “the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way: before time began God gave birth to him.” But there is no Scripture that says anything like that. Scripture is clear. The “way” that Jesus was born was that God impregnated Mary, and Jesus himself was born as a fully human being, which is why he is called “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45).

Jesus was the plan of God for the salvation of God’s people from before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8) and prophecies of his suffering go back to early Genesis (Gen. 3:15). Yet the plan that became reality in Jesus did not become that reality in the flesh until Jesus was conceived in Mary. Jesus is clearly called a “man” in the Bible, and furthermore, one “who has been tempted in every way just as *we are*” (Heb. 4:15).

Also, 1 Timothy 3:16 says that part of Jesus’ coming was that he was “seen by angels.” That phrase and that event are important and are properly placed in 1 Timothy 3:16 if the angels had never seen Jesus until he was born. But if Jesus existed before he was born, then of course the angels would have seen him, and seen him for millennia, not just when he came in the flesh, and according to some Christians, Jesus even created the angels. The reason that it was so important to insert the phrase “seen by angels” in 1 Timothy 3:16 is that Jesus Christ is not only the savior of people, but the savior of the whole universe, which is in bondage due to sin (cf. Rom. 8:19, 22). Once Jesus was born, then the angels could see him.

Also, Hebrews 1:1-2 says that it is in these last days that God spoke to us through His Son. But if the Son is the “angel of Yahweh,” as many Christians believe, or if he existed from the time of Adam and Eve, then Jesus has been speaking to us for millennia, in fact, he spoke to us even before most of the prophets that Hebrews 1:1 is speaking about were born.

The biblical evidence is that Jesus was the plan of God, and it was in that sense that he was the Messiah from the foundation of the world. Furthermore, Jesus’ being the plan of God before he was a reality in the flesh is also what is said about the Christian Church, of which the Bible says that “he [God] chose us [the Church] in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). The Church did not exist physically when we were chosen, but we were chosen in the plan of God, and the Messiah, Jesus Christ, was chosen that same way.

Adding up the biblical evidence makes the situation clear. Jesus was the plan of God to atone for the sins of the world long before he existed. Jesus began his physical existence when Mary conceived in her womb, and thus when Jesus was born he was literally “the Son of God.”

[For more on Jesus being a fully human person, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on the gift of holy spirit and the Trinity, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“Joseph.”** Not much is said about Joseph in the Bible, but there are things said about him that give us important information about him and thus about Jesus (see commentary on Matt. 13:55).

**“before they came together she was found *to be* with child.”** Mary was likely 14 or so when she was impregnated by God (see commentary on Luke 1:31). The phrase “before they came together” is an idiom for coming together in sexual intercourse.

**“from the Holy Spirit.”** The Greek reads literally, “of Holy Spirit,” which in this context is the genitive of origin, thus the translation “by.” Mary was impregnated “by” or “from” God. “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8.

The Bible has many names that refer to our One God, who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of the Hebrew names for God are: *Yahweh*, *Elohim, El, Elyon, Adonai,* and *Shaddai.* In the New Testament, He is referred to as *Theos* (God). Furthermore, the attributes that are used as names for God include: “the Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8. Greek is *pantokrator*); “the Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:9,13, 22); “the Blessed” (Mark 14:61); “Father” (Ps. 68:5; Eph. 1:2); “Judge” (Judg. 11:27); “King” (Ps. 5:2; 47:6; 1 Tim. 1:17); “Yahweh of Armies” (1 Sam. 1:11; 17:45); “the Mighty One” (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 132:2; Isa. 1:24); and “the Rock” (Deut. 32:18; Isa. 30:29; Hab. 1:12). Moreover, God is holy (Isa. 6:3; John 17:11), so He was also known as “the Holy,” which is usually translated in English Bibles as “the Holy One” (2 Kings 19:22; Job 6:10; Ps. 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isa. 1:4; 29:23; Luke 1:49; John 17:11). Sometimes “Spirit” is combined with “holy,” and God is called “the Holy Spirit,” *pneuma hagion*. In fact, holiness and “spirit” are so essential to God that it would be strange if “the Holy Spirit” were not one of His names. Thus, in Acts 5:3, Peter told Ananias, “You have lied to the Holy Spirit,” whom he identified in Acts 5:4 as “God.”

Every name of God emphasizes a different aspect of His character. Calling God “the Ancient of Days” magnifies His age and timelessness; calling him “the Blessed” magnifies the blessings He gives and receives; calling Him “the Rock” magnifies His stability and invulnerability. Similarly, since “spirit” is used of invisible power, when God is called “the Spirit,” or “the Holy Spirit,” it emphasizes His invisible power at work. The Gospels say that Mary was impregnated by “the Holy Spirit,” (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35) because that name emphasized God’s power at work. That “the Holy Spirit” is a name for God and not a separate being is why Jesus is always called “the Son of God” and never “the Son of the Holy Spirit.” There is no reason to make “the Holy Spirit” into a separate “Person.” We do not make any of the rest of God’s names into other “Persons,” and the Jews never made “the Spirit” in the Old Testament into another person. There is one God, and He has many names. Every use of “the Holy Spirit” can be explained as being a name for God without once making “the Holy Spirit” into another “Person” [we must, however, differentiate between “the Holy Spirit,” which is another name for God, and “the holy spirit,” which is the gift of God’s nature that He gives to believers; cf. Acts 2:38).

[For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Here in Matthew 1:18, there is not a definite article before “Holy Spirit.” The preposition *ek* is before the phrase. In Greek, if a preposition precedes a noun, the noun can be definite without specifically adding the definite article; the subject and context are the final arbiters. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.”[[5]](#footnote-10615) A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use *ek*.[[6]](#footnote-30398)

[For more on God the Father being called “the Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on Jesus being a fully human person, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Mat 1:19

**“Joseph.”** For more on Joseph and his trade as a builder, see commentary on Matthew 13:55.

**“husband.”** The Greek word is *anēr* (#435 ἀνήρ), and generally refers to an adult male. It can refer to a man in contrast to a woman (Acts 5:1; 8:12); a man in his role as a husband (Mark 10:12; Luke 2:36; Acts 5:9; thus sometimes the translation “husband” is acceptable); and a man in contrast to a boy (1 Cor. 13:11). Sometimes it was used universally when both men and women were present, “men” being inclusive of men and women because men were more visible in the culture and women were sheltered (Luke 11:32; James 1:20). Similarly, “man” was used in a way equivalent to “someone” or “a person” even if there was no specific need to refer to the sex of the person (Luke 9:38; John 1:30; Rom. 4:8). Matthew 1:19 is a case where culturally “man” (or “husband”) is used because, in the conservative Eastern biblical culture to which Joseph and Mary belonged, a betrothal (engagement) was as strong as the marriage, so strong, in fact, that it had to be dissolved by divorce, as this verse makes clear. Thus, in the eyes of the people, Joseph was the “husband” of Mary, even though the two had not yet been through the marriage ceremony. This verse is a case where trying to translate *anēr* as “fiancée” or “betrothed” causes problems because then the reader is left wondering why a divorce was necessary to break the engagement. It is better to translate the Greek more literally and then learn the biblical culture. This approach promotes a better understanding of the entire Bible.

**“and *yet*.”** From Joseph’s point of view, his betrothed had unfaithfully slept with another man while still out of wedlock. He is now facing his legal options, out of his just nature desiring to fulfill the Law, and yet also desiring not to shame Mary. His options would be to either institute a lawsuit against Mary or issue her a certificate of divorce, dismissing her quietly. According to the Law, if a husband finds his new wife has had premarital sex, she should be stoned (Deut. 22:20-21). Joseph does not seem to be afraid that Mary will be stoned to death, however, instead, he wished to save her from “public disgrace.” The reason for this is that by this time, death by stoning could not be accomplished in court (cf. John 18:31: “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death”). As Hendriksen explains: “This law had been modified by so many man-made restrictions that this possibility could be safely dismissed, [yet, instituting a lawsuit] would nevertheless have exposed Mary to public disgrace and scorn, the very thing which Joseph wanted by all means to avoid.”[[7]](#footnote-13001) The only other option for Joseph is what is described in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. He could quietly issue her a certificate of divorce because he “found indecency” in her, and Mary could leave him and “become another man’s wife” (Deut. 24:1-2). Joseph wanted to allow her to go quietly and marry whom he presumed to be the man she had slept with. This would preserve her from public disgrace and, technically, fulfill the righteousness of the law prescribed in Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

Mat 1:20

**“But after he considered these things.”** Joseph apparently fell asleep after considering the situation, and it was while he was asleep that the angel appeared to him in a dream. The verb “considered” is an aorist participle, which normally carries with it the idea of a concluded action (cf. CSB, NIV).

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού). The second-person singular aorist middle imperative of *eidon* (εἶδον; “to see, to look at, to perceive) is ἰδοῦ (note the special accent mark on the “u”). However, when *idou* has an acute accent (ἰδού) as it does in this verse and many others in the New Testament, it is used as a demonstrative particle to draw our attention to something. To be strictly literal we would stick with translations that retain the meaning of seeing something (“Look!”; “Behold!”; “See!”). But ἰδού was used more idiomatically than literally, and thus would be heard by anyone listening as an attention grabber appropriate to the context, not a command to actually look at something. We do the same thing in English. If someone is being accused of being somewhere he was not supposed to be, he may well say, “Look, I told you I was home, and I was.” In this case, the man does not expect us to see anything just because he said “Look.” In the same way, *idou* should be translated in ways that are appropriate to the context. Thus it is best translated “look” or “behold” if the context is visual, “Listen” if the context is audible, “Pay attention,” etc. It often introduces something new or unusual, or something that requires special attention. In that light, there are contexts in which “consider” would be an appropriate translation (cf. Matt. 10:16).

As with any exclamation meant to get people’s attention, the force and meaning of the exclamation *idou* would be expressed by the tone and volume of the way it was spoken. Thus there are times when *idou* is clearly meant to forcefully grab our attention—an angel just showed up with a message about the birth of the Messiah, and we had better pay attention. On the other hand, there are times when the context dictates that it would have been used with less force but still deep meaning. For example, in Matthew 19:27, Peter is reminding the Lord that he and the other apostles have left everything to follow him. It is a gentle reminder, so a harsh attention grabber such as “Pay attention!” would not be an appropriate translation in that context, but perhaps “consider,” or even “remember” (cf. Matt. 28:20). Often the punctuation associated with *idou* can help express the meaning, there being a difference in force between “Look,...” and “Look!”

Many translations of the English Bible (cf. NIV, NRSV, HCSB) omit the word, usually on the logic that it is based on an underlying Semitic expression and does not bring meaning to the subject. We disagree, and note that BDAG says that it is “frequently omitted in translation, but with some loss of meaning.” In fact, we agree with Bullinger that it is the figure asterismos (“indicating;” related to “asterisk”), and calls attention to the subject.[[8]](#footnote-21096) This can be seen by simply noting that it is not used in every speech or before every interesting or important event, but is carefully placed and when it does occur it always is appropriate.

[See Word Study: “Asterismos.”]

**“take.”** At this point, Joseph would naturally have presumed his wife had been unfaithful. Since Joseph was “righteous” (Matt. 1:19), he would be obligated to put her away and not take her to himself after she had been “defiled” (Deut. 24:4; See commentary on Matt. 1:19; “and *yet*”). In this context, the angel appears and tells Joseph not to fear to *paralambanō* (#3880 παραλαμβάνω) his wife. This word is usually translated as “take” or “receive,” but can also have the meaning of *accept favorably*: “Sometimes the emphasis lies not so much on receiving or taking over, as on the fact that the word implies agreement or approval, *accept.*”[[9]](#footnote-20794) Hence, the angel is assuring Joseph that he may accept his wife, not fearing any defilement. Additionally, the word would come with the strong connotation of “taking to one’s self” or receiving Mary into his house (as in Matt. 1:24).

**“because the child who has been conceived in her.”** The conception of Jesus Christ, i.e., when God impregnated Mary, was the actual beginning of Jesus Christ. He had been foretold in prophecy and thus expected since Genesis, but now he was actually conceived and was alive as a human being.

[For more information on Jesus being a true human, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“the Holy Spirit.”** “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. In this case, there is not a definite article before “Holy Spirit” due to the preposition *ek* before the phrase, making the definite article unnecessary.

[For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’” Also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Mat 1:21

**“Jesus.”** Jesus is the Greek form of the name “Joshua,” which means “Yahweh saves.” It was a common name at the time of Christ. The angel would have spoken to Joseph in Hebrew or Aramaic because the phraseology is Semitic,[[10]](#footnote-32665) and the name “Jesus” means “Yahweh is salvation.” The angel explains the name “Jesus” by saying, “for, he will save his people from their sins.” “Jesus” is the same name in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, as “Joshua” in the Old Testament, something that has caused some confusion in some modern versions. For example, in the King James Version in Acts 7:45 and Hebrews 4:8, the Old Testament man Joshua is mistakenly called “Jesus.” Joshua was one of the types of Christ in the Old Testament and there are some profound parallels between Joshua and Jesus.

It should be noted that “Jesus” is the English name of the man Jesus, and the name is spelled and pronounced differently in different languages. In Hebrew, the name is *Yeshua* or *Yehoshua* (the shorter and longer form of the name), in Greek the name is *Iēsous* (approximately pronounced Ē-ā-sous; Greek has no “Y” or “J”), in Latin the name was *Iesus* (from the Greek, and also approximately pronounced Ē-ā-sous), in English the name is “Jesus” (the letter “J” was invented for English in 1524), in French the name is *Jésus* (pronounced Jézu), in Spanish the name is *Jesús* (pronounced Hay-'soos). In some English-speaking Christian circles it has become fashionable to call Jesus “Yeshua,” but that is not “more holy” than using his name in the vernacular of one’s own language, thus “Jesus” in English. In fact, there is little doubt that when Jesus was alive on earth, the people around him (including his family, who were most certainly bi-lingual and likely even tri-lingual) called Jesus by different names depending on whether they were dominantly Hebrew (like many rabbis), Aramaic, Greek or Latin (like Pontius Pilate). Jesus knows his name and answers people who call out to him no matter how his name is spelled or pronounced in the language of the one calling to him.

**“because he.”** The pronoun “he” is in an emphatic place in the Greek text since it is put as the very last word in the sentence for emphasis. That would only be confusing in English, so we would have to use capital letters or bold letters. We might say, “Because **HE** will save his people from their sins.”

**“sins.”** In this context, to be saved from sin is multifaceted. The major emphasis is a metonymy of effect, where “sin” is put for the effect of sin, i.e., the consequences of sin, which is death. In saving people from their sin, Jesus saves people from everlasting death. Jesus Christ came to give people everlasting life, as Scripture attests in many places. Also, however, Jesus saves people from sin in many other ways, including changing their life so that they do not continually live in sin and its consequences, and forgiving sin so people do not have the weight of sin on their shoulders.

[For more on sin, what it is, and what it does, see commentary on 1 John 1:7, “sin.”]

Mat 1:22

**“with the result that.”** The Greek reads *hina plērōthē* (ἵνα πληρωθῇ), which is the conjunction *hina* followed by the verb for “fulfilled” in the subjunctive mood. Although the conjunction *hina* can have several different meanings, in general, it either introduces a purpose clause (“so that,” “in order that”) or a result clause (“with the result that,” “resulting in”). The fact that the *hina* can be translated either way leaves the door wide open to the theology of the translator. If the translators believe that God is totally in control of what people do and the events of history, then they use “so that” or “in order that.” Thus the BBE (Bible in Basic English) says, “Now all this took place so that the word of the Lord by the prophet might come true.” In other words, according to that translation, the events surrounding the birth of Christ happened the way they did “so that,” or for the purpose of, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy. But that is not the correct way to think about history and man’s free will decisions.

God works with our free will and in history such that what we do by our free will fulfills what He foretold. No person is forced to act in such a way that Scripture is fulfilled. Rather, God is so knowledgeable and skillful that what happens fulfills what He has written, not the opposite. What happens results in His Word being fulfilled, not that He writes and then forces events to occur “so that” His Word is fulfilled.

**“the Lord.”** “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh (see commentary on Matt. 3:3).

Mat 1:23

**“Behold! The virgin will be pregnant and will give birth to a son, and they will call his name Immanuel.”** This quotation is much closer to the Septuagint than the Hebrew text. For example, the Hebrew text has the phrase “is pregnant,” while the Greek text has the phrase, “will be pregnant.” Also, the word in the Hebrew text which gets translated “virgin” means “young woman,” not specifically “virgin.” Thus, Isaiah 7 spoke of a “young woman” being pregnant and, furthermore, pregnant at that very time, not more than 700 years later: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread [Syria and Israel] will be deserted” (Isa. 7:14-16 NRSV). Historically, Syria and Israel were both attacked and conquered by Assyria shortly thereafter.

The prophecy and imminent fulfillment of Isaiah 7 during Isaiah’s time is why even very spiritual Jews like Joseph and Mary were not expecting a virgin birth. When the angel told Mary that she was going to give birth to the Messiah, she was very surprised that it was going to be a virgin birth. She said to the angel, “How will this be, seeing I am not knowing [not currently having sex with] a man” (Luke 1:34).

When the Hebrew text was translated into Greek about 250 BC, making the version we know as the Septuagint, the translators translated the Hebrew word *almah* (#05959 עַלְמָה), “young woman,” as *parthenos* (#3933 παρθένος). The Hebrew word *almah* refers to a “young woman” but not necessarily a virgin. Similarly, there is good evidence in Greek literature that the word *parthenos* does not specifically refer to the virginity of the woman or man. Rather it refers more to their age as being young (*parthenos* with the masculine pronoun refers to a young man). Liddell and Scott[[11]](#footnote-17400) give references to when *parthenos* was used of young married women. Also, some scholars say that if strictly “virgin” was meant, then *parthenois* would have been used instead of *parthenos*.[[12]](#footnote-13720) That the Septuagint reads *parthenos* in Isaiah 7:14, but the Jewish people did not think their Messiah would be born of a virgin, is quite conclusive evidence that the word *parthenos* did not have to refer to a virgin, even though it could refer to one.

Mary was certainly a young woman, thus an *almah* and a *parthenos*, and she was also a virgin. We know she was a virgin, not from the meaning of the word *parthenos*, but from the clear statements in both Matthew and Luke where Mary is referred to as a *parthenos.*

Many commentators have written about Isaiah 7:14 and how the vocabulary and the context are not about a virgin birth but about a birth that would occur in Isaiah’s time, and that is true. Easily available commentaries include J. P. Lange’s commentary and the commentary on the Old Testament by Keil and Delitzsch. English versions such as the Revised Standard Version read “young woman” instead of “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14, and that is the proper way to translate the Hebrew text (other versions that read “young woman” include: BBE, CJB, NAB, NET, NJB, NRSV, RSV, *The Complete Bible: An American Translation*; and the *Moffatt Bible*).

We can tell from Matthew that the prophecy in Isaiah, which referred to a young woman, had a second fulfillment in Jesus Christ. We must remember that it is God who prophetically tells the future, and God can shape His prophecies so that they fit multiple situations, even if unbelievers or over-zealous Christians deny a double fulfillment. Interestingly, unbelievers usually agree that the prophecy was fulfilled in Isaiah’s time and deny the fulfillment in Matthew, while over-zealous Christians deny the fulfillment in Isaiah’s time and invent reasons why the only fulfillment is with the birth of Christ.

When it comes to Isaiah 7:14, it is like Hosea 11:1 in that it involved two fulfillments. What we should be aware of when it comes to prophecies that are fulfilled twice, is that once it is fulfilled the first time, the only way people can see a second fulfillment is if God tells them about it, like He does with Isaiah 7:14 or Hosea 11:1.

[A good, but technical treatment of Isa. 7:14 is in *The Bible Translator*, July 1958, “A Study of Isaiah 7:14,” by Robert G. Bratcher.]

It fits perfectly within the scope and purpose of the book of Isaiah that the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 would have a second fulfillment in the birth of Jesus Christ, because Isaiah and his children are specifically said to be “signs” (Isa. 8:18). Just as the prophet Isaiah foretold the birth of a son who would be born in his own time and be associated with the deliverance of Judah, so the prophecy also was fulfilled by a son who would be born centuries later who was associated with the ultimate deliverance of Judah.

As the New Testament makes clear in Matthew and Luke, Mary was impregnated by God. In fact, the very reason Isaiah is quoted in this context is because it is the second and ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah. That is why Matthew 1:22 says, “Now all this took place with the result that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet [Isaiah] was fulfilled.” If Mary’s having a son did not fulfill Isaiah, then it would not have been appropriate to quote it as Matthew quoted it. Matthew 1:22 shows that Mary’s being impregnated by God fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14.

[For more clarity on Matt. 1:23, see commentary on Isa. 7:14.]

**“Behold!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. Although the literal meaning of *idou* relates to visual perception (seeing), it was used idiomatically, and thus should be translated in ways appropriate to the context, such as “look,” “listen,” “pay attention,” “consider,” “remember,” etc. Many translations of the English Bible (cf. NIV, NRSV, HCSB) do not translate *idou*, but in doing so miss the meaning that it is bringing to the context. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Immanuel.”** One of the names of Jesus Christ is “Immanuel,” which can be translated as, “God with us” or “God is with us.” We know that God was with us in Jesus Christ, and Jesus himself said that if one had seen him, he had seen the Father. Names are often symbolic, the meaning of the name importing some characteristic that God wants us to know. When Jesus is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5), the Lamb of God (John 1:29), or the tent peg (Zech. 10:4), God is importing characteristics about Jesus that He wants us to know. When it comes to Immanuel, God wants us to know that through Jesus Christ, God was with us. Not with us literally, but acting powerfully through His Son, just as 2 Corinthians 5:19 indicates: “That God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself” (NKJV). It is important to read exactly what was written: God was **in** Christ, not God **was** Christ.

Symbolism in names can be seen throughout the Bible, it is not something that is unique to Jesus Christ. Many people were given names that would cause great problems if they were believed literally. Are we to believe that Bithiah, a daughter of Pharaoh, was the sister of Jesus because her name is “daughter of Yahweh?” Are we to believe that Eliab was the real Messiah since his name means “My God [is my] father?” Of course not. It would be a great mistake to claim that the meaning of a name proves a literal truth. We know that Jesus’ name is very significant—it communicates the truth that, as the Son of God and as the image of God, God is with us in Jesus, but the name does not make Jesus God.

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on a name being significant but not necessarily a literal truth, see Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord*, also, A. Buzzard and C. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*; Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition*; D. Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals.*]

**(which is translated as “God with us”).** The parenthesis is the figure of speech epitrechon, a form of parenthesis where the statement is not itself a complete thought.[[13]](#footnote-12924)

Mat 1:24

**“took *Mary* as his wife.”** The phrase “took Mary as his wife,” or as the KJV has it, “and took his wife to himself,” does not mean that Joseph married or consummated his marriage to Mary that very morning. It simply means that he immediately started the process by which he would be married.

Mat 1:25

**“know her *sexually*.”** Matthew 1:24 says Joseph took Mary home as his wife, but Matthew 1:25 makes it clear that he did not have sexual intercourse with her until after Jesus was born. Mary’s being pregnant would not have stopped her from having sexual intercourse, so why would they have waited until after Jesus was born? Before we answer that question, we need to be sure we correctly understand what this verse is saying.

In both Hebrew and Greek, the word “know” was a common idiom for having sexual intercourse (cf. Gen. 4:1; 1 Kings 1:4), even including rape (Gen. 19:5; Judg. 19:25). Other idioms for sexual intercourse include, “go into” (2 Sam. 3:7), and “go near; approach” (Exod. 19:15 ESV, NAB), “be with” someone (2 Sam. 13:20), “uncover the nakedness” (Lev. 18:12); and sometimes “see the nakedness” (Lev. 20:17).

The Hebrew word “know” that is used idiomatically for sexual intercourse is the common word *yada* (#03045 ידע), which is used well over 800 times in the Old Testament. Its first use in the Bible for sexual intercourse is Genesis 4:1, and it is used many other times that way (cf. Gen. 4:1, 17, 25; 19:8; 24:16; Judg, 11:39; 19:25; 1 Sam. 1:19; 1 Kings 1:4). In the Greek New Testament, the word “know” is the common word *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω), which occurs more than 200 times and is used of “knowing” someone sexually in Matthew 1:25 and Luke 1:34. The association between sex and “knowing” was most likely made because modesty and sexual privacy are normal parts of our humanity, so if we become sexually intimate with someone, we “know” them in a unique and personal way. Interestingly, throughout the ages, spies have used the special connection and intimacy that comes with “knowing” someone sexually to get to know other things about them, including top-secret information, because knowing a person sexually often leads to intimate knowledge in other areas as well.

From a lexical viewpoint, “knowing” someone sexually, which involves intimate and experiential knowledge, is quite close to the ordinary semantic range of the word “know,” which includes thorough or experiential knowledge as well as just intellectual knowledge. For example, when the Bible says that Jesus “knew” no sin (2 Cor. 5:21 KJV), it is not that he did not have intellectual knowledge of sin, but rather that he had no experiential knowledge of sin. Similarly, when Romans 3:17 says the wicked have not “known” the way of peace, it is not saying that the wicked do not know what peace is, but they have not experienced it. It is possible that “know” as an idiom for sexual intercourse came into the Greek language after the Greeks conquered Israel and Egypt, because “know” is used for sexual intercourse from the time of Alexander the Great down. In any case, “know” shows up as an idiom for sexual intercourse in the writings of Greek authors such as Menander of Athens, Hiraclides, Plutarch, and the apocryphal book of Judith.[[14]](#footnote-22802)

It has been suggested by at least one theologian that “know” refers to sexual intercourse that results in conception, but that is not accurate, something that can be seen by studying the Hebrew and Greek writings and lexicons. In the OT, verses such as Genesis 19:8 and Judges 19:25 clearly make a separation between sexual “knowing” and conception. Similarly, in the New Testament in Luke 1:34, when the angel tells Mary she will be pregnant, she replies, “How will this be, since I am not knowing a man” (literal translation). In Luke 1:34, the verb “know” is present tense, active voice, which indicates action that is currently going on in the present. Thus, when Mary told the angel she was not “knowing” a man, she was saying she was not actively having sex at the time, in her case, because she was not married. It is clear from Mary’s statement to the angel that she did not think “know” included conception. Furthermore, verses such as Genesis 4:1, 17 and 4:25, show that the “knowing” and the conception were two separate events because the verses say that the husbands “knew” their wives and also say they “conceived.” If “know” included conception, then adding the phrase “and she conceived” would have been inappropriate.

The question remains as to why Joseph did not have sexual intercourse with Mary until after Jesus was born, and the answer is both simple and profound. He wanted there to be no doubt in anyone’s mind that Jesus was not his child. Today we track pregnancies with a precise knowledge of when the baby will be born, and women who have only been pregnant for a couple of months speak of their “due date” months away. In our world of precise due dates and DNA paternity testing, Joseph could prove he was not Jesus’ father. However, things were much less clear in the ancient world. For example, Sarah Pomeroy notes that the exact period of gestation was not known in ancient times, and she writes, “Some Romans believed that children could be born seven to ten months after conception, but that eight-month babies were not possible.”[[15]](#footnote-21406) There was just no way Joseph could conclusively prove that he was not Jesus’ father if he had sexual intercourse with Mary before Jesus was born. In fact, the uncertainty about paternity was one reason kings did not let women leave their harems, even if they were no longer interested in them, and why David wanted his first wife Michal to be in his harem even though he had other wives and she had married another man during the years David was running from Saul (2 Sam. 3:13-15). If a woman who had been with a king had a baby, it could be set forth as an heir of the king without there being a way to disprove the claim. And even if the paternity was unlikely, no king wanted to take the risk of having a possible heir and rival out causing trouble.

Joseph was a godly and honorable man, and did not want to cast any doubt on the fact that God was the father of the Lord Jesus Christ, so he and Mary restrained their passions and acted in the best interests of God and Jesus, waiting until after Jesus was born to have sexual intercourse. Matthew 1:25 makes it clear that the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was indeed a virgin birth, one of the great miracles in history, and because Joseph and Mary waited to have sex, we can be sure that God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[For more on the idiomatic sense of “know,” see commentary on Gen. 3:22. For more on the idiomatic sense of other words such as “remember,” see commentary on Luke 23:42.]

**Matthew Chapter 2**

Mat 2:1

**“Now after Jesus was born.”** This phrase should have done away with any thought that the Magi belong in any manger scene, or are associated with the night of the birth of Christ in any way. The Magi did not even arrive in Jerusalem, much less Bethlehem, until after Jesus was born. They were not present with Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds on the night of Jesus’ birth. The verb “born” is *gennaō* (#1080 γεννάω) and it is an aorist participle in the Greek text, meaning, “having been born,” which is how Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible translates it. In English, we would usually not say, “Jesus, having been born,” but would more likely say, “after Jesus was born” as does the HCSB, ESV, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, and NRSV. We learn from history and Herod’s killing the children up to two years old that the amount of time “after” Jesus was born was likely close to a year and a half.

The record of the events surrounding the birth of Christ occurs in Matthew and Luke, and the two Gospels interweave when it comes to the chronology of the events. To read about the birth of Christ in chronological order, it is: Luke 1:5-80; Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-38; Matt. 2:1-22. Then Matt. 2:23 and Luke 2:39-40 are both summary statements about Jesus growing up in Nazareth.

**“Bethlehem of Judea.”** The ancient tribal territories of the twelve tribes had given way to the kingdom of Herod, and other kingdoms before that. Nevertheless, the Bethlehem in which Christ was born was in the tribal territory of Judah, and thus the prophecy that Christ would be from the tribe of Judah was important to emphasize, which was done by saying that the city was Bethlehem of Judea. There was also a Bethlehem in Galilee in the tribal territory of Zebulun, and that must not be confused with Bethlehem of Judea.

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. Although the literal meaning of *idou* relates to visual perception (seeing), it was used idiomatically, and thus should be translated in ways appropriate to the context, such as “look,” “listen,” “pay attention,” “take notice,” “consider,” “remember,” etc. Many translations of the English Bible (cf. NIV, NRSV, HCSB) do not translate *idou*, but in doing so miss the meaning that it is bringing to the context. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Magi.”** The Greek word *magoi*, correctly translated as “Magi,” (Matt. 2:1 NIV) is a plural proper noun referring to people of a specific religious group that existed in the ancient Near East, most specifically the area of ancient Media and Persia. Although by the time of Christ there were groups of Magi in other countries, such as Egypt, these Magi came “from the east,” so it is almost certain they were from Parthia, which is north and east of Israel. Much has been written in encyclopedias and Bible dictionaries about their origin, history, and beliefs, so that need not be repeated here, however, it is important to know that at least some Magi were looking for a Messiah who would conquer darkness and restore justice in the world.

The NASB and NIV are two modern versions that say “Magi,” while other modern versions retain the designation “Wise Men” (KJV, ESV, NRSV). Magi, especially their leaders and priests, were considered to be wise and even to have occult powers, so the translation “Wise Men” might at first seem to be a fitting translation, but it is far too broad a term to communicate the meaning of the word “*magoi*.” After all, there were many wise men in the ancient world, just as there are today, whereas the Magi were a specific group. A good comparison might be if Catholic Cardinals from Rome came to visit Jesus but we only knew them as, “Good Men from the West.” The designation might be true, but it would not give us important and accurate information about them. The title “Wise Men” does not tell us who the Magi were, but their proper title does. Similarly, calling them “kings,” as in the song verse, “We three kings from orient are…,” only confuses the record. They were not kings.

Perhaps the most important reason to refer to these men by the name “Magi” is so we can see their relation to the religious group that was at one time led and instructed by Daniel. In the late 500s BC (Jerusalem was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, and Daniel was promoted shortly after that) Daniel was made ruler over the Magi, although this is not as clear as it could be because the book of Daniel says “Magicians,” and Daniel is referred to as “chief of the Magicians” (Dan. 4:9; 5:11; cf. Dan. 2:48 NIV). Although there is no proof for it outside the Bible, it seems certain that Daniel instructed the leaders of the Magi about the Jewish origin of the true Messiah.

As the centuries passed after the birth of Christ, the true knowledge about the Magi was replaced by superstition and tradition, and this has persisted in spite of the fact that it contradicts what is clearly written in Scripture. For example, the Magi did not follow a star to Bethlehem. No super-bright, westward traveling celestial phenomena appeared in the sky and went from Parthia to Bethlehem. The “star” they saw was not an unusual celestial object, but a unique occurrence of planetary conjunctions and appearances that, viewed by themselves and considered individually, would not have grabbed anyone’s attention—which explains why only the Magi, diligent astronomers, and observers of the heavens, showed up in Judea asking where the new king had been born. We have to keep in mind that in a culture in which a substantial part of the population lived in tents or spent a lot of time outdoors, any unusual event in the heavens got a lot of attention. The fact that there was no such attention at the time of Christ is good evidence that to an untrained observer, the heavenly events were normal.

These Magi were astronomers, and it seems quite certain that the “star” they saw was a series of celestial events, including stars, planets, and conjunctions, especially involving the “king planet” Jupiter.[[16]](#footnote-21100) Before telescopes were invented, planets, stars, novas, and comets were all called “stars,” and before the invention of modern devices for measuring their movement, ancient astronomers tracked the timing and position of the stars by when they were first visible over the horizon. We know the Magi used this technique because it was a usual procedure, and also by what they said when they reached Jerusalem: “For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him” (Matt. 2:2 ESV). The ESV does a superb job of translating the phrase “when it rose.” The Magi were watching the stars and noting their relation to points on the horizon, to each other, and to the constellations in which they appeared. Eventually, they saw patterns that convinced them the Messiah had been born (see, “in its rising” below).

The Magi would have traveled to Jerusalem by joining a trading caravan that was heading in that direction. It was unsafe to travel in small groups, especially carrying valuables across the international border between the enemy countries of Rome and Parthia. We do not know how long the journey took, but it likely would have taken several months or even more (Parthia itself is hundreds of miles across, and we do not know exactly where they started their journey). The trip from Persia (Parthia in New Testament times) to Jerusalem took Ezra four months (Ezra 7:9), and the Magi could easily have taken about as much time.

Also, the Bible does not say how many Magi came to see Jesus. Tradition says three, but that idea comes from the three kinds of gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts were all fitting for a king, and each could easily be sold or bartered, so they would greatly help Joseph and his new family. It is not likely that each Magi individually brought “a gift,” like we would bring “a gift” to a birthday party. The three gifts would have been presented as a collective offering from the Magi who made the journey and from the people they represented back in Parthia, who put together the gift. There were almost certainly many more than three Magi who made the trip. For one thing, the purpose of the trip was to pay homage to the long-awaited Messiah, and many devout people would have wanted to be part of that event. Furthermore, the trip was long and dangerous, and it was standard procedure in those days to travel with a large number of people for protection.

Another good reason to believe there were more than three Magi is that when they arrived in Jerusalem, King Herod and “all Jerusalem” were disturbed at their coming (Matt. 2:3). To fully appreciate this, we need to remember that Herod and Jerusalem were not disturbed when, about a year and a half earlier, shepherds announced that they had seen angels and that the Messiah had been born (the chronology of the year and a half is explained in the books by Martin and Wierwille mentioned earlier, and is why Herod killed all the babies two years old and under). When, however, a group of Magi arrived from Parthia and wanted to know where the Messiah was born, that got the attention of Herod and Jerusalem, and upset them greatly.

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, neither they nor King Herod knew where to find the young Messiah. Herod had to call the priests and experts in the Law to find out where the Old Testament said the Messiah would be born (Matt. 2:4). They told him that the book of Micah (Mic. 5:2) foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, so that is where King Herod sent the Magi (Matt. 2:4-8). Bethlehem is seven miles (11.2 km) south of Jerusalem, and the Magi did not travel there the day they got an audience with King Herod. Even at two miles per hour, the journey would have only taken three and a half hours, and we can conclude from the biblical record that they returned to where they were staying and prepared to make the journey the next day. It was usual for caravans to get started very early in the morning, while it is still dark, and that is what they did.

When the Magi headed out for Bethlehem, the “star” they had observed back in Parthia “went before them” (Matt. 2:9 KJV, ESV). It is important to remember that these Magi did not follow the star to Bethlehem, they were already going there. Thus the “star” did not lead them to Bethlehem. They rejoiced at seeing it because it seemed a confirmation of the godly purpose of their journey, to meet and pay homage to the new king. The evidence is that the star that seemed to go in front of them was the planet Jupiter, which at that time was in the southern sky.[[17]](#footnote-28607) As it rose in the sky, it became more and more directly south, the very direction they were heading, and thus appeared to be “going before them.” Finally, as it reached its zenith (high point) in the sky south of them, it “stood” directly over Bethlehem, which was also south of them (by the way, astronomers still use the same language today, saying stars “rise,” “stand” and “set”).

Seeing Jupiter going before them caused great joy among the group. Although they certainly would have known Jupiter was visible in the sky, they did not know where the Messiah was to be born, or where Bethlehem was, and thus would not have known the star would also seem to go before them. To the untrained eye, there was nothing in the sky that morning that would have been a cause for rejoicing, which accounts for the fact that there were not large crowds of people traveling south along with the Magi.

Bethlehem was a small village, and houses in such villages of the ancient Near East were all crowded together, so nothing in the sky could point out an individual house. This is more evidence that the star did not lead the Magi to the Messiah. Nevertheless, the Messiah would be easy to locate in Bethlehem, thanks to the shepherds, who had told the whole town about him. All the Magi had to do was ask, and everyone would remember the baby who the shepherds had announced so joyfully was the promised Messiah and whose parents were both of the line of David.

Upon finding the “child” (Jesus was not a “baby” anymore; Matt. 2:11), the Magi paid homage to him and presented their gifts. The Magi were not stupid, and Herod had a reputation for killing potential rivals, so they asked God for guidance as to what to do after they found the Messiah. This fact is not clearly stated in most English Bibles, but the Greek word translated “warned” in most of them was usually used of a divine instruction or warning that came to people who asked for guidance from an oracle. The Magi asked God what to do, and He warned them not to go back to Herod, so they went home by another route (Matt. 2:12).

Likely right after the Magi left, Joseph was also warned by God to flee the area, which he did, going down to Egypt (Matt. 2:13, 14). This is another piece of evidence that shows the Magi were not present at the birth of Jesus, but long after. Herod and the powers in Jerusalem had ignored the shepherds, and so after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary stayed in Bethlehem. They completed the 40 days of cleaning and the sacrifice required by the Law of Moses (Luke 2:22-24; Lev. 12:1-8).

However, after the Magi left Judea, Herod was furious and would have moved very quickly to do away with this new potential rival for his throne. There is no way that Joseph and Mary could have then stayed around for 40 days without Herod finding and killing both them and Jesus. This accounts for the urgency in the angel’s message to Joseph: “Get up…take the child and…escape to Egypt.” “Take” and “escape” are in the imperative mood; they are firm commands, and Joseph acted on them immediately (Matt. 2:13 NIV).

Another way we know the Magi came to see Jesus long after his birth is that when Mary offered a sacrifice for her cleansing after giving birth, she offered two doves or pigeons (Luke 2:24), but this was only allowable if a person could not afford a lamb (Lev. 12:8). If the Magi had come and given the family gold, they could have afforded a lamb. Thus it is clear that the Magi did not arrive until at least 40 days after Jesus was born, and it was very likely closer to 18 months based on the time the Magi gave to King Herod.

The truth about the Magi teaches us a lot. We see the great patience and faithfulness they had, passing down the information about the Messiah generation after generation, waiting over 500 years for him. That should remind us to pass on our knowledge of God’s Word to the next generation. We see the great risk the Magi were willing to take, carrying valuables hundreds of miles across an international border to pay homage to the Messiah, and the value of the gifts they brought indicates how thankful they were for him. They remind us that living a godly life often involves risk, and also that prayer, Bible study, worship, and financial support of the Church may not be easy or convenient, but the same Lord who was worthy of the sacrifice the Magi made is worthy of our sacrifice of time, money, and energy.

[For more on the actual story of the birth of Jesus, see the REV commentary on Luke 2:7 about there being no space in the guest room, and see Luke 2:8-18 about the shepherds who came to see Jesus.]

**“from the east.”** The Greek word translated “east” is *anatolōn* (ἀνατολῶν), the plural of *anatolē* (#395 ἀνατολή), which is translated “when it rose” in the next verse, verse 2. *Anatolē* is one of the Greek words that usually has a different meaning if it is singular than if it is plural. In the singular, as in verse 2, it usually refers to the “rising,” but when plural it usually refers to the direction, “east.”

[For more information on “when it rose,” see the REV commentary on Matt. 2:2.]

**“arrived.”** Using this particular word and employing it in the aorist tense emphasizes the arrival of the Magi. If the text were going to emphasize the *travel* it would have used the word for “came” in the imperfect tense. But here we have the word *paraginomai* (#3854 παραγίνομαι) in the aorist, the word for an arrival or making a public appearance.[[18]](#footnote-22321) Holman captures the sense of the emphasis and translates it “arrived unexpectedly,” which makes the point, but perhaps too strongly; the translation “arrived” seems the best choice. The trip from Persia to Jerusalem took Ezra exactly four months (Ezra 7:9), and the Magi would have taken about as much time.

The Magi would have arrived in Jerusalem as part of a caravan of camels, and there would likely have been hundreds or even thousands of camels. Caravans of hundreds, and thousands of camels were common because they traveled with valuable goods and needed the large numbers for security. Britannica.com, the website of Encyclopedia Britannica (accessed Dec. 2019) says, “The size of the caravan was dependent upon the amount of traffic, the insecurity of the route, and the availability of camels. The largest recorded caravans were those for special purposes, such as the Muslim pilgrim caravans from Cairo and Damascus to Mecca, which might include over 10,000 camels, or the trans-Saharan salt caravans from Taoudenni to Timbuktu or Bilma or Aïr. Even in its decline in 1908, this latter caravan numbered 20,000 camels.”

The caravan routes across the ancient Near East passed by dozens of areas controlled by separate tribal groups, many of which enriched themselves by preying on smaller groups or groups that were not prepared to defend themselves against attack. The only defense against such tribes was size and strength, so a large camel caravan was essential for safety. It is worth noting that in Genesis 27:40, in Isaac’s prophecy over Esau, Isaac said, “By your sword you will live.” Nahum Sarna writes about that prophecy: “Edom shall subsist, not from pastoral or agricultural pursuits, but from violence and pillage, raiding its neighbors and plundering the caravans that pass through its land.”[[19]](#footnote-30469)

Two things we don’t know about the Magi’s coming to Jerusalem are how many Magi traveled to Judea, and how long a time the trip took. According to the book of Ezra, the trip from Persia—Parthia in New Testament times—to Jerusalem took four months (Ezra 7:9), and it is likely that the trip of the Magi took at least that long. This was not a short trip for the Magi, but a trip of many months. We also do not know how many Magi traveled to Judea. The camel caravans were usually composed of a mixture of people, all traveling together for safety, and the Bible does not say how many Magi were in the caravan, so we just don’t know. However, considering that these Magi were going to see the one they considered to be the Savior of the world, we can expect that there was a large number of them. A large number would also contribute to why Herod and “all Jerusalem” were troubled by them and the question they asked the king.

Mat 2:2

**“Where is he?”** This is the first question in the New Testament and is appropriate guidance for all believers. The Messiah, the “King of the Jews” is the source of everlasting life, and so finding him and believing in him is the most important thing a person can do. This life is short and difficult, and to just live it and die is unsatisfying, to say the least. Everlasting life in a new, glorious body with wonderful people in a wonderful place is available, and wise people take advantage of the opportunity to live forever by confessing Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9).

It shows God’s mercy and grace that the first people in the New Testament to seek the Messiah were Gentiles, not Jews. Salvation and everlasting life through Jesus Christ are available to anyone.

“**who has been born king of the Jews?”** When the Magi got an audience with King Herod, they asked him, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? (Matt. 2:2 NIV). Herod was deeply troubled by what the Magi said (Matt. 2:3). Herod was paranoid about anyone replacing him, and the Magi had said this new king was “born” king of the Jews. In contrast, Herod had not been “born” the king, but was appointed king of the Jews by the Roman senate. Herod certainly knew that there were prophecies of a Messiah/king who was going to be “born” of the lineage of David and that he would rule Israel, and the thought that that Messiah/king had been born and would certainly replace him deeply upset Herod.

**“when it rose.”** Most Bible versions say the Magi saw the star, “in the east,” instead of “when it rose.” However, studies have shown that when the Greek reads like it does in the Greek text of the New Testament, *en tē anatolē* (ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ) in the singular, it has a special astronomical meaning. That meaning is, “when it rose” or “at its rising,” referring to a heliacal rising, that is, when a star appears on the horizon in the early dawn before sunrise. The reason it was important to be able to see a star when it first rose was that the horizon line gave a point of demarcation that made it easier to see where it was in relation to other stars, as well as how far north or south it was when it rose in relation to other times it appeared. When the Greek reads *en tē anatolai* (in the plural), then it means “in the east,” but in the Bible the phrase is singular, referring to a heliacal rising.

Although “in the east” is not the most accurate translation of the Greek text, it does tell us that most English Bibles give enough information to dispel some of the traditional mythology that has arisen about the Magi. In other words, if we would just read the Bible carefully, many traditions could be dispelled. For example, the Magi did not see the star in the western or southwestern sky—the direction of Jerusalem from where they lived. If they traveled toward the “star” that they saw “when it rose” (or, “in the East”), then they would have traveled eastward to India. Also, there is no verse that says they “followed” the star to get anywhere. The idea that they “followed” the star comes from an old tradition that was popularized by Christmas music. The Magi saw celestial events that led them to conclude that the Jewish Messiah had been born in Israel. Therefore, they made a decision based on logic and knowledge, and went to Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, and asked the king where to find this new Messiah. Matthew 2:1 makes it clear they came to “Jerusalem,” not to Bethlehem. There they got an audience with King Herod, who directed them to go to Bethlehem.

**“pay homage to him.”** The Greek verb that is translated as “pay homage to” in the REV and as “worship” in many English versions is *proskuneō* (#4352 προσκυνέω). Something that causes confusion to the modern English reader, and especially Trinitarians, is that it is a convention in many English Bibles that the same Hebrew and Greek words are translated “worship” when referring to God or Jesus Christ, but “bow down to” or something similar when the person is showing respect to another person. Translating the Hebrew and Greek words for worship and respect one way when humans are involved and another way when God is involved may be an acceptable translation practice, but it almost always gives the English reader the wrong impression, which is that only God or Jesus was “worshiped.”

This phrase is usually translated as “worship him,” and the reason for translating it “pay homage to him” is explained in Word Study: “Worship.” See the REV commentary on 1 Chron. 29:20 for more on how humans can be rightly “worshiped.”

Mat 2:3

**“deeply troubled.”** How deeply troubled Herod was, and how dangerous that made life for Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus, can be seen from history. Herod was a suspicious, jealous, and evil man, and the group of Magi arriving in Jerusalem from Parthia and asking where the new king was born got his attention right away. Herod had a reputation for being ruthless in getting what he wanted and maintaining his authority. Early in his political career, before he was king of Judea, he was appointed by Antipater, under the rule of Cassius, to collect taxes, something at which he was so successful that Cassius appointed him ruler of Coele-Syria, a region of the Roman province of Syria, which was much larger than Syria today. Herod had to fight a number of wars and conflicts to come to the throne, as well as ingratiate himself to a number of leaders, some of whom he had even fought against. As it turned out, he was a brilliant tactician and could also read people very well, and thus he preserved and even increased his power when others would have likely been executed.

Herod was ruthless in getting rid of anyone he thought of as a rival of any kind. Over his life, he married ten women and so had many children and relatives that plotted against him and each other, which resulted in the death of a number of his relatives and children. For example, he had his brother-in-law, the High Priest, drowned in a swimming pool. He executed his wife, Mariamne, because of suspicions against her, and had her mother executed for plotting against him. Other sons were executed as well. Caesar Augustus is reported to have made the pun, “I would rather be Herod’s pig (Greek ‘*hus*’) than his son (Greek ‘*huios*’),” because Herod, acting Jewish, would not eat pork so his pigs got to live.

As it became certain that Herod was going to die very soon from the disease that ended his life, he summoned leaders of the Jews from all over his kingdom to come to Jerusalem. But when they arrived he imprisoned them in the hippodrome with orders that they all be killed the day he died so that day would be a day of mourning for the Jews instead of a day of rejoicing. However, when news of Herod’s death arrived in Jerusalem the guards let the men go free.

Herod’s reign was so ruthless and bloody that his having the children around Bethlehem killed to protect his throne from a potential rival did not even make it into the history books and is only mentioned in the Bible.

Mat 2:4

**“high priests.”** In Old Testament times the High Priest served for life. However, that custom had been changed for political reasons, such that at the time of Herod (and at the time of Christ’s crucifixion) there was more than one High Priest. Furthermore, it seems that members of the High Priest’s family also could be called high priests.[[20]](#footnote-26460)

**“the People.”** The Greek is *ho laos*, (ὁ λαός). The word “people” can mean different things in the Bible, depending on the context. It can refer to a specific group, and often refers to the Jews, the “people” of God.[[21]](#footnote-11099) When it is used of the people of Israel, it becomes a specific designation of the Jews and as such can be capitalized. Many scriptures use “people” as a designation of the Jews. (cf. Matt. 2:4, 21:23, 26:3, 47; Mark 14:2; Luke 19:47, 22:66; John 11:50; Acts 3:23, 4:8, 25, 7:17, 26:17, 23; Rom. 15:11; 2 Pet. 2:1) In many cases the REV translation has capitalized “People” to make it clear to readers that the Jews as a specific group are being referred to. However, there are also many scriptures that use “the people” that do not clearly refer to Israel, and when the exact designation is in doubt, we have left “people” in lowercase.

**“he inquired of them where the Christ would be born.”** Like many leaders, even supposedly religious ones, Herod did not know the Bible and did not know where it said the Christ would be born. The religious leaders knew that the prophet Micah said the Christ would be born in Bethlehem of Judah (Mic. 5:2) but at the time of Christ the Bible had neither chapters nor verses; the religious men simply had to know the scrolls well enough to find it.

Mat 2:5

**“In Bethlehem of Judea.”** The full name, Bethlehem of Judea, was necessary because there was another Bethlehem in Galilee in the tribal area of Zebulun (cf. Josh. 19:15). Micah 5:2 said the city was Bethlehem in “Judah,” because at the time Micah wrote, the tribal territory of the tribe of Judah had not been compromised. It had been attacked but was still intact. In contrast, when the religious leaders spoke with King Herod, the tribal territories were not in use, and the tribe of Judah had become part of the larger territory of “Judea.” “Judea” was the Greco-Roman designation of southern Israel, which included the original tribal territory of Judah, but also included a larger land area. Since the religious leaders were talking to Herod about territory that he was king over, they used the designation that he would have known and used, which was “Judea,” not “Judah.”

**“the prophet.”** That is, the prophet Micah (Mic. 5:2).

Mat 2:6

**“And you, Bethlehem.”** This verse is quoted from Micah 5:2, but with some significant alterations that make the application to New Testament times and the Messiah more vivid. This is common with quotations; often quotations are changed such that they are better understood as long as the original meaning is not lost. For example, Micah reads “Bethlehem Ephrathah,” whereas Matthew reads “Bethlehem in the land of Judah.” Also, Micah uses “clans” (literally, “thousands”) whereas Matthew uses “leaders” who represent the thousands. Also, Micah uses the word for “rule” whereas Matthew uses “shepherd,” which fits with both the Old Testament and New Testament use of “shepherd” for a ruler.

**“in the land of Judah.”** Some translations read “Bethlehem, in the land of Judah” (e.g., ESV, NIV) and some read, “Bethlehem, land of Judah” (e.g., ASV, NASB). The Greek word for “land,” *gē* (#1093 γῆ), has the same form for the dative (“in the land”) and vocative (“O land” [direct address]) cases. The dative, “Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,” is correct; for “Bethlehem, land of Judah” does not make sense. When Joshua divided up the Promised Land, the town of Bethlehem was in the tribal territory of Judah (Josh. 15:1-12).

**“are by no means the least among the leaders of Judah.”** Understanding this phrase involves understanding a custom that the leader of a city often represented the city.[[22]](#footnote-29638) The Author is expecting that the reader will see that the city of Bethlehem is important and eventually its leader will be the one who shepherds all of Israel, not just the people from Bethlehem. Although there is a temptation to make “leaders” into “ruling cities” (cf. NLT), that does not catch the fullness of the prophecy which combines the thought of the ruling city with the ruler himself.

Mat 2:7

**“the time when the star appeared.”** Herod called this meeting secretly, to avoid arousing any more interest among the people about the birth of a new king, who many of the people would have suspected was their Messiah. Furthermore, Herod tried to hide his true intention—killing the child—from the Magi by not asking, “How old would the child be,” but only seeming to be interested in the star and its various appearings. The Magi were almost certainly not fooled; why call a secret meeting to ask about the appearances of a star?

It helps us to properly understand this verse when we remember that in biblical times, before the invention of the telescope, the word “star” was used for many things in the heavens, including stars, planets, novas, and asteroids. Herod wanted to know the timing of the “star,” in order to ascertain how old the child must be (cf. Matt. 2:16). In this verse we find evidence for the view that the “star” was a prolonged astronomical event(s), rather than a one-time past appearance seen in the east, then miraculously appearing again to lead the Magi in Matthew 2:9. The text uses the word *chronos* (#5550 χρόνος) to describe the timing of the star, and *chronos* usually refers to “an indefinite period of time during which some activity or event takes place, *time, period of time.*”[[23]](#footnote-20746) Literally, the verse reads, Herod “determined from them the period of time of the appearing star.” *Appearing* is in the present tense, indicating a continual action; the star was “continuously shining” (*phainō* [#5316 φαίνω]) over an indefinite period of time. Hence, the way most translations go, “the time the star had appeared,” captures the sense of what Herod wanted to know (when the star first appeared), but unfortunately misses the fact that the star appeared over a period of time, and was still appearing when Herod spoke to the Magi. At this point, we believe that the best candidate for the “star” was the planet Jupiter in its various positions and in various associations with different stars and planets.[[24]](#footnote-15174)

Mat 2:8

**“sent them to Bethlehem.”** Note that the Magi did not go to Bethlehem because they were following a star, as tradition says. They were going to Bethlehem because the Word of God said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and so that is where King Herod sent them.

**“search diligently for the child.”** Herod understood from the times given to him by the Magi that by this time Jesus was not a baby (*brephos*, #1025 βρέφος) but a “child,” (*paidion*, #3813 παιδίον). Sure enough, the Magi found the “child” in a house in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:11).

**“as soon as.”** The word *epan* (#1875 ἐπάν) can mean “when” or “as soon as,” (BDAG; see also NIV, Rotherham). Herod’s eagerness to get rid of the competition for his throne makes the translation “as soon as” the best choice.

**“pay homage.”** See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

Mat 2:9

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. Although the literal meaning of *idou* relates to visual perception (seeing), it was used idiomatically, and thus should be translated in ways appropriate to the context, such as “look,” “listen,” “pay attention,” “take notice,” “consider,” “remember,” etc. Many translations of the English Bible (cf. NIV, NRSV, HCSB) do not translate *idou*, but in doing so miss the meaning that it is bringing to the context. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“The star that they had seen when it rose.”** The fact that this verse points out that this “star” (or planet) was the one “they had seen when it rose” in the eastern sky when they were in the area of Babylon seems to indicate that they had not seen it on their journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, which could have been the case. For one thing, they may have been traveling during the day.

**“was going ahead of them until it came and stood over where the child was.”** As the Magi headed south to Bethlehem (Bethlehem is 7 miles south of Jerusalem), the “star,” the planet Jupiter, was rising in the southern sky. So it appeared in the sky ahead of them, and in the hours that they traveled, likely about three hours, it rose in the sky, seeming to go ahead of them toward Bethlehem, and it was “before” them, always in the southern sky. As the Magi were arriving, the “star,” Jupiter, reached its zenith in the southern sky and thus was directly over Bethlehem. The astronomical phraseology used in the Bible is still used by astronomers today.

The timing of the star in the sky shows us the Magi would have gotten up in the early morning, before light, and traveled south. This was very common. Often travelers got an early start and then stopped traveling and rested when the sun was hot. They would have arrived at Bethlehem right around dawn. The fact that the Magi started in the early hours of the morning when it was still dark is evidence that the Magi were not traveling in the middle of winter.

The fact that the “star” was the planet Jupiter, the “king planet,” would have been obvious to the Magi, who were astronomers and who rejoiced greatly, but entirely unnoticed by the average person. If the “star” had been an unusual celestial event, thousands of people would have been watching and waking their neighbors, and Bethlehem would soon have been overrun by curiosity seekers. Tradition is silent on why only the Magi seemed to notice the mysterious star that stood over Bethlehem, but the answer is logical and beautiful.

Mat 2:10

**“rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”** The Greek text contains the figure of speech polyptoton, the repetition of the same word but in different parts of speech. Here, the word is “joy,” appearing in both noun and verb forms, emphasizing the great joy of the Magi.[[25]](#footnote-12590) Although in English “rejoiced” and “joy” are separated, in the Greek text they are together, *echarēsan charan* (ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν; “rejoiced [with] joy). The Magi were excited to see the star. When they traveled to Jerusalem to meet with King Herod, they had no idea where in Judea the Messiah was born. It could have been west towards the Mediterranean Sea; east towards the Jordan River, back north towards Gibeah, the hometown of King Saul, Israel’s first king—the Magi had no idea where in Judea they would be directed to go. When they were told to go south to Bethlehem and then saw the star in front of them, that was very exciting to them.

[See Word Study: “Polyptoton.”]

Mat 2:11

**“house.”** The Magi were not at the birth of Christ. They came over a year later. Joseph and Mary were in a “house,” but the Scripture does not tell us whether they were staying with someone else or had their own house by then. Bethlehem was a small town, and the Magi would have had no trouble finding the right house. No one would have forgotten what the shepherds had said less than two years earlier when Jesus was born, how angels appeared to them and said the promised Messiah had been born.

**“child.”** The Greek is *paidion* (#3813 παιδίον), which means “young child.” Jesus was no longer a “baby,” which is the Greek *brephos* (#1025 βρέφος), as he was in Luke 2:12, 16. Now, at over one year old, he is a young boy.

**“with Mary his mother.”** The Magi no doubt saw Joseph too, but Matthew’s focus is on the Messiah himself, and the woman who was divinely impregnated by God. Thus the record mentions Jesus and Mary, but not Joseph.

**“paid homage.”** See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

**“treasure boxes.”** The Greek word simply refers to a container of some kind that holds a treasure. It could have been treasure boxes or treasure bags, the word is too general to be sure. Although some versions have “treasure chests,” that brings to mind visions of pirate treasure chests and so clouds the idea of what these containers would have actually been like. For one thing, they would have not been overly large, which would have attracted attention. It would have been better to have more smaller containers than a few large ones to avoid too much curiosity about them. Also, Joseph left with them that night and took them to Egypt with him and his family, so they could not have been really large. It also makes the point, however, that the Magi likely left Joseph with a donkey or camel so that he could travel with his new possessions.

**“gold and frankincense and myrrh.”** These gifts were all valuable and easy to trade for goods or sell for more spendable cash. Although many people believe that three gifts were mentioned so there must have been three Magi, that is not the case. For one thing, the Magi would have arrived in Jerusalem as part of a caravan. There would have almost certainly been hundreds of camels, but frankly, given the extent of the journey and the fact they were crossing an international border between unfriendly countries, Parthia and Rome, there would have been thousands of camels. This was common because the caravans traveled with valuable goods and needed large numbers for security. *Encyclopedia Britannica* says, “The size of the caravan was dependent upon the amount of traffic, the insecurity of the route, and the availability of camels. The largest recorded caravans were those for special purposes, such as the Muslim pilgrim caravans from Cairo and Damascus to Mecca, which might include over 10,000 camels, or the trans-Saharan salt caravans from Taoudenni to Timbuktu or Bilma or Aïr. Even in its decline in 1908, this latter caravan numbered 20,000 camels.”[[26]](#footnote-12164)

Also, the Bible never says how many Magi traveled to Judea. The Magi would likely only have been a small contingent within the caravan. Ulrich Luz writes: “The number three appears to have been established for the first time by Origin [although]…in the Syrian Church one often assumed that there were twelve Magi who traveled to Jerusalem with a large retinue.”[[27]](#footnote-31925) Tradition has even assigned names to the “three kings,” and although the names were different at different places, the Armenian tradition is the generally accepted one, and the names Gaspar (or Caspar), Melchior, and Balthasar, first appear in the sixth century.[[28]](#footnote-11852) To name the Magi is just to heap tradition on top of tradition.

Camel caravans were generally composed of a mixture of people, all traveling together for safety, and the Bible does not say how many Magi were in the caravan. However, these Magi were making this long and somewhat dangerous journey to see the one they considered to be the Savior of the world. Also, the gifts they were carrying were very valuable, which meant they not only had to be guarded from outside attack, but also from unscrupulous thieves within the caravan itself. Given all that, it certainly seems there would have been many Magi on the trip, all of them wanting to see the Savior. Also, a large number of Magi would help explain why not only Herod but “all Jerusalem” was disturbed when the Magi arrived (Matt. 2:3). So saying there would have been several dozen Magi would not necessarily be overstating the case.

The gold, frankincense, and myrrh were gifts that were fit to bring a king, and the Magi brought them in containers, but what kind of containers is not described in the text. Likely it was in bags or small boxes.

**“frankincense and myrrh.”** Frankincense and myrrh were two of the more common types of incense used in the ancient world. The Magi brought incense, which made a wonderful gift because it was very portable, quite expensive, and easy to sell. Incense of various kinds was used in all kinds of things, for example in most temples, and places of worship, and also it was burned regularly in many homes.

Wendell Phillips writes, “Today we can scarcely appreciate the role of incense in the ancient world because, for one thing, it is difficult to imagine the odors of that world, requiring clouds of sweet-smelling smoke to cover them.”[[29]](#footnote-22751)

Basically, the whole ancient world smelled terrible, and there were lots of reasons for that: smelly people, smelly clothes, human and animal excrement all over, dead animals (and people) rotting in the open, and garbage and more garbage everywhere you looked.

Most of the people in the ancient world bathed seldom if ever, so we can imagine what they smelled like. While there were public baths in some of the Roman cities, a lot of people did not get to take much advantage of them and there was no truly effective deodorant soap. Furthermore, the vast majority of the people did not or could not wash their clothes. For the most part, the people and their clothes stank.

Also, very few places had an effective way of handling the bodies of dead people and animals, human and animal excrement, of which there was a lot, and normal garbage, which ended up being dumped everywhere. We must remember that there was no “public works department” of the government that took care of sewage, dead bodies, and garbage.

Gregory Aldrete writes about Rome and other larger cities which had very large problems but the same basic problems as other smaller cities and towns:

“The streets of Rome were breeding grounds for numerous disease-causing organisms due to the widespread presence of human and animal cadavers in various states of decomposition as well as the copious quantities of raw sewage deposited in the streets.

“The normal course of events produced enormous numbers of dead bodies, many of which were not properly disposed of. The truly impoverished who could not afford to join a burial club or who lacked nearby family members to cremate or bury their bodies, along with Rome’s large population of homeless and beggars, simply lay where they dropped or else were thrown into the Tiber [River] or into open pits just outside the city. It has been estimated that the city of Rome produced perhaps 1,500 such unclaimed [human] bodies per year [and many animal bodies as well].

“A number of literary anecdotes vividly illustrate the presence of both bodies and scavenging animals in the streets of the city. The poet Martial describes the gruesome death of a beggar whose last moments are spent trying to fend off the dogs and vultures that have gathered to feed on him (Martial, *Epigrams* 10.5).

“Although Rome possessed some sewers, their purpose was more to provide drainage than to actually carry away waste. While latrines were sometimes present in buildings…most often they were not, suggesting that people relieved themselves in the streets or in chamber pots. Unfortunately, most city inhabitants appear to have emptied their chamber pots by simply dumping them out the windows of their dwellings. Much of Rome’s garbage and sewage seems to have ended up in the streets. This was no small problem since, at its height, Rome’s human inhabitants were producing about 50,000 kilograms [over 55 tons] of excrement each day. … Rome’s animals certainly also contributed to the general level of filth. Thus the streets of the city probably more closely resembled open sewers than our modern notion of roadways.”[[30]](#footnote-28709)

The fact that the ancient world stunk produced a great demand for incense. For example, the Beloved in Song of Songs speaks of a sachet of myrrh between her breasts, which would have given off a pleasant odor. The golden incense altar in the Tabernacle/Temple was to be burned twice a day every day (Exod. 30:7-8). The fact is that cities stunk up until our modern age. As long as things and people moved by horse and carriage there was always some amount of dung in the streets, and truly modern toilets and sewers were not commonly used until the mid-1800s.

Mat 2:12

**“instructed *by God*.”** This is a fascinating word. The Greek is *chrēmatizō* (#5537 χρηματίζω). Its basic meaning is “to make known a divine revelation from God.”[[31]](#footnote-11814) The word is usually translated as “warn,” yet its full meaning is much richer than that. The REV has “instructed by God,” which is the same idea as the *TDNT*: “In the NT the verb denotes divine instruction by revelation.”[[32]](#footnote-25580) The translation of the NT done by Nelson Darby has “divinely instructed.”

Outside the New Testament, *chrēmatizō* is used as a response of those seeking an oracle—it, therefore, designates the answer given to someone who is seeking a divine answer. Thayer defines the word: “to give a response to those consulting an oracle… to give a divine command or admonition, to teach from heaven.”[[33]](#footnote-19021) Likewise, Bullinger writes in his lexicon, “spoken of a divine response, to give a response, to speak as an oracle, speak or warn from God.”[[34]](#footnote-21217) The only example of the noun form in the New Testament follows this definition. In Romans 11:2-4, Elijah makes intercession to God about Israel (Rom. 11:2) and God gives back a “divine answer” (Rom. 11:4); it is not meant as a warning, but an answer from God to Elijah’s appeal.

*Chrēmatizō* is used nine times in Scripture: four times to indicate the divine instruction given in response to an implied seeking of God (Matt. 2:12; 2:22; Luke 2:26; Acts 10:22), three times to indicate the message from God with emphasis on *warning* (Heb. 8:5; 11:7; 12:25), and twice it is used in its second definition, “to be called, designated as” (Acts 11:26; Rom. 7:3).

When applied here in Matthew 2:12, *chrēmatizō* shows us that the Magi asked God what to do, and God instructed them to leave for home by another route and not to go back to Jerusalem and speak with Herod. These men were godly and smart. They did not need to be “warned” that Herod was corrupt and evil—that was well-known. The absurdity of Herod’s claim that he would come and worship the Christ would have been very apparent to them. Would Herod, who was so paranoid about losing his throne that he had close relatives executed, really prostrate himself before a would-be usurper of his throne? Never. The Magi did not need a warning; what they needed was divine instruction as to what to do about their situation, and that prompted them to seek advice from God. Concerning this verse Meyer writes in his commentary, “the question that preceded [the dream] is presupposed.”[[35]](#footnote-23984) Similarly, Vincent writes, “The verb means *to give a response to one who asks or consults*… [it] therefore implies that the wise men had sought counsel of God.”[[36]](#footnote-28013)

This same reasoning can be applied in Matthew 2:22. Joseph already heard of Archelaus and was afraid to go to Judea, so to translate the verb “he was warned” does not fit the situation, but “divinely instructed” does. Joseph, along with the Magi (Matt. 2:12), Simeon (Luke 2:26), and Cornelius (Acts 10:22), were spiritually discerning and seeking counsel from God, and thus were divinely instructed in what path to take.

**“by a different road.”** The Magi came to see the Messiah at great personal risk and sacrifice. They likely never knew that at least the start of their trip home would likely be as dangerous as any other part of their journey. Herod was furious at them for not telling them who and where the new king was, and Herod was a very vengeful person. For example, near his death he ordered that a large group of distinguished men in his kingdom be killed on the day he died so that the day of his death would be a day of mourning, not rejoicing (when Herod died, however, the men were released). Herod had palace-fortresses in many places that covered the roads the Magi would have normally taken home. The Bible does not tell us what route the Magi took home, but whichever it was, they had to be very judicious about it. It likely took them a lot of extra time to get home by a road that would keep them and the new Messiah safe, but that was a sacrifice they were no doubt glad to make.

Mat 2:13

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. Here in Matthew 2:13, “take note” or something similar catches the meaning. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“the Lord”** “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh (see commentary on Matt. 3:3).

**“Get up!... take the child and his mother… stay.”** These exact words are used to describe what Joseph did in response to the command from the angel of the Lord. The angel says “get up,” so Joseph “got up” (Matt. 2:14); the angel says, “take the child and his mother,” so Joseph “took the child and his mother” (Matt. 2:14); the angel says “stay there until,” so Joseph “stayed there until” (Matt. 2:15). This parallelism highlights Joseph’s obedience to the word of the Lord, by describing what Joseph did with the same words the angel used in his command. The same parallelism occurs in Matthew 2:20-21.

**“stay there until I tell you.”** For the word *stay*, the angel uses the verb “to be,” *eimi* (#1510 εἰμί), with the sense of “remain” or “stay;” Joseph is told to “be there” in Egypt until the angel tells him differently. Then in Matthew 2:15, we are told that Joseph “was there”—using the same verb and word for “there.” Since we do not know when the Magi arrived in Bethlehem, we do not know how long Joseph and Mary stayed in Egypt. However, it seems like it would not have been too long—months, not years.

Mat 2:14

**“the child.”** Although some versions (cf. ASV, KJV, NKJV) have “young child,” the Greek is just “child.” In the traditional Christmas story, Jesus would have been a newborn baby, but when we correctly understand that the Magi came one and a half to two years after Jesus was born, the word “child” is exactly accurate.

[For an accurate understanding of the Christmas Story, see commentary on Matt. 1:25; 2:1-14; and Luke 2:4-24. Also, download the free ebooklet “Retelling the Christmas Story” by John W. Schoenheit. Please see the description and link below, or [click here](jsondload.php?fil=2332) to download it directly.]

Mat 2:15

**“stayed there.”** See commentary on Matthew 2:13, “stay.”

**“with the result that...”** The *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) clause typically communicates either purpose or result. In this context, since Matthew is quoting Hosea 11:1 which was not a future prophecy about Jesus but was referring to the exodus, in which Israel (God’s son) left Egypt, the *hina* communicates a result. Jesus did not stay in Egypt in order to fulfill Hosea 11:1, because Hosea 11:1 was not a prophecy that needed to be fulfilled. Instead, a more accurate understanding of the event is that Jesus stayed in Egypt and then came back to Nazareth (Matt. 2:19), and that just happened to give a second fulfillment to the words of Hosea 11:1, but those words were not originally a prophecy.

[For more information on *hina* see Word Study: “Hina.”]

Mat 2:16

**“tricked by.”** From *empaizō* (#1702 ἐμπαίζω), “To trick someone so as to make a fool of the person.”[[37]](#footnote-14902) The Greek is actually deeper than just being “tricked” by the Magi. Herod reigned by fear and control, so having someone disobey a direct command, from his perspective, was to make a mockery of his reign. He would have expected the Magi back the next day, two at the most. He felt they made a fool of him by slipping away, and was furious.

**“having sent *orders*.”** The Greek text simply has that Herod “sent,” but the text does not supply an object. Some versions say “men,” but given the circumstances in Herod’s kingdom that we learn from history and archaeology, it seems much more likely that rather than send a lot of men from Jerusalem, Herod would have sent orders to fortresses such as the Herodian and perhaps even Masada and dispatched soldiers from those places to execute the children in Judah.

**“he killed all the male children…in Bethlehem and all its surrounding region, from two years old and under.”** Killing potential rivals was standard operating procedure for Herod. King Herod the Great was so afraid of anyone taking his throne that he even had one of his wives and three of his sons executed because he was suspicious of them. The Bible does not say how many children in Bethlehem were killed, and it is very likely that because the killing was in Bethlehem “and all its surrounding region,” no one kept count. However, the “surrounding region” could not have been very large—perhaps only a few miles—because Zechariah and Elizabeth lived in the hill country of Judah and there is no evidence that John, who was only six months older than Jesus was in danger (although he could have been older than two by the time the Magi arrived, likely 18 months to 2 years after Jesus was born). In any case, demographic studies of the city of Bethlehem and the surrounding region done by scholars have led to the conclusion that almost certainly less than two dozen children were murdered, and perhaps only half that many. Although this was certainly a tragedy, Herod’s reign was so filled with violent acts including murder and death that this particular killing is not even noticed in any secular writing of the time or in Josephus. The palace-fortress of Herodium was just east of Bethlehem and was clearly visible from there, and it is likely that soldiers were dispatched from the Herodium to kill the babies.

The fact that Herod’s murder of the children is not mentioned in secular writings of the time has caused some historians to say the record is a myth and that it never really happened. Many of them say it was just an invention by Matthew to build a parallel story of Pharaoh’s killing of the male babies in Egypt (Exod. 1:15-22) into the biblical account of the birth of Jesus. However, that argument is pure speculation; there is no good reason to reject what Matthew wrote.

Many things in the Bible are not recorded in secular history, and Herod’s known character fits with him killing anyone he thought was a rival. Josephus does not mention the killing, but there could be many reasons for that, including that the details of the event were not well-known. Furthermore, although there are a few parallels—a very few—between Herod and Pharaoh, there is also such a large number of differences that the average reader never even sees any parallel between them. If Matthew concocted the story of Herod killing the children around Bethlehem to draw a parallel to the story of Pharaoh ordering the death of the male babies of Israel, it seems he would have made the parallels easier to see. Furthermore, if Matthew invented the story of the killing of the babies, it would have defeated his purpose of writing an account of the life of Jesus that was designed to get people to know about Jesus and accept him as Messiah. When Matthew wrote it could still be confirmed or rejected that Herod killed the babies; some of the siblings and most likely even some of the parents of those babies would still have been alive. If word got around that Matthew fabricated what is certainly a major event in his gospel record, then many people would doubt the entire account Matthew had written. But, on the other hand, if what Matthew wrote could be confirmed by people who lived through the events that Matthew recorded in his gospel, then what Matthew wrote would indeed get people to believe, which is exactly what has happened through the millennia; people read the Gospel of Matthew and believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that he died for their sins.

[For more on Herod’s character and ruthless ways, see commentary on Matt. 2:3, “deeply troubled.”]

Mat 2:18

**“a sound was heard in Ramah.”** Most translations read, “a voice was heard.” However, the Greek word *phōnē* (#5456 φωνή) can be used to mean just a sound (e.g., John 3:8; 1 Cor. 14:7; Rev. 8:5; 8:13 [“blasts”]). Though the sound would have been coming from a human voice, it would have been the sound of sobbing.

**“sobbing.”** Traditionally, this has been translated “weeping.” But it does not seem that “weeping” best captures the sense of the Greek word *klauthmos* (#2805 κλαυθμός). In English, *weeping* conjures up pictures of a weak and quiet, teary sadness. *Klauthmos* is more of a loud crying with obvious physical manifestations: “not merely with tears, but with every outward expression of grief.”[[38]](#footnote-28249) Hence, we have rendered the word here “sobbing,” which gives a better sense of physical wailing than does the term “weeping;” after all, these mothers’ babies had just been murdered. This is the noun form of the verb *klaiō* (#2799 κλαίω) translated as “crying” in the second sentence of this verse.

**“Rachel.”** The favorite wife of Jacob the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Here, Rachel, Jacob’s favorite wife represents the people around Bethlehem. Rachel was buried near Bethlehem; she died while giving birth to Jacob’s youngest son, Benjamin (Gen. 35:16-20), whereas Leah was buried in Hebron (Gen. 49:31).

**“crying.”** The Greek verb is *klaiō* (#2799 κλαίω). We have translated it as “crying” rather than “weeping.” *Klaiō* is the verb form of *klauthmos*; see commentary on “sobbing” in this verse.

Mat 2:19

**“after.”** The phrase “after Herod had come to the end of his life” is a Greek construction known as a genitive absolute. Although there are no specific time words, a genitive absolute has a temporal sense, usually translated “while,” “when,” or “after.” Did the dream come “while,” “when,” or “after” Herod died? To say “after Herod died” is the most ambiguous translation (the dream could have come right after Herod died, or at some later point). To say “while” or “when” would mean the dream occurred simultaneously with Herod’s death, which most likely would not have been the case. Political and social tension always accompanied regime change in ancient times; would there be a peaceful transfer of power, or a *coup d’état*? We have translated the genitive absolute with “after,” to allow for the possibility of some time elapsing for Archelaus—who had already begun reigning when Joseph arrived in Israel (Matt. 2:22)—to stabilize control and for things to settle down after the transfer of power.

**“had died.”** The Greek is *teleutaō* (#5053 τελευτάω), which is related to the word *telos* (#5056 τέλος), “end,” and means to finish, bring to an end, come to an end, close. It was used by the Greeks as a euphemism for death. God could have used a common word for death here, such as *apothnēskō* (#599 ἀποθνῄσκω), so the fact that he did not, but used the euphemism, should catch our attention. All of us will eventually, “come to the end,” so it behooves us to take our lives seriously because after our end will come Judgment Day.

[For more on dead people being truly dead and not alive in any form or place, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**“behold”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“the Lord.”** For more information on “the Lord” see commentary on Matthew 3:3.

Mat 2:20

**“saying.”** The REV follows the verse division of the Nestle-Aland text, including this word at the beginning of Matthew 2:20. However, some translations put it at the end of verse 19 (cf. NASB, NRSV, RSV, ASV).

**“Get up! Take the child and his mother.”** For the significance of the parallelism between the angel’s command and Joseph’s response see commentary on Matthew 2:13.

**“life.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and *psuchē* has a large number of meanings. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Mat 2:22

**“instructed *by God*.”** The Greek word is *chrēmatizō*. See commentary on Matthew 2:12.

Mat 2:23

**“he will be called a Nazarene.”** This phrase is not meant to be a quotation of any Scripture, for the saying is not found in any of the biblical writings. So what does Matthew mean here? There are two possibilities. First, these words could be a prophecy that was “spoken” (*rheō*, #4483 ῥέω), but not written. Unlike any other such reference in Matthew, this was said to be spoken by the “prophets” (plural), rather than by the “prophet.” The fact the noun is plural tells us Matthew did not intend this to be taken as a reference to a particular prophetic writing, but the words of the “prophets.” Hence, there were some things God told his prophets regarding the Messiah that were spoken and preserved in oral tradition but never inspired as holy writ—that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene was one such orally preserved prophecy. In this case, it is the figure of speech hysteresis, when an author gives added information not known in the historical narrative.[[39]](#footnote-28444)

The second possibility for understanding this phrase—the way it is understood by Lenski and Hendriksen, for instance—is that the expression “he will be called a Nazarene” is meant as a summary statement of what the prophets spoke about the Messiah, that he would be considered lowly and rejected. We recall the words of Nathanael, who showed typical disdain for Nazarenes: “Is any good thing able to come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). If this interpretation was correct, Matthew would be combining the sense of several prophetic writings about the Messiah and then describing them by saying “He will be called a Nazarene.” But this view is unlikely, for why would Jesus have to literally move to Nazareth in order to fulfill this saying? If being called a Nazarene does not refer to actually living in Nazareth, then moving there would not fulfill the prophecy. If the phrase was meant as simply a derogative saying, “he will be called ‘a Nazarene,’” then there would be no need for the Messiah to literally live there. Therefore, the first interpretation is to be preferred.

**“so that.”** The Greek word translated “so that” is *hopōs* (#3704 ὅπως), and it denotes purpose. Often when prophecies were fulfilled the Greek text used *hina* (cf. Matt. 1:22), but this use of *hopōs* shows that Joseph moved to Nazareth with the intention that the prophecy would be fulfilled. A study of prophecy shows that there are different “kinds” of prophecies. There are prophecies that will come to pass without or in spite of human involvement, and there are prophecies that require human involvement to come to pass. This is quite clearly articulated in Jeremiah 18:5-10. God can say something, but human involvement can help it be fulfilled or cause it to go unfulfilled. In this case, Joseph moved to Nazareth “so that” the words of the prophets were fulfilled.

[For more on the relationship between human behavior and fulfillment of prophecy, see commentary on Deut. 18:20.]

**Matthew Chapter 3**

Mat 3:1

**“in those days.”** “In those days” is a literal rendering of the Greek phrase in Matthew 3:1, however, the phrase is quite peculiar because Matthew had just finished talking about how Joseph, Mary, and Jesus went to Nazareth and lived there when Jesus was a baby (Matt. 2:23). So, Matthew 3:1 is almost 30 years after Matthew 2:23. So, why does Matthew say, “in those days” in Matthew 3:1 as if he were speaking of the same time frame as Matthew 2:23?

There are no clear occurrences of the phrase “in those days” being used to introduce a completely new time frame, as it is seemingly used here. Many commentaries suggest that this phrase can introduce a new time frame, but when looking at each of those occurrences they put forward such as Genesis 6:4, Deuteronomy 17:9, and Daniel 10:2 there is a defined time frame already within the context. The phrase never introduces a new time frame. R.T. France proposes a good solution to the problem.[[40]](#footnote-14340) France suggests that the best way to understand “in those days” is that it refers to “in those days when Jesus was still living in Nazareth.” So, although 30 years have passed, what Matthew mentions in Matthew 2:23, that Jesus is living in Nazareth, still holds true in Matthew 3:1, and so “in those days” is properly supplied. In the days that Jesus was still living in Nazareth, John the Baptist came on the scene.

The Bible does not tell us how long before Jesus was baptized and started his ministry that John started his ministry. It could have been months or a few years. John was six months older than Jesus (Luke 1:26), and for a period of time, both John and Jesus were ministering separately and were both baptizing people (John 3:22-23). Then John was thrown in prison and executed.

Mat 3:2

**“the Kingdom of Heaven has drawn near.”** The phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” only appears in the Gospel of Matthew, while everywhere else in the New Testament, it is called “the Kingdom of God.” Matthew, the most Jewish of all the Gospels, avoids using “God” and uses the circumlocution “Heaven.” The Jews today do the same thing and do not mention God by name.

John the Baptist taught that the Kingdom of Heaven (also called the Kingdom of God) was near, and Jesus taught that too (Matt. 4:17, Mark 1:15). It is important to note that although neither the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” nor the phrase “Kingdom of God” appears in the Old Testament, the people listening to John the Baptist and Jesus understood what they were talking about. That is because although the phrase “Kingdom of God” was not used, the idea of a Kingdom ruled by God’s appointed ruler, the Messiah, occurs in many places in the Old Testament. The Messiah was foretold to rule the whole world from Jerusalem, and the kingdom that he would rule would have all the blessings of God: health, peace, safety, food, joy, and more.

We learn from the New Testament, especially the Book of Revelation, that the kingdom of the Messiah will come in two stages. There will be a first part, which will last 1,000 years and which scholars now refer to as Christ’s “Millennial Kingdom,” and there will be a second part, an eternal kingdom, that will come to earth and last forever (Rev. 21, 22).

The Old Testament spoke of God’s king ruling the world from Mount Zion, which was partly the city of Jerusalem and partly where Solomon had built the Temple (Ps. 2:6-8), and we learn that Christ’s kingdom would fill the whole earth (Ps. 2:8; 72:8-11; Dan. 2:35; 7:14; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10; Rev. 2:8; 19:11-21). Christ’s earthly kingdom will be filled with joy and be a wonderful place to live.

[For more on this wonderful coming Kingdom of Christ, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”

Mat 3:3

**“A voice of one calling out in the desert, ‘Make the road ready for the Lord! Make the paths straight for him!’”** This quotation is from Isaiah 40:3 and it is quoted in Luke 3:4 and Mark 1:3 as well. In the Hebrew text of Isaiah, the word translated “Lord” in the Greek text is Yahweh, the personal name of God.

[For more on the custom of making a road ready by clearing and leveling it, see commentary on Mark 1:3. For more on the Septuagint and the original NT texts being in Greek, see commentary on Luke 3:4.]

**“the Lord.”** The Greek text reads “Lord.” However, it is worth noting that the Hebrew manuscripts of Matthew read “Yahweh,” not “*adonai*” or another word for “lord.” Yahweh is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. As we will discuss below, there is evidence that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, however, there is debate about the fidelity of the Hebrew text of Matthew, and since the rest of Matthew in the REV is from the Greek text, the REV followed that construction here in Matthew as well.

In the fourteenth century, a complete Hebrew text of Matthew appeared in the body of a Jewish polemical treatise entitled *Even Bohan*, “The Touchstone.” The manuscript was not all in one place, but when gathered together was the complete book of Matthew. The author of the treatise, and thus the one who copied Matthew into it, was Shem-Tob ben Isaac ben-Shaprut (sometimes called Ibn Shaprut; also, because his name was actually Shem-Tob, sometimes the manuscript is referred to as the Shem-Tob or Shem-Tov manuscript (the “b” and “v” in Hebrew are the same consonant). The Shem-Tov manuscript is not well-known, so it is important to say a few things about it.

The *Even Bohan* treatise contains the entire book of Matthew in Hebrew, but unfortunately, Shem-Tob wrote his notes in Hebrew right into the Hebrew text, which means they have to be lifted out of the text of Matthew for it to be read without them.

For many years the Shem-Tov manuscript was ignored, even though there was historical evidence that Matthew wrote in Hebrew. It was ignored because it had been the opinion of most scholars that the Shem-Tov manuscript was a translation back into Hebrew from the Latin, or perhaps from Greek. However, recent interest in the Hebrew language has caused a reexamination of the text. There are now some scholars who, for a number of reasons, think that the Shem-Tov manuscript represents a Hebrew manuscript tradition that goes back to the Hebrew text Matthew wrote. One reason is that there seem to be too many verses that differ from any known Greek or Latin manuscript for the Shem-Tov manuscript to be a translation from either of those manuscript traditions. Another very important reason is that the Shem-Tov manuscript uses a rabbinic abbreviation for Yahweh, the only personal name of God (all His other “names” are actually titles). No Jew in the Middle Ages would have used “Yahweh,” and no scholarly Jew would ever have placed the holy name of God, which they would not even say out loud, into a Christian Bible. A third reason involves some of the commentary Shem-Tob wrote. For example, after Matthew 2:12 and the verse about Jesus being born in Bethlehem, he comments that the Hebrew text is wrong and the error is not in “Jerome’s version” (the Latin). From comments like these, we can see that Shem-Tob was copying an earlier Hebrew text. He would not have created a unique, and incorrect, Latin text, and then criticized it.

It is too much to go into all the various reasons for believing that the Shem-Tov manuscript represents a Hebrew manuscript tradition that goes back to an original that Matthew wrote, and there are still many scholars who believe Matthew first wrote in Greek, but more information can be found in the work by George Howard, *The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew.*

It is also important to remember that although there are quite a few places that the Shem-Tov manuscript differs from the Greek text, it will take thorough study before adopting any of its readings into the English Bible because the Shem-Tov manuscript was in the hands of Jews, not Christians and also, as with any other manuscript from centuries after Christ, would have been copied several times before it existed as the Shem-Tov manuscript we have available today. However, when it comes to the name “Yahweh,” the evidence is strong that it would have had to have been passed down from an original Hebrew text of Matthew.

Until recently scholars believed that Hebrew was not spoken in Palestine in the first century and that when the word “Hebrew” appeared in documents from the first or second century, “Aramaic” was actually meant. However, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other documents from around the time of Christ have revealed that Hebrew was both written and spoken in the first century. Given that, there is reason to believe that when the ancients said “Hebrew” they meant “Hebrew.”

A number of Church fathers said that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew. Unfortunately, some of them are quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* and we do not have their original surviving statements. Nevertheless, it seems highly unlikely that Eusebius would have said they said Matthew wrote in Hebrew if that was not what they said. Eusebius was not trying to build a case that Matthew wrote in Hebrew; he was simply writing a history of the Church. Furthermore, the accuracy of Eusebius’ statements would have been much easier to check in his day than now.

* Papias. The Church Father Papias, who wrote in the first third of the second century was a bishop of the early Church. According to Eusebius, Papias said: “Matthew collected the oracles [literally: “words”] in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could.” (Quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* (Lake Translation, p. 297). The statement, “each interpreted them as best he could” refers to the declining knowledge in Hebrew as the years went on and the Church became more Hellenized.
* Ireneus (pronounced I-ren-'ā-us). In about AD 170, Irenaeus wrote in *Against Heresies* (3:1): “Matthew also issued a written gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect.”
* Origen. Origen lived about AD 210. He was cited by Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History* (6:25) saying that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew.
* Jerome. Jerome (AD 347-420) said Matthew originally wrote in Hebrew, and he apparently had a Hebrew manuscript of Matthew, because he quotes from it. From Jerome, *Commentary on Psalm 135 (de Santos 22)*: “In the Hebraic gospel according to Matthew it has thus: Our bread for tomorrow give us this day, that is, the bread which you will give in your kingdom give us today.”

Jerome also wrote, *On Famous Men 3 (de Santos 18)*: “Matthew, who is also Levi, the ex-publican apostle, first composed in Hebraic letters the gospel of Christ in Judea on account of those who had believed from among the circumcision; [but those] who afterward translated it into Greek is not sufficiently certain. Furthermore, this Hebraic [text] is held even until today in the Caesarean library which Pamphilus the martyr studiously put together. There was an opportunity for me from the Nazaraeans to copy this volume, which is used in Beroea, a city of Syria. In which [gospel] it must be noted that, wherever the evangelist, whether from his own person or from the Lord and savior, makes use of testimonies of the old scriptures, he does not follow the authority of the 70 translators [the Septuagint version], but the Hebrew. From which things two are: From Egypt did I call my son, and: For he shall be called a Nazarene.” (These references are 2.15 and 2.23, respectively).

Jerome said in the *Prologue of the Four Gospels*: “First of all is Matthew, a publican with the cognomen of Levi, who published a gospel in Judea in the Hebrew speech, especially on account of those who had believed in Jesus from among the Jews, and with the shadow of the law in no way succeeding he served the truth of the gospel.”

**“Make the road ready for the Lord! Make the paths straight for him!”** When the people said, “Prepare a road for Yahweh in the wilderness” (Isa. 40:3), no one thought that God would actually come and use the road. It would be well understood in the culture that the road would be prepared for God’s representative, in this case, the Messiah. Some Trinitarians say this verse shows that Jesus was God, but that is not the case. Jesus was God’s Messiah, and as such, when the road was prepared for him, it was prepared for God.

We see the cultural thought and expression that God’s representative was referred to as “God,” or that God somehow came via a representative, in other places in the Bible. For example, after Jesus raised a man from the dead, Luke records that the people said, “‘A great prophet has arisen among us!’ And, ‘God has visited his people!’” (Luke 7:16). The people did not think God Himself had somehow shown up among them; for one thing, they would never call God a prophet. The people realized God had “visited” them by sending a great prophet.

God comes to us through many different intermediaries and circumstances, but the fact that God is the one behind the actions of His intermediaries explains why, in the culture, the intermediary is not mentioned at all. For example, sometimes angels speak or act as if they were God Himself, but they are actually His intermediaries. A good example is when Jacob wrestled with “God” (Gen. 32:28, 30). Genesis never tells us that “God” is not God Himself but a representative—we have to learn that from other places in the Scripture. It was an angel who wrestled with Jacob (Hos. 12:4). Another example is when Naomi, living in Moab, heard that “Yahweh had visited Israel by giving them bread” (Ruth 1:6). Saying that God “visited” Israel was just an idiomatic way of saying He had blessed Israel, in this case with food. God did not show up in Israel carrying a basket of food, as we might do if we visited a neighbor with food. Instead, God blessed the efforts of the laborers who planted and tended to the food, so there was plenty of food.

The custom of using mediators and intermediaries was so deeply ingrained in the culture that sometimes they are completely left out of the biblical record. For example, Matthew 8:5 says that when Jesus entered Capernaum, “a centurion came to him.” The entire record of the centurion and Jesus is recorded in Matthew without any hint that the centurion was not present at all—he worked through intermediaries. Only in Luke do we find the full record with the intermediaries included. Luke says that when the centurion heard of Jesus, “he sent elders of the Jews to him” (Luke 7:3). The whole conversation between the centurion and Jesus occurred through intermediaries.

We see the idea of intermediaries when Jesus is called “Immanuel” which is Hebrew for “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). Calling Jesus Immanuel does not make him God any more than David’s brother Eliab was the son of God because his name means “God is my father.” Names often have a significance or are a kind of prayer or wish of the one doing the naming, but they are rarely purely literal. Jesus was “God with us” as God’s Messiah and intermediary.

It might well be asked that if the Bible is really saying to prepare the road for the Messiah, God’s representative, why not just say that; why say prepare the road for God? The “Messiah” was “the anointed one,” but as we can see from the biblical text itself, there were many “anointed ones” (cf. King Saul, 1 Sam. 24:6; King David, 2 Sam. 19:21; King Zedekiah, Lam. 4:20). We learn that there were many gods and many lords (1 Cor. 8:5), as well as many “anointed ones” and “saviors.” Many of them did not represent the true God, or represent Him fully or faithfully. A wonderful way to make sure that everyone knew the way was to be prepared for God’s true representative was to say to prepare it for God.

[For more on names being significant but not literal, see commentary on Matt. 1:23, “Immanuel.”]

Mat 3:4

**“camel’s hair.”** The garment of camel’s hair was a rough, thick, outer robe. It was common, and when James Freeman wrote *Manners and Customs of the Bible* in 1875, it was still worn quite commonly by Arabs. It was likely an outer robe similar to what Elijah wore centuries before (2 Kings 1:8).

Mat 3:5

**“Jerusalem...Judea...the whole region.”** The names of the areas are a metonymy for the people in Jerusalem, Judea, etc. The area is put by metonymy for the people in those areas.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Mat 3:6

**“openly confessing.”** The Greek verb is *exomologeō* (#1843 ἐξομολογέω), and it means to confess or admit openly or publicly. In this instance it is a plural participle, and indicates that the confession was connected with the baptism: they confessed their sin as they were being baptized, i.e., just before going under the water. The form of the verb indicates that they openly confessed their sin, not just whispered it to John. John Peter Lange writes: “The compound ἐξομολογούμενοι denotes public confession.”[[41]](#footnote-17981) Meyer points out that public confession is also indicated in Acts 19:18 and James 5:16.[[42]](#footnote-26759)

The public confessions at the baptism of John showed how serious the people were about being saved and entering the Kingdom of Heaven after they heard from John that the Kingdom was about to arrive (cf. John’s message in Matt. 3:2, “the Kingdom of Heaven is near”). The “Kingdom of Heaven” was the kingdom promised in the Old Testament and ruled by Christ where no one was sick, the government was just, there was an abundance of food, and there was no war or crime.

People wanted to get into that kingdom, and they set aside their reservations and, out in the water with John, openly confessed their sins. Their being immersed in the waters of the Jordan then symbolized the death of the old ways and rebirth or resurrection into a new life, which they would then have to live out in the flesh day after day. In contrast to the common people, the religious leaders such as the Pharisees refused to be baptized by John, no doubt in part because they had no intention of openly confessing their sin (Luke 7:30).

We may gain some insight into part of the reason why God spoke from heaven and said about Jesus, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” when we contrast what occurred with the common people and what happened with Jesus. The common people all openly confessed their sin in the hearing of the crowd, but of course, Jesus did not do that. It is possible that there were people in the crowd who were confused about Jesus and wondered why he did not confess any sin, but the loud voice from heaven would have made it quite clear that God was pleased with Jesus, as well as testify to the crowd who Jesus was. The voice was not for John’s sake. John knew who Jesus was, although miraculous confirmation is always welcome. The voice was for the crowd’s sake. Also, there is little doubt that news of the voice got around, which would have only heightened the Messianic expectation that was already quite high due to things such as the teachings of John.

[For more on John’s baptism, see the commentary on Mark 1:4. For more on the Messianic Kingdom on earth, see commentary on Matt. 5:5, “inherit the earth.”]

Mat 3:7

**“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism.”** This event is also recorded in Luke 3:7-9, and that record lets us know that the “multitudes” were coming to John and he was speaking to them. However, Matthew lets us know that, although John said what he said in a way that everyone could hear him, part of what he said, was to, and specifically applied to, the Jewish leaders, which were the Pharisees and Sadducees mentioned here in Matthew 3:7. They were the “trees” (Matt. 3:8), the high and mighty “pillars of society” who ruled Israel and thought themselves better than others (Luke 18:11), and refused to be baptized by John (Luke 7:30), and who were in danger of being “cut down” and thrown into the fire of Gehenna, the Lake of Fire (Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9; cf. Rev. 20:11-15).

**“You offspring of vipers!”** The phrase, “You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come” appears in the same context in Matthew 3:7 and Luke 3:7. Jesus also called the religious leaders a generation of vipers (Matt. 12:34; 23:33).

**“The wrath to come.”** This is the wrath associated with the Day of the Lord (see commentary on Rev. 6:17). The wrath did not come quickly, and still has not come. John the Baptist did not know that God would interpose the Administration of the Sacred Secret, which we are in today, between the resurrection of Christ and his coming in Judgment. He thought since the Messiah was on earth, Armageddon would come soon.

[For a more complete understanding of the Administration of the Sacred Secret, and an explanation of administrations in the Bible, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be like Christ*, Appendix A “The Administration of the Sacred Secret.” Also, see commentary on Eph. 3:2.]

Mat 3:8

**“Come now.”** See commentary on Luke 3:8.

**“produce fruit *that is* consistent with repentance.”** In other words, produce fruit that shows or demonstrates that you have repented, such that the works are consistent with the person’s repentance. The CEB reads, “Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives.” That translation catches the sense, but is idiomatic.

Mat 3:9

**“to yourselves.”** This phrase could also be understood in the Greek as, ‘among yourselves.’ Thus, they would be saying this to each other.

**“these stones.”** The Jews claimed that salvation was in large part due to their being descendants of Abraham, and John was repudiating that belief. His sharp rebuke was made even sharper by his reference to “these stones.” If anything is common in Israel it is stones, and the Bible has many, many references to them. Solomon’s wealth was described by saying that he made silver to be in Jerusalem as “stones” (1 Kings 10:27). Dashing one’s foot against a stone was common and painful (Ps. 91:12). When a dignitary would come through the area, the roads would have to be cleared of stones (Isa. 62:10), and to plant one would have to get the stones out of the vineyard (Isa. 5:1-2). This record is also in Luke 3:8.

Mat 3:10

**“trees.”** The “trees” are people, and in this context, it refers to rulers and leaders. This is the commonly used figure of speech hypocatastasis.

[For more on “trees” being people, see commentary on Luke 3:9. For more on hypocatastasis see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“will be cut down.”** Although the Greek text has the verb in the present tense, the cutting will be done in the future, as the English translation has the text. This is the idiom some scholars refer to as the “prophetic present,” and it takes an event that is future but certain to happen and coming soon, and treats it as if it is present.

[For more on the prophetic present, see commentary on Luke 3:9.]

**“and thrown into the fire.”** John is giving these leaders a very serious warning. God expects people to have faith in Him, obey Him, and do good works, and those who do not are in danger of being thrown into Gehenna, the Lake of Fire, which is the “second death” and is everlasting death (Rev. 20:14-15).

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Mat 3:11

**“*as a symbol of your* repentance.”** The Greek can be expressed that way, even if it is not the predominant way *eis* and the accusative is translated. D. A. Carson expresses the situation well:

The phrase “for repentance” (*eis metanoian*) is difficult: eis plus the accusative frequently suggests purpose (“I baptize you in order that you will repent”). Contextually (v. 6), this is unlikely, even in the telic sense suggested by Broadus: “I baptize you with a view to continued repentance.” But causal *eis*, or something very close to it, is not unknown in the NT (cf. Turner, *Syntax*, pp. 266-67): “I baptize you because of your repentance.”[[43]](#footnote-12703)

We assert the scope of Scripture shows that John did baptize people because of their repentance, and indeed, it was because of their repentance that the people came to John to be baptized by him. Indeed, Luke 7:29-30 make it clear that the sinners came to John to be baptized while the religious leaders rejected God’s purpose for themselves by not allowing themselves to be baptized by John, which would have involved their publicly confessing their sins.

The water baptism was a symbol, an outward demonstration, of the inward repentance that had happened in the heart of the people who came to be baptized. Many scholars and translators recognize this, and Daniel Wallace expresses it well: “Water baptism is not a cause of salvation, but a *picture*; and as such it serves both as a public acknowledgment (by those present) and a public confession (by the convert)....”[[44]](#footnote-31432)

Scholars and translators express how water baptism is a symbol or picture of the inner work of God in different ways in their writings. For example, Charles Williams translates Matthew 3:11: “I am baptizing you in water to picture your repentance” (*The NT in the Language of the People*). Ann Nyland has: “I baptize you in water to show that you have changed your minds” (*The Source NT*). J. B. Phillips says: “I baptize you with water as a sign of your repentance” (*NT in Modern English*). Goodspeed’s New Testament reads: “I am baptizing you in water in token of your repentance.” Davies and Allison, after examining other possible interpretations, conclude: “It is, however, better to endorse a more nuanced position: baptism presupposes and expresses repentance.”[[45]](#footnote-22099) Robert Mounce writes as if John is speaking in the first person: “‘My baptism’ he might say, ‘indicates you have repented.’”[[46]](#footnote-19488) See commentary on Mark 1:4.

**“I am not *even* worthy to carry his sandals!”** That John would compare himself to Jesus in this way is very important in showing the humble and obedient heart of John, who was God’s loyal servant. John’s comparison occurs in all four Gospels (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16, and John 1:27). Matthew is slightly different but the heart is the same.

**“with holy spirit or *with* fire.”** This is the gift of holy spirit. The Messiah will baptize every person with either the gift of holy spirit or the fire of God’s judgment.

[For more information on “holy spirit or fire,” see commentary on Luke 3:16. For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’’’]

Mat 3:12

**“wheat…chaff.”** This is the figure of speech hypocatastasis; the wheat and chaff represent people. The “wheat” was the grains of wheat that could be ground into flour, while the chaff was small broken pieces of the stalk on which the wheat grew.

[For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2, “dragon.”]

**“he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor.”** The threshing floor is a metaphor for the final judgment when there will be “wheat” people (the saved) and “chaff” people (the unsaved). The floor will be thoroughly cleaned out—no one will escape the final judgment.

**“barn.”** This word could also be in reference to a granary which would normally be a pit in the ground. Regardless, it is in reference to a place where grain is stored. In general, the word “barn” is a historical anachronism because the granaries and storehouses used by people of biblical times in the ancient Near East were not like our modern barns but were much more modest storehouses. Archaeology has revealed that in many cases, grain was even stored in large clay storage jars which could be closed with a lid or stone on top.

**“unquenchable fire.”** The fire cannot be put out, but it will go out when all the fuel is used up. Interestingly, one of the illustrations given in the Liddell and Scott *Greek-English Lexicon* was of laughter that could not be quenched, but of course, it eventually would stop. That is the same with the fire that burns the ungodly. Eventually, like chaff (Matt. 3:12) or weeds (Matt. 13:40), or branches (John 15:6) the ungodly will be burned up and there will be neither root nor branch left (cf. Mal. 4:1).

Mat 3:13

**“Then Jesus came.”** The record of Jesus’ baptism is in Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; and is mentioned in John 1:31-34.

Mat 3:15

**“Allow *it* for now.”** Jesus does not deny what John just said, “I [John]have *the* need to be baptized by you [Jesus].” Yet at this time, Jesus was allowing both he and John to fulfill their calling by God. John’s baptism portrayed cleansing from sin, surely, but also the picture of going under the water and then coming up out of it also signified death and resurrection, something that Jesus certainly went through. So Jesus’ being baptized by John was proper on a number of levels.

**“this is the proper way for us to fulfill all righteousness.”** The fact that Jesus said, “this is the proper way,” even though he did not need to be cleansed from sin, points to another purpose for Jesus’ baptism that was proper, appropriate, or “right,” in the eyes of God. Although Jesus did not need John’s baptism to be cleansed from sin, he went to John specifically to be baptized by him (Matt. 3:13). Furthermore, Jesus did not say, “this is the proper way for ‘me’ to fulfill all righteousness,” but rather, “this is the proper way for ‘us’ [John and Jesus] to fulfill all righteousness.” So here we see Jesus, before his public ministry began, submitting to God and the offices that God ordained: God sent John to baptize, and God told Jesus to go to John and get baptized. Lenski writes, “It was proper that they should carry out whatever their respective positions required.”[[47]](#footnote-32291) John’s baptism of Jesus was tied into Jesus’ being revealed to Israel (John 1:31), perhaps as one obedient enough to be “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29).

Mat 3:16

**“as he stepped up out of the water.”** The heavens did not open and the holy spirit descend while Jesus was standing in the Jordan River, but as he came “away” (*apo*) from the river and stepped up onto the bank. This fact becomes especially clear when Matthew is read in harmony with Mark. Here in Matthew 3:16, “away from” is from the Greek preposition *apo* (away from). The only way to be “away from” the water is to be out of it. Leon Morris writes:

Matthew does not describe the baptism, but takes up his narrative from the time when it was completed...He uses the preposition *apo* (which he uses 113 times) whereas Mark uses *ek* (Mark 1:10). But Matthew has no dislike for *ek*, for he uses it 82 times, so he is not simply avoiding Mark’s preposition. He may, of course, use *apo* to indicate “more clearly Jesus’ complete departure from the waters of the Jordan” than does Mark’s *ek*....[[48]](#footnote-32180)

Robert Gundry writes: “[Matthew] makes Jesus go up from the water immediately after the baptism, i.e., clamber up on the riverbank...Matthew’s *apo* does not negate the thought of emergence contained in Mark’s *ek*, but it indicates more clearly Jesus’ complete departure from the waters of the Jordan.”[[49]](#footnote-30278)

Other commentators make note of the fact that by leaving John and stepping out of the Jordan River, Jesus is shown to be starting his own new ministry, not connected with John the Baptist. Davies and Allison make that point: “Jesus’ emerging from the water and climbing the bank...connects the heavenly vision and voice not with an action of John but with an action of Jesus.”[[50]](#footnote-12729) They further state that it brings to mind at least two strong images that are embedded in the Jewish mind: the creation of order from watery chaos (Gen. 1:2), and Israel’s new beginning as it came up and out of the Red Sea. Jesus’ coming up out of the Jordan marked the start of something new.

[For more on Jesus’ baptism, see commentary on Mark 1:10.]

**“behold”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“he saw the spirit of God descending.”** In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the “he saw” can refer to Jesus or John, the pronouns are unclear. But in any case, this was an event visible to anyone there and John did actually see it (John 1:32). The fact that the spirit came down upon Jesus was important because it openly demonstrated to the world that Jesus had been “anointed” with holy spirit, something that normally cannot be seen (cf. Acts 10:38).

Mat 3:17

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“This is.”** What God said at Jesus’ baptism is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in Mark and Luke, God speaks directly to Jesus, saying, “You are my beloved Son.” Here in Matthew, the text says, “This is” my beloved Son. While it is possible that God made more than one statement about His Son, one being “You are” and one being “This is,” that is not likely. The greater possibility is that Mark and Luke recorded what the voice from heaven actually said, while Matthew recorded what the voice fully intended: that we the audience be included in the knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. Thus, when Matthew, Mark, and Luke are put together and understood as communicating God’s heart to mankind, we see that Jesus got clear confirmation that he was the Son of God, and God intends for us to have that understanding too. That Jesus is the Son of God is not a message just for Jesus. It is for the world to know. It seems likely from John 1:34 that the audience, including John the Baptist, heard the voice from heaven as well as Jesus did.

Due to the pressure to harmonize Scripture so that the same record reads the same way in different Gospels, the Greek manuscript “D” from the fifth century, and some Syriac (Aramaic) manuscripts, have Matthew read “You are my beloved Son,” like Mark and Luke do. Thankfully, that harmonization was copied into so few manuscripts that it does not show up in any well-known version of the Bible. In support of the reading “This is my beloved Son” are not only almost every known Greek manuscript and some Syriac manuscripts, but also the Shem Tov Hebrew manuscript of Matthew. The Shem Tov Hebrew manuscript is believed to be a lineal descendant of the original manuscript of Matthew that the apostle Matthew wrote in Hebrew.

[For more on the Shem Tov Hebrew Manuscript of Matthew see commentary on Matt. 3:3.]

One last reason to believe that “this is” was the original reading of Matthew 3:17 is that there would be lots of pressure to change “this is” to “you are,” but no pressure to change “you are” to “this is.” That makes “This is” what textual scholars call “the more difficult reading,” which in most cases is the original reading because scribes tended to make the text easier to read and understand rather than harder to read and understand. Given all the evidence, “This is my beloved Son” can be seen to be the original reading of Matthew 3:17.

[For more on the harmonization of Scripture, and how it has affected translations, see commentary on Luke 11:2, “Father.”]

**Matthew Chapter 4**

Mat 4:1

**“Then Jesus.”** The record of Jesus’ being tempted in the desert is in Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; and Luke 4:1-13.

**“led up.”** The Greek is *anagō* (#321 ἀνάγω) and means, to lead or bring from a lower to a higher point; thus, lead up, bring up. This shows us conclusively that Jesus was led into the desert of Judea immediately after his baptism in Matthew 3. The Jordan River is the low point in that area, being around 900 or so feet below sea level, and the Judean desert was above it to the west, with some mountain summits approaching 1,500 or more, and over 2,000 as one gets close to Jerusalem.

**“by the spirit.”** The Greek text reads, *hupo tou pneumatos* (ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος), using the preposition *hupo* followed by “the spirit,” in the genitive case. Thus here, *hupo* denotes agency and tells us that Jesus was led “by” the spirit. It is difficult to decide whether we should say “by the Spirit,” i.e. “by God;” or “by the spirit,” that is, by the gift of God that Jesus had just received 2 verses earlier. The ancient texts were all capital letters, so it was up to the reader to decide what *PNEUMATOS* (Spirit or spirit) meant. Because English forces the translator to choose between “Spirit” and “spirit,” modern translators have to make a decision for the reader and hope to educate the reader via commentary.

Actually, in this case, it is likely that both “Spirit” and “spirit” are true, and this is an example of the figure of speech amphibologia, where there are two meanings, both of them true. God, the Spirit, led Jesus into the desert, communicating and leading him “by the spirit,” just as He had done for millennia with Moses, Joshua, David, and the prophets and prophetesses. What actually happened was that Jesus was led “by the Spirit by the spirit.”

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

**“desert.”** The Greek is *erēmos* (#2048 ἔρημος), and it means a solitary, lonely, desolate, uninhabited place, a desert, a wilderness, a lonely region. However, the word *erēmos* can refer to an uncultivated region fit for pasturage, even though that area may be right next to fields and houses, thus the title of Gertrude Bell’s book, *The Desert and the Sown*. Areas in the Middle East were thought of as being good for farming or pasture, and a valley used for farming might butt right up to a hillside used for pasture. This situation always produced the tension that existed between the shepherds and the farmers.

**“to be tempted.”** Here in Matthew, the Greek text uses the infinitive tense of the verb *peirazō* (#3985 πειράζω), so “to be tempted,” as the English translations say, is a good translation. The infinitive clause expresses purpose. It is God who leads Jesus into the Judean wilderness “to be tempted,” but it is the Devil (Slanderer) who does the tempting. It can be confusing at first to see that God led Jesus into the desert “to be tempted,” but there are good explanations for it.

For one thing, we must realize that both God and Jesus knew that a showdown between the Devil and Jesus was inevitable. For millennia the Devil had been aggressively trying to prevent the Messiah from even being born. Then, when he was born, he tried to kill him as an infant through his evil servant, Herod the Great. So it was better for Jesus if he met the Devil head-on and dealt with him personally at the beginning of his ministry. It accomplished many things.

One thing the temptation accomplished is that it cemented in Jesus’ mind who the Devil was and what he wanted: to be in God’s place and to be worshiped. The Devil is like the Wizard of Oz. He makes himself look much larger and more powerful than he really is and controls people by threats, fear, lies, etc. The prophet Isaiah tells us that when the Devil meets his doom and we get to see him for what he really is, we will say, “Is this the man who made the earth to tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a wilderness and overthrew its cities, who didn’t release his prisoners to their home?” (Isa. 14:16-17). When the Devil met Jesus face to face, it gave Jesus a chance to see who he was really dealing with. And the Devil, for his part, revealed his crafty and evil nature perfectly for Jesus to see.

Another thing it did was make Jesus stronger in the spiritual battle. It is commonly said that what does not kill us makes us stronger, and successfully enduring temptation does make us stronger. Facing the Devil’s temptations cemented in Jesus’ mind that he did not need the world’s fame, power, or even food. He could rely on God—on God’s provision and God’s timing. This was a huge lesson to learn. And even though Jesus had certainly learned to rely on God in the first 30 years of his life, talking to God via the gift of holy spirit would have bolstered his confidence, and things such as the angels coming to minister to him after the Devil left would have helped also (Matt. 4:11).

Another thing it accomplished was to cement for Jesus, and show us, the absolute necessity to know and understand the Word of God, and to use it in our lives to fight the spiritual battle. Jesus resisted each of the temptations by saying, “It is written,” and quoting Scripture. This set the tone for how he would deal with opposition from that time forward, and it sets the tone for how we must act if we are going to be successful in the spiritual fight. Furthermore, it shows us how important it is to use Scripture as a “measuring tool” to determine good from evil. How did Jesus know what was right and what was wrong? Via Scripture, and anything contrary to the proper interpretation of Scripture must be resisted.

Another thing it accomplished, and continues to accomplish, is that it lets everyone know that just as Christ resisted the Devil and overcame his temptations, so we too can have victory in Christ. Believers do not have to be victims of the Devil, we stand against the Devil and win even as Christ did.

Also, although there is no way to know this for sure, Jesus made it clear to the Devil that he was not going to be simply fooled or led astray, and there are no more direct encounters between the Devil and Jesus mentioned in the Gospels. The Devil realized he would have to kill Jesus to get rid of him, and he tried in multiple ways to do that: from inciting mobs such as at Bethlehem, to trying to drown him via storms on the Sea of Galilee. He thought he won when he finally engineered his crucifixion, only to find like Haman in the book of Esther, that he had killed himself via his own stake.

**“tempted.”** The Greek word *peirazō* (#3985 πειράζω) can mean several different things depending on its context. It is used for (1) tempting and (2) testing (i.e., trying, examining, proving); its semantic range also includes (3) “attempting to do something,” like when Paul and Timothy tried to go into Bithynia but were prevented (Acts 16:7); and (4) trying to “entrap through a process of inquiry,” such as the Pharisees testing Jesus with questions.[[51]](#footnote-21264) The differences in meaning are found not in the word itself, but in the circumstance and especially the motive behind the one who is tempting, testing, attempting, etc. The distinction between testing and tempting, then, is this: testing comes from a desire to see the person prove himself true, to pass the test, and to gain confidence from the victory; temptation, on the other hand, is when evil is placed before someone in hope that he or she will fail. Thus God never tempts people (James. 1:13) but he does test people (Gen. 22:1; Heb. 11:17). Both temptation and testing are meant to see what is in a person, whether they will obey, but temptation is meant to make someone fall, while testing is to raise them up. God always tests in order to reward or bring about good (Deut. 8:16). Hence, Jeremiah 17:10 says, “I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings” (ESV).

**“by the Devil.”** “Devil” is a transliteration of the Greek word, *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer.” A primary attribute of the Devil is slander, and slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.” “The Slanderer” works hard to slander others and destroy them and their reputation. He has no regard for law or honesty and uses many different illicit means to discredit and destroy people.

The literal Greek phrase in this verse is “of the Slanderer,” a genitive of origin, the Slanderer being the source of the temptation, so “by the Slanderer” (by the Devil) is a good translation.

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Mat 4:2

**“40 days and 40 nights.”** Here Jesus is clearly being shown as a new Moses, who had twice spent 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai (First time: Exod. 24:18, which was retold in Deut. 9:9; Second time: Exod. 34:28). Jesus also spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness, and is now the new Lawgiver, superior to Moses. Jesus brings a “better hope” (Heb. 7:19); initiates a “better covenant” (Heb. 7:22; 8:6) that is based on “better promises (Heb. 8:6); and is a “better sacrifice” (Heb. 9:23).

Mat 4:3

**“If you are.”** The Devil did not doubt who Jesus was, and neither did Jesus. The Devil, called “the Tempter” in the verse, is goading Jesus, prodding and poking him in order to get him to act rashly. He was trying to get a reaction from Jesus like, “I am the Son of God, and I’ll prove it to you,” and then do something stupid. This event is historical fact, but we must learn from it because the Devil and those who follow him use the same tactic every day, poking at people until they get angry and do something stupid. We are to be peaceful and controlled and not be victims of the Devil’s tricks.

**“the Tempter.”** This is a name for the Slanderer (the Devil). The Greek is *peirazō* (#3985 πειράζω, pronounced pay-'rah-zō), which means to tempt, to put through an ordeal. It can also be used in a good sense, to test with the idea of the one tested being successful, but that is not its meaning here. The Tempter is an apt name for the Slanderer because he is constantly at work setting up traps and temptations so that people will fall. The Adversary comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), and often he sets the stage with a temptation so that we end up destroying ourselves.

[For other names of the Devil and their meanings, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Mat 4:4

**“It is written: Man cannot live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”** Here in Matthew 4:4, Jesus refers to Deuteronomy 8:3. The quotation in Matthew is from the Septuagint, and it is close to the Hebrew text, but not exact.

The Old Testament context of Deuteronomy 8:3 is that God humbled Israel and made them reliant on Him by providing manna for them for their 40 years in the wilderness. God provided for their physical needs to teach them about their spiritual need of God, although, many times they complained and grumbled. God taught them a similar idea to what we read in Matthew 6:33, that if we seek first the Kingdom of God, he will provide our physical needs. However, Israel’s reliance upon God was imperfect, in contrast to Jesus’ reliance upon God, which was perfect.

The Tempter (the Devil) is trying to tempt Jesus using two methods. First, he challenges Jesus’ sonship, saying, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.” Yet, this is a false notion, because Jesus’ sonship does not rely upon his ability to turn stones into bread. Jesus would still be the Son of God without doing this. But the Devil attacks his identity wanting him to feel the need to prove himself as God’s son. Interestingly, in trying to prove his sonship, if Jesus had taken up the Devil’s offer, he would not have actually proved what the Devil wanted him to prove. Old Testament prophets did miracles and weren’t the Son of God.

Secondly, the Devil is trying to tempt Jesus to satisfy his physical hunger. However, in quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 Jesus is showing his complete trust in God, showing that his physical hunger pales in comparison to his spiritual hunger for God. He embodied what Israel had to learn, a complete reliance upon God and his word.

Mat 4:5

**“Then the Devil took him into the holy city.”** This reveals some of the power of the Devil. The Devil had the power to physically move Jesus from one place to another, and he did. Jesus could have resisted, but the ability of Jesus to fully experience and resist the temptations of the Devil was part of the fact that he was tempted in every way like we humans are. Although most of us are not tempted directly by the Devil, historically many people have been. Some scholars assert that Jesus was only taken mentally to Jerusalem, but then that would not have been a real temptation. Jesus would not have been tempted to jump because he would have known that any “fall” he would have taken would have been a mental act, just make-believe. The Devil is real, his power is real, and he can move a physical body as he did to Jesus.

**“Devil.”** The Greek is literally “the Slanderer,” and we know him as “the Devil.”

[For more information on the Devil, see commentary on Matt. 4:1. For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.” For this temptation actually being the last of the three temptations and Luke 4 having the correct order of temptations, see commentary on Matt. 4:8, “showed him all the kingdoms.”]

Mat 4:6

**“Son of God.”** The phrase “Son of God” is one of the pieces of evidence that Jesus is not God and the doctrine of the Trinity is not in the Bible. The doctrine of the Trinity is that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and the three of them are co-equal and co-eternal and together make up “one God;” and that Jesus is both 100% man and 100% God with both Jesus’ human and divine natures co-existing in the human body of Jesus.

God was not born, but is eternal. But in contrast to the eternal God, Jesus Christ is “begotten.” Jesus had a beginning. Jesus is the “Son” of God, and children have a beginning. Although many orthodox Trinitarians say that Jesus was “eternally begotten,” that phrase is not in the Bible. It is a made-up phrase that is both nonsensical and self-contradictory. The only reason the phrase “eternally begotten,” exists at all in theological circles is that the Bible says Jesus is the Son of God, and Trinitarians assert that Jesus is eternal God, so they assert that Jesus must be “eternally begotten.” But Jesus is God’s “Son,” and nowhere in the Bible does God state the word “Son” does not have its common meaning when it comes to Jesus. In fact, the opposite is true. The angel Gabriel told Mary that God would impregnate her, and “for that reason” the child Jesus would be called “the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

A study of the theological concept of “eternally begotten” reveals that a debate has raged for centuries about whether Jesus is in fact “the eternally begotten Son.” There are a number of Trinitarians who admit that Jesus cannot be an “eternal Son,” many of them noting that a “Son” had a beginning. However, rather than saying that there was a time Jesus did not exist, they say that Jesus existed as God, but not as the Son, before he was born of Mary. However, the Bible has no description or explanation of how that could have been. God is a spirit, so was Jesus a spirit before he was human? The Bible never says. We assert that the reason that the Bible never speaks about the kind of being Jesus was before his birth is very simple: before God impregnated Mary, Jesus did not exist except in the mind of God and as part of God’s plan.

The Jews of the Old Testament never thought that their Messiah was somehow alive. The Messiah was coming in the future. Dustin Smith writes: “Jesus is certainly not alive and active anywhere within the pages of the Hebrew Bible. …In fact, the author of Hebrews argues that God used to speak through prophets, but *in these last days* He has spoken to us through a Son (Heb. 1:1-2) indicating that God didn’t speak through a Son in the Hebrew Bible.”[[52]](#footnote-24113)

The prophecies of the Old Testament always spoke of the Messiah as one who was coming in the future, not someone who was already there. He was to be the offspring of the woman (Gen. 3:15). He would be a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). He would be from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10). He was still far off, but a star coming out of Jacob (Num. 24:17). He would be a descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12-13; Isa. 9:7; 11:1). He will rule over the world (Ps. 2:8; Dan. 2:44). He would be both a king and priest (Ps. 110:1-4). The Jews were well aware that God was with them, but there is no indication that any of them thought of their Messiah somehow with them too; that he was with them as some kind of spirit being, but would later come and be with them in the flesh.

The phrase Son of God is simple and straightforward. God impregnated Mary while she was still a virgin and she bore God’s son, making Jesus “the Son of God.”

[For more on Jesus having a beginning, see commentary on Matt. 1:18.]

Mat 4:7

**“the Lord.”** A rabbinic abbreviation for “Yahweh” appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew and could have used the name Yahweh, so we have put it here in the commentary in the REV (see commentary on Matt. 3:3).

Mat 4:8

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “the Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“very high.”** The Greek adjective *hupsēlos* (#5308 ὑψηλός) has a basic meaning of “high” (as in Matt. 17:1, Mark 9:2, and Rev. 21:10). However, it can also have the connotation of “proud” or “arrogant.” We see this in Romans 12:16 when we are told to “not mind high things” (μὴ τὰ ὑψηλὰ φρονοῦντες), i.e. not be arrogant. The LXX uses this sense in Isaiah 2:12-14: “the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty…against all the lofty mountains, and against all the uplifted hills.” It is possible that here in Matthew the adjective has this connotation implied; the Devil tempted Christ to ‘mind high things’ by taking him to a ‘proud’ mountain, showing him all the splendor of ruling the kingdoms of the world. In English, the word “high” conveys altitude but can also suggest arrogance when understood in context.

**“showed him all the kingdoms.”** Matthew and Luke both record the three temptations that the Adversary tempted Jesus with, but worded slightly differently and in a different order. We believe Luke has the order correct because Luke says he recorded things “in order” (Luke 1:3). However, it makes sense that Matthew, which emphasizes Jesus’ role as the king, would have the temptation about ruling over the world as the last temptation because to a king, the domain and people over whom he rules is of primary importance.

Commentators differ as to whether Matthew or Luke has the order of events as they actually happened. We suggest that another reason that Luke has the correct order is that it makes sense that to the Devil, the most desirable outcome would be to have Jesus worship him, but if he could not accomplish that, to kill Jesus and be done with him. The order of temptations in Luke accomplishes that goal. The second temptation would result in Jesus worshiping the Devil, and if that failed the third temptation would have resulted in Jesus’ death.

Mat 4:9

**“worship.”** The Devil wanted Jesus to revere him as he revered God. Thus “worship” is appropriate here. See commentary on Matthew 2:2, “pay homage.”

This is one of the many places the Bible reveals that Jesus Christ was not God, but a human being. If the doctrine of the Trinity is true, and Jesus was God and an indivisible part of the Trinity, there is no way that he, as God, could have or would have worshiped the Devil. Jesus and the Devil would have been intimately acquainted for many eons of time. Jesus, as part of the Trinity, would have created the angel who eventually rebelled against God and became known as the Devil, the archenemy of himself and the Father. Jesus and the Devil would have been battling each other for ages, especially during the 4,000 years since the Fall of Adam and Eve. Given that huge history of animosity, and given that if Jesus was God, would the Devil really think that now that Jesus was on earth he would somehow decide to worship his age-long enemy—and to gain what? To become the ruler of the world? The idea is absurd. If Jesus as God would have made the world, he could even make another one if he wanted to. The Devil would know that God would not worship him. The Devil would know that he had nothing of value to offer God Himself. The very fact that the Devil offered Jesus the rulership of the world if Jesus would worship him is very strong evidence that Jesus was not God.

[For more information about Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Mat 4:10

**“For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”** The quotation is not exact. Deuteronomy 6:13 says, “You are to fear Yahweh your God.” Jesus correctly gets the sense of “fear” in that context, and so brings it forward as “worship.” This is not a case where Jesus was quoting the Septuagint and it read “worship,” because both the Hebrew text and LXX read “fear.”

It is sometimes stated that since we are to worship only God, and because we are also supposed to worship Jesus, therefore he must be God. That argument is not valid and is based on a false understanding of the word “worship.” While it is true that we are to worship God in a special way reserved only for Him, there is no Greek or Hebrew word that represents that fact. It is an issue of the heart and cannot be represented on the written page. The words for “worship” in both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament are used of both people and God. In fact, the entire temptation of Christ by the Devil proves that Jesus was not God. God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). Also, if Jesus were God, the Devil would never have asked Jesus to worship him. God is worshiped, but there is no evidence He worships anything else at any time. It was for desiring to be like God (and thus be worshiped like God) that the Devil was thrown out of heaven in the first place (Isa. 14:12-15), and it is unreasonable to think that the Devil would have believed that God could now be persuaded to worship him.

In the biblical culture, the act of worship was not directed only to God. It was very common to worship (i.e., pay homage to) men of a higher status. Sadly, almost always this fact has been obscured by the translators of the Bible and therefore is impossible to see in the English translations. The translators usually translate Hebrew or Greek words that relate to worship as “worship” when they refer to God or a pagan god, but as some other word, such as “bow before,” or “pay homage to,” when the worship involves men. This double standard of translation does not allow the English reader to see what any person reading the Hebrew or Greek text can see: that “worship” is not just reserved for God. A few examples should make our point.

* Exodus 34:14 NIV84: “Do not worship [#07812 שָׁחָה shachah] any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.
* Genesis 19:1 NIV84: When Lot saw the two strangers, he got up to meet them “and bowed down [#07812 shachah] with his face to the ground.”
* Genesis 27:29 NIV84: Isaac said to Jacob: May…peoples bow down [#07812 shachah] to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down [#07812 shachah] to you.
* Exodus 18:7 NIV84 “So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down [#07812 shachah] and kissed him.
* 1 Samuel 1:19 NIV84 Early the next morning they arose and worshiped [#07812 shachah] before the LORD.
* 1 Samuel 2:36 Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him [#07812 shachah] for a piece of silver and a crust of bread.
* 2 Samuel 1:2 On the third day a man arrived from Saul’s camp…. When he came to David, he fell to the ground to pay him honor [#07812 shachah].

The above list confirms what has already been pointed out—that the translators used the word “worship” when the worship was to God or pagan gods, but never used the word “worship” when people were “worshiping” other people, even though the Hebrew text used the same word for both types of worship. And the above list is only a tiny sampling of the examples that could be given, or of what one will see if he studies the subject for himself. “Worship,” usually expressed by bowing down before someone, was a part of the culture and a way of showing respect or reverence. However, because of the theological position that only God should be worshiped, translators have avoided the English word “worship” when people worship people, in spite of the fact that it is clearly in the original text. We assert that not translating into English what is clearly in the original text has created a false impression in the Christian community and supported the belief that “only God can be worshiped, so if Jesus is worshiped he must be God too.” It is very clear in the biblical text that people “worshiped” other people who deserved that worship, and no person deserved worship more than Jesus Christ.

There is a sense, of course, in which there is a very special worship (homage, allegiance, reverent love, and devotion) to be given only to God, but there is no unique word that represents that special worship. Rather, it is a posture of the heart. Scripturally, this must be determined from context. Even words like *proskuneō*, which are almost always used of God, are occasionally used for showing respect to other men (Acts 10:25). And the word “serve” in Matthew 4:10 is *latreuō*, which is sometimes translated worship, but used of the worship of other things as well as of the true God, as in “worship the host of heaven” (Acts 7:42 KJV) and “served created things” (Romans 1:25). Thus, when Christ said, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him,” he was speaking of a special worship of God that comes from the heart, not using a special vocabulary word that is reserved for the worship of God only.

Once we understand that in the Bible both God and men are worshiped, we are forced to look, not at the specific word for “worship,” but rather at the heart of the one doing the worship. It explains why God rejects the worship of those whose hearts are really not with Him. It also explains why there are occasions in the Bible when men reject the worship of other men. In Acts 10:26, Peter asks Cornelius to stand up because Cornelius was paying homage to Peter in a way that made Peter uncomfortable even though Cornelius felt Peter was worthy of it. In Revelation 19:10, an angel stops John from worshiping him. In these cases, it is not the “worship,” per se, that was wrong, or it would have been wrong in all the other places throughout the Bible. In the aforementioned accounts, the one about to be worshiped saw that it was inappropriate or felt uncomfortable in the situation. Actually, the example of John in Revelation is another strong proof that men did worship others besides God. If it were forbidden to worship anyone besides God, the great apostle John would never have even started to worship the angel. The fact that he did so actually proves the point that others besides God were worshiped in the biblical culture.

It is clear why people fell down and worshiped Jesus while he walked the earth and performed great miracles: people loved him and respected him greatly. It is also clear why we are to worship him now—he has earned our love and our highest reverence. He died to set us free, and God has honored him by seating him at His own right hand above all other powers and authorities. Just because we worship God and worship Jesus, does that mean they are the same or receive the same worship? No, it does not. We reserve a special place in our hearts for God, for Jesus, and frankly, for those other people who deserve our “worship” in the biblical sense of the word.

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“the Lord.”** A rabbinic abbreviation for “Yahweh” appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew could have written his gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV commentary (see commentary on Matt. 3:3).

**“Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information, see commentary on Mark 1:13.

[For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Mat 4:11

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “the Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“began ministering.”** See commentary on Mark 1:13.

Mat 4:12

**“Now when he heard that John had been arrested.”** John was arrested between Passover and Pentecost. It was after John the Baptist was arrested (Matt. 4:12, 17; Mark 1:14) that Jesus started preaching and telling people to repent because the Kingdom of Heaven (also called the Kingdom of God) had drawn near (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15). John the Baptist had been preaching that message until his arrest (Matt. 3:2). If Jesus’ ministry was just over a year, as many believe, then he started his ministry before a Passover, and was crucified the next Passover.[[53]](#footnote-22921) John the Baptist was arrested between the first Passover (likely April) and Pentecost (likely June). We know that because Jesus was at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem (John 2:13, 23), and when he left Jerusalem after the Passover, he went into other parts of Judea (John 3:22). At that time John had not been arrested and was still baptizing (John 3:23). However, by Pentecost, John had been arrested (John 5:35).

**“he withdrew into Galilee.”** Herod Antipas imprisoned John at his palace-fortress of Machaerus, which was in Perea, the area beyond Jordan where John had been baptizing according to John 1:28. When Jesus knew John was imprisoned there, he went north into Galilee. For a while anyway, Jesus concentrated his evangelistic efforts in Galilee, far removed from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life. He also left Nazareth, where he had encountered great resistance, even though it was a city in Galilee (Matt. 4:13; Luke 4:28-31; John 2:12).

Mat 4:13

**“And he left Nazareth and went and lived in Capernaum...”** Jesus left Nazareth after the people there tried to kill him (Luke 4:28-31). He made Capernaum his home

[For more information, see commentary on Mark 2:1.]

Mat 4:14

**“what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah.”** Matthew 4:15-16 quote from Isaiah 9:1-2.

Mat 4:15

**“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali.”** (Matt. 4:15-16 are quoted from Isa. 9:1-2). Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the twelve tribes of Israel and two of the twelve tribal areas that were assigned by Joshua (Josh. 19:10-16, 32-39). They were both in the area most frequented by Jesus in his ministry.

**“The Way of the Sea.”** This major trade route that went right through Capernaum (there is a Roman mile marker now on display at Capernaum) is most often known by its more modern name that comes from the Latin, the Via Maris. The Via Maris is the ancient trade route linking Egypt with Damascus and all Syria, Anatolia (modern Turkey), and Mesopotamia. Its early name was “Way of the Philistines” (cf. Exod. 13:17) because after leaving Egypt it ran north along the coast of Israel through the territory of the Philistines. The name “Via Maris” is much later and based on the Latin Vulgate translation of Matthew 4:15. It means “the Way of the Sea,” or “the Road of the Sea.” The history of the Via Maris is long and the main road changed during different periods. For example, before the Roman period, the Via Maris went from Capernaum north to Hazor, and from Hazor, it crossed the Jordan River at Jacob’s Ford then went over the Golan Heights to Damascus. This road still existed in the time of Christ, but recent archaeological evidence suggests that in Roman times the road left Capernaum and headed east to Bethsaida-Julius and then northeast to Damascus.

The Via Maris goes from Egypt across Sinai, through the Philistine Plain and the Plain of Sharon through the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Joppa. At Dor it branches into two roads. One continues directly north along the Mediterranean coast, and the other follows an inland route by Megiddo, through the Jezreel Valley, then to Old Testament Beth-shean (which is New Testament Scythopolis, a city of the Decapolis). From there it branched, and one branch ran on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, passing through Tiberias, then continuing north through Migdal and Capernaum. The east branch crossed the Jordan south of the Sea of Galilee and ran along the east coast of the lake until Hyppos (Susita) when it turned northeast and climbed over the Golan and then continued down to Damascus. The fact that the Via Maris passed by Capernaum helps explain why that city had a tollhouse (Matt. 9:9) so revenue could be collected from the passing caravans. That money needed protection, so it was also a Roman outpost and had a centurion and troops (Matt. 8:5). Also, it shows us that when Jesus Christ chose Capernaum to be his hometown after he left Nazareth, he chose a cosmopolitan town where there would be plenty of opportunity to share the Word and reach others, as well as opportunity for others to more easily reach him.

**“beyond the Jordan.”** The phrase “beyond the Jordan” can refer to either east (Deut. 3:8; Josh. 24:8) or west (Deut. 3:20; 11:30; Josh. 5:1) of the Jordan River depending on the context or the location of the speaker. Here in Matthew 4:15, and in Isaiah 9:1-2, which Matthew quotes, “beyond the Jordan” refers to the east side of the Jordan River.

Mat 4:16

See commentary on Matthew 4:15.

Mat 4:17

**“From that time on.”** Jesus waited until John the Baptist was arrested before he started preaching the message that John had been preaching, which was that the Kingdom of Heaven had drawn near. Jesus had been teaching things about the Kingdom of Heaven (also called the Kingdom of God),

**“The Kingdom of Heaven has drawn near.”** This message was spoken by both John and Jesus. Neither of them knew that the fullness of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven would be more than 2,000 years in the future. The parallel passage to Matthew 4:17 is Mark 1:15 (see commentary on Mark 1:15).

Jesus taught on many things, but the primary focus of his teaching was the Kingdom of Heaven (also frequently called “the Kingdom of God”). We certainly see that in Matthew. Some of the primary verses about Jesus teaching on the Kingdom of Heaven are: Matthew 4:17, 23; 5:3, 10, 19, 20; 6:33; 7:21; 8:11-12; 9:35; and 11:11. In Matthew 10:7 Jesus sent his disciples to preach the Kingdom.

[For more on what Christ’s kingdom on earth, the “Kingdom of God,” will be like, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the many different ways that Jesus said the Kingdom of God was coming soon, see commentary on Matt. 16:28.]

Mat 4:18

**“Sea of Galilee.”** The “sea” of Galilee is actually a rather small lake, only 7 miles (11.2 km) across and 12 miles (19.3 km) long, and the entire lake can be seen from the escarpments on both the east and west sides. The Greek word *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα), lake, sea, or ocean, does not really refer to the size of the body of water, and thus has to be translated into English as “lake,” “sea,” or “ocean” by knowing the body of water that is being referred to. Because the body of water is historically known as, and called, “the Sea of Galilee” we leave that name intact when its proper name is mentioned. However, when it is not referred to by name, we refer to it like it actually is—a lake. The “Sea of Galilee” is the only freshwater lake generally referred to as a “sea.” Technically, “seas” are saltwater, but the “Sea of Galilee” is fresh water.

Mat 4:19

**“Follow me.”** See commentary on Mark 1:17. The word “follow” here is a different word from “follow” in Matthew 4:20. The disciple would follow behind the teacher in the biblical culture.

**“I will have you fish for people.”** The Greek text literally reads, “I will make you fishermen of people.” For more on Jesus’ metaphor about his followers becoming fishermen of people, see commentary on Mark 1:17.

Mat 4:20

**“And immediately they left their nets and followed him.”** The Gospels contain records of Jesus calling his disciples which can be very confusing. To understand Jesus’ calling of his disciples, one must read all four Gospels and piece the records together. Furthermore, it is important to have some knowledge of the first-century rabbinic practices. The four Gospel records we will compare are: Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:4-11; and John 1:29-2:2.

If we start by reading the record in Matthew 4, we can see that Jesus’ calling of the disciples can be confusing. It seems as if Jesus just walks by the area where the men are working, calls out “Follow me,” and they leave their fishing business and follow Jesus. This behavior of Peter, Andrew, James, and John seems abrupt and even reckless. If we start reading at Matthew 1:1 and read until Matthew 4:20 and 4:22 when the disciples left their work and followed Jesus, it seems Jesus had never met those four men before. Just because a rabbi, even a powerful one, said “Follow me,” who would leave their profession?

The key to understanding Matthew (and Mark and Luke) is to read it in the context of all four Gospels and pay close attention to the details. When we read all four Gospels, we see that Peter, Andrew, James, and John knew Jesus, and knew him well. In fact, they were already his disciples when he called them from their boats. Actually, as this study develops, we will see that he called them from their boats on two different occasions. The key to the records in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is the Gospel of John.

Andrew and Peter were brothers and were deeply spiritual men, something that is obvious from reading John 1. Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist before he ever met Jesus (John 1:35-40). That speaks volumes about Andrew. As a disciple, not just a “listener” or someone in John’s audience, Andrew understood the message of the Baptist, which included that the Messiah was coming soon. Of course, there would have been many things John taught about the spiritual situation of the times, and so Andrew would have seen through the religiosity and corruption of the spiritually bankrupt Pharisees and Sadducees. John the Baptist’s opinion of those religious leaders is clear from when he met them because he called them “offspring of vipers” (Matt. 3:7). Furthermore, John would have taught his disciples much more about the truth and error of the religious system of his time. The Four Gospels do not say much about the teaching of John. This is understandable since the Gospels are about Jesus, not John. Nevertheless, John was a great prophet, and since his followers were actual “disciples,” John would have taught the truth on many different subjects.

One of the great truths that John would have taught his disciples was that he was the forerunner of the Messiah who was to come shortly. We know this because he openly proclaimed it. When asked who he was, John said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, make straight the way of the Lord” (John 1:23, a quotation of Isa. 40:3). The “way of the Lord” was the road the Lord would travel on. The word “way” is also “road” in both Hebrew and Greek, and in the USA many small roads and paths use the designation “way.” Roads in the Middle East were fixed up (“made straight”) for passing dignitaries, but they deteriorated quickly, so there was no need to repair the roads until just before the arrival of the dignitary. The fact that John declared that he was the voice who shouted to repair the road of the Lord meant the Lord would come on the scene shortly after he did.

When John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, “Look! The Lamb of God,” (John 1:36), Andrew believed his teacher. But before going to Jesus, he first went and got his brother Peter and said, “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41). Then Peter and Andrew both went to Jesus, who immediately changed Peter’s name from “Simon” to “Rock” (“Cephas” in Aramaic, “Peter” in Greek; John 1:42). In the biblical culture when a person changed someone’s name, it meant that he had some kind of control over the person’s life. In the Old Testament, God, as well as other rulers, changed people’s names; for example, Abram to Abraham (Gen. 17:5); Sarai to Sarah (Gen. 17:15); Jacob to Israel (Gen. 32:28); Joseph to Zaphenath-paneah (Gen. 41:45); Eliakim to Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34); Mattaniah to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17); Pashhur to Magor-missabib (Jer. 20:3); Daniel to Belteshazzar (Dan. 1:7). That Peter would accept what Andrew said and also immediately accept the new name Jesus gave him shows us that Peter was a deeply spiritual man too, and immediately willing to become a disciple of Jesus.

[For a deeper study of God or a ruler changing someone’s name, see commentary on John 1:42.]

The next day Philip and Nathanael began to follow Jesus, along with Andrew and Peter, and this was before John was arrested and before Jesus started ministering in Galilee (John 1:43-51). This is important because it shows that Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael were “following” Jesus, and even believed he was the Messiah before John was arrested, and that was before Jesus called them from their boats the first time (Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20). Jesus called the disciples from their boats after John was arrested, so they had already been following Jesus for some time (Matt. 4:12-22). The record shows us that Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael were following Jesus, and we can also assume that since James and John were business partners with Peter and Andrew, and also deeply spiritual men, they believed what Peter and Andrew said about Jesus.

But if Peter and Andrew were following Jesus before John was arrested, why were they fishing when Jesus called them? In the biblical culture, a person could be a disciple or follower of a rabbi without giving up his occupation. Although some men were full-time disciples, discipleship often did not require that. For example, Andrew was a disciple of John (John 1:35-37) but still made a living as a fisherman, which is what he was doing when Jesus called him (Matt. 4:18). Chronologically, then, Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael first became aware that Jesus was the Messiah and became his disciples while they were in Bethany beyond Jordan where John was baptizing, and yet they still worked for a living. This was before Jesus lived in Galilee. Then, after Jesus moved to Capernaum (Matt. 4:13), Jesus called them to intensify their discipleship with him, which they did (Matt. 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20). Jesus told them “Follow me, and I will have [future tense] you fish for people” (Matt. 4:19; cf. Mark 1:17). Even after this calling to more intense discipleship, however, they still continued to fish for a living.

The final time Jesus called Peter and the other fishermen is recorded in Luke 5:1-11. This record is significantly different from the records in Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, and Peter and the others were in the boats fishing or washing nets. In Luke, Jesus was teaching the people and the boats were empty, while the fishermen were washing their nets from the previous night’s work. This time Jesus got into the boat with Peter, and James and John were close by, likely in another boat so they could help with the nets. This time, in Luke 5, Jesus calls the apostles from fishing to being full-time disciples. He said, “From now on you will be catching people.” Jesus’ words, “From now on” are important—they mark the start of the apostles’ full-time discipleship. So it was at this time the apostles left fishing to others and followed Jesus on a full-time basis.

This last calling of the apostles was associated with a miracle—the catching of such a huge haul of fish that those professional fishermen were amazed. It seems certain that this miracle was designed to comfort and encourage the disciples, who had families to take care of. It was as if God was saying by this miracle, “You can leave your human wisdom and your fishing and I will take care of you and your loved ones.” The disciples were comforted and convinced and left their boats and equipment to the care of others while they followed Jesus.

Wisdom and logic are a part of good biblical interpretation, and they are certainly necessary when understanding the calling of the disciples. When Luke 5:11 says they “left everything and followed” Jesus, it does not mean they just walked away from the fish they had just caught, leaving them in the boats. It is a summary statement, summarizing what happened after catching all the fish. The apostles did not just abandon their boats or leave the fish to rot in the sun. The fish would have been divided up as usual so the families were provided for, and the fishing equipment would have been given into the care of others. But it is clear that this calling in Luke was the turning point at which those future apostles started in full-time ministry.

Even so, it is likely that these future apostles never completely left the fishing business; it seems likely that they simply handed their business over to managers or other family members so they could then follow Jesus on a full-time basis. That would explain how they could go back to fishing so quickly after Jesus was crucified (John 21:3). While acquiring the boats, nets, and other equipment for successful fishing would have certainly taken at least a few weeks and perhaps longer, simply stepping back into an ongoing business would have been something they could have done very quickly.

Realizing that Peter never actually gave the fishing business up completely not only explains how he could get back into it so quickly after the crucifixion, it also explains Jesus’ final call to Peter. When Jesus met Peter at the Sea of Galilee after his resurrection, he said, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these [fish]?” (John 21:15). Even after seeing the resurrected Messiah both individually (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), and as part of various group appearances (cf. John 20:19ff), Peter returned to the fishing trade rather than continuing in the footsteps of Jesus and making disciples—which admittedly was a risky business. So Jesus met Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and challenged him: “Do you love me more than fishing?” Peter said “Yes,” and Jesus pressed forward, asking three times if Peter loved him, always following it with an exhortation to feed the sheep, that is, to become the shepherd for the new and at that time very confused and frightened flock of the developing church. Their conversation led to Jesus giving Peter the command, “Follow me!”

In summary, many of the apostles, certainly Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael, and likely James and John as well, became followers of Jesus before he lived in Galilee, while John the Baptist was alive. Months later, after Jesus had performed many miracles and John the Baptist had been killed, Jesus told some of the apostles he would make them fishers of men, and their discipleship intensified. At some time after that, in Luke 5, Jesus said, “From now on you will be catching people,” and at that time the disciples started into full-time ministry. So when we study the full chronology of the calling of the apostles, Jesus did not simply tell people who barely knew him to give up their occupations and follow him. He cultivated a relationship with his future apostles, discipled them to some extent, and then finally called them into full-time ministry.

The full account of how Peter and Andrew came into full-time ministry is helpful to those of us today who are not aware of the customs and processes involved in becoming a disciple of Jesus, or for that matter, of any rabbi of that time period. We can see that it was not an instantaneous and mysterious event in which Jesus just said “Follow me” to total strangers who then gave up the work that supported them and their families and trotted off to follow someone they did not know. Understanding that, we should also understand that the Bible does not need to give us an account of the discipleship process of all the apostles. For example, we do not know how Matthew became a disciple of Jesus, but we know by custom and logic that it was not magical or mystical. Jesus and Matthew somehow developed a relationship, and then at the right time, Jesus asked Matthew to follow him. The fact that the Bible does not give us the details of how Matthew became a disciple does not mean it was a mystical experience. Quite the opposite! If the process was ordinary, normal, and usual, then the Bible would not have to say anything about it because the reading audience would understand the process from their culture. However, if the calling of the disciples was mystical and unusual, then we should expect the Bible would say something about that for the benefit of the reading audience.

Mat 4:23

**“the good news of the kingdom.”** The “good news of the kingdom” primarily refers to the coming of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, and the fact that Christ (and John the Baptist) was teaching that it was near (Matt. 4:17). The coming Kingdom of God was the primary subject of Christ’s teaching, and Matthew 4:23 is very similar to Matthew 9:35.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 4:24

**“throughout all Syria.”** “Syria” can refer to the Roman province of Syria, or to the territory belonging to the Syria (Aramea) of the Old Testament, and that is likely given its use here in contrast to Galilee (Matt. 4:23). Jesus had been healing all over Galilee, immediately south of Syria, and it would be natural for the news of this miracle worker to spread far and wide and not just stop at a political border. And while there were Jews in Syria who would have wanted to be healed by Jesus, there were Gentiles who wanted to be healed too, such as the Syrophoenician woman of Matthew 15. So it is quite natural that both Jews and Gentiles would come from Syria to be healed, and Jesus responded by healing them.

Mat 4:25

**“Decapolis.”** The Decapolis was a loosely associated league of ten cities (*Deka* means ten; *polis* means city) and is also the name of the area where these cities are located. By 200 BC the Greeks had occupied towns like Gadara and Philadelphia, and in 63 BC the Roman General Pompey liberated Hippos (Susita), Scythopolis (built on the ancient site of Beth-shean), and Pella from the Jews and gave them municipal freedom, allowing them to answer directly to the governor of Syria. About 1 BC they formed a league, even minting their own coins. Although the number of cities was probably ten at an early date, with time the number of cities changed. The Roman historian Pliny named the ten cities as Damascus, Philadelphia (modern Amman, Jordan), Canatha, Pella, Hippos, Gadara, Dion, Raphana, Gerasa (modern Jerash), and Scythopolis (ancient Beth-shean and the only city west of the Jordan River). In the second century AD, Ptolemy named 18 cities in the Decapolis, and another source mentions 14 cities. Hence the number of cities varied from time to time.

The original Decapolis was settled by Greeks who migrated into the area shortly after the conquest of Israel by Alexander the Great. For the most part, they either founded a city or moved into a city that did not have a large population and became the dominant influence there. Jesus is never mentioned as going into any specific city of the Decapolis. Nevertheless, he did minister in the area of Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis, so he well may have been in a Decapolis city (Mark 7:31), even though he primarily ministered to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). Also, when word about Jesus and what he was doing reached the cities of the Decapolis, “large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and *from* beyond the Jordan” (Matt. 4:25). Thus, the teachings and miracles of Jesus clearly caught the attention of the Greeks as well as the Jews.

**“*from* beyond the Jordan.”** Since the list specifically mentions the Decapolis, the region across the Jordan River refers to Perea, the territory controlled by Herod Antipas, who was the son of Herod the Great by his wife Malthace (Herod had 5 wives in his lifetime). Herod Antipas married Herodias, who divorced his half-brother Herod Philip to marry him, and it was Herod Antipas who imprisoned John the Baptist in his castle at Machaerus when John confronted Herod Antipas and told him it was against the Law of Moses to marry his brother’s wife.

**Matthew Chapter 5**

Mat 5:3

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”** The verse is idiomatic, and the meaning is, “Blessed are those who are humble, for the future Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”

**“Blessed.”** This verse is the first of what is called “The Beatitudes.” The word “beatitudes” means “supreme blessedness or happiness, perfect bliss,” so theologians named the first nine verses in the Sermon on the Mount, “The Beatitudes” because they each start with the phrase, “Blessed are.” The pattern Christ used of putting the word “blessed” first for emphasis is the same pattern God used in Deuteronomy 28:3-6. Starting a sentence in the same way over and over is the figure of speech anaphora, and it is done for emphasis.[[54]](#footnote-32296) In Deuteronomy 28, God wanted Israel to know and clearly understand that if they would obey Him they would be blessed, and here in Matthew, Jesus Christ wanted people to know that if they were humble and obeyed God they would be blessed. Being humble and obedient to God is not just a good thing to do, people who make an effort to live godly lives will be abundantly blessed.

[See Word Study: “Anaphora.”]

The Beatitudes primarily refer to the Hope, the future Kingdom on earth, not this life. Although some aspects of them can sometimes apply to this life, the promises of the Beatitudes will only be fully fulfilled in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom when he reigns as king over the earth.

Jesus knew the value of having a clear and living hope, as opposed to a hazy or even false hope, so he spent the opening part of his first major teaching recorded in the Word of God—the Sermon on the Mount—rebuilding the Hope for Israel. Most Christians do not know that everything Jesus said in the Beatitudes, which is the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, relates primarily to the future Hope. Also, most Christians do not know that what he taught was not “new revelation.” It had already been stated in the Old Testament but had been almost forgotten by Jesus’ time.

Sadly, most Christians today believe that the Beatitudes refer to this life. For example, under “Beatitudes” in the Mercer Dictionary of the Bible, the following definition is provided:

Beatitudes. The term is used to designate the condition of individuals or groups who are faithful or righteous and who may therefore expect to enjoy the favor of God. Such blessings were expected to be realized in this life…”[[55]](#footnote-32636)

It is a distortion of the text to interpret the Beatitudes as referring to this life. Although there are certain aspects that do apply today, such as a pure-hearted person seeing God more clearly than someone with an impure heart, the primary emphasis of the Beatitudes is on the future. Students of the Bible must understand the difference between “interpretation” and “application.” “Interpretation” is what the verse is actually saying—what it means. “Application” is how a person can apply the verse or derive meaning from the verse in his own life. Some people may say that they are “blessed” by God because they are “poor in spirit” (i.e., humble) and refer to Matthew 5:3. However, that is not the primary meaning of the verse, even though a person may apply it to their life. A more accurate application (and interpretation) of his idea would come from his using 1 Peter 5:5.

How can “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” be accurately applied to this life when many people who mourn die without ever being comforted? Or, how can “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” be applied to this life? Many meek people never own land and most never “inherit” any land at all. These blessings relate to the future, and Christ was simply teaching what the prophets of long ago had taught. He was rebuilding the walls of doctrine that had been torn down by years of unbelief.

Some Christians try to apply the Beatitudes to this life by spiritualizing them, i.e., by making them something other than a strictly literal reading would say. For example, The NIBCNT expounds on the phrase “the meek shall inherit the earth” by saying that greedy, aggressive people are not able to enjoy what they have in this life, but the meek “have the capacity to enjoy in life all those things that provide genuine and lasting satisfaction.”[[56]](#footnote-16258) The first and most obvious problem with this interpretation is that it does not deal with what the verse actually says. There is a world of difference between “inheriting the earth” and “enjoying what one has.” It is safe to assume that if Christ had wanted to communicate to his audience that only meek people can enjoy what they have, he would have said just that.

A second problem with the idea that the verse refers to enjoying things now is that such an interpretation does not provide the comfort and hope that many people need. Many of those in Christ’s audience were poor, hungry, sick, had lost children or relatives to premature death, and were terribly oppressed by the Romans and even their fellow Jews who had rulership over them. They owned little and life was very difficult. Would it really have comforted them if what Christ said had meant, “Don’t worry, those greedy people cannot really enjoy all the wealth they have, but you can enjoy what you have”? It would not have comforted them any more than it would comfort people who are poor, sick, and oppressed today. But having hope that things in the future will be better than they are now can be very comforting and encouraging. Furthermore, experience teaches that hope in a wonderful future is more important to people who are having difficulties in life than to those who are having an easy life. William Shakespeare, a brilliant writer and keen observer of human life, wrote, “The miserable have no other medicine, but only hope,” and the Beatitudes provide a wonderful hope for the future.

When a person understands that the subject of the Beatitudes is primarily the future life and not this current life, the Beatitudes become easy to understand, profound in their meaning, and powerful in their impact. Christ, the master teacher, garnered truth from the Old Testament and taught it, and as long as the Beatitudes are taken literally and applied to his future Kingdom, what is taught is simple and clear. The Beatitudes are recorded in both Matthew and Luke. There are significant differences between the two Gospels, so both should be examined carefully. In Matthew, Jesus was teaching to a crowd (Matt. 5:1), some of whom were his disciples, but many were not. Not everyone in the crowd was a believer. Since he was teaching from a mountainside, the teaching is called, “The Sermon on the Mount.” In Luke, Christ was teaching on a plain (Luke 6:17) and although a crowd was listening, he spoke specifically to his disciples (Luke 6:20). Each of the Beatitudes should be studied in light of the Old Testament verses that teach the same basic truth.

**“poor in spirit.”** This is a Semitic idiom and is an idiomatic way of saying “humble in their attitude.” To fully understand the idiom, we must examine both “poor” and “spirit.” The Greek word “poor” is *ptōchos* (#4434 πτωχός), and it means poor in wealth, but can refer to being “poor” in other ways. For example, the people Christ addresses in Revelation 3:17 are technically wealthy in material goods, yet Jesus says: “you say, ‘I am rich, and have acquired riches, and have need of nothing,’ and *yet* do not know that you are the wretched one, and pitiful, and poor, and blind, and naked.” In this verse, “poor” refers to being poor in godliness and in the treasure that will be bestowed at the Judgment. Similarly, the word “poor” can refer to being poor or humble in one’s attitude. This is reflected in Isaiah 66:2, which mentions the person to whom God will pay attention: “but to this *man* will I look, *even* to *him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” This verse mentions a “poor and contrite spirit” but many versions correctly understand that the word “poor” refers to “humble,” and translate it that way (ESV, HCSB, NASB, NIV, NRSV). Kenneth Bailey does a good job in showing from the Old Testament, the Qumran texts, and even early Christian sources, that “poor” was used idiomatically for “humble.”[[57]](#footnote-25570)

The word “spirit” is translated from the Greek word *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα), and *pneuma* has many meanings, such as “wind” and “breath.” Furthermore, when *pneuma* is translated as “spirit,” it can refer to many different things, including God who is spirit (John 4:24); Jesus who is called “the spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17); angels who are spirits (Heb. 1:14); and demons who are spirits (Matt. 10:1). It can also refer to “attitude,” which it does here in Matthew 5:3. Other places it refers to attitude are Matthew 26:41 and Mark 14:38, when Peter and the other disciples were sleepy and Jesus told them, “The spirit [attitude] is willing, but the body is weak.” It is also “attitude” in Acts 18:25 when Apollos was called, “fervent in the spirit” (KJV), meaning that he had a fervent attitude, which is why the NRSV translates the phrase, “he spoke with burning enthusiasm.” Interestingly, English also uses “spirit” as “attitude.” For example, we speak of a person being “in good spirits,” or a school having good “school spirit.”

The “spirit” in Matthew 5:3 cannot refer to the gift of holy spirit, because before the day of Pentecost, holy spirit was only upon a select few people, not upon the crowds Jesus was speaking to. Also, before the Day of Pentecost God gave His holy spirit to whom He wanted and in the measure He wanted, so there was no way anyone could have been “poor” in holy spirit.

It is important for us to understand that Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount by teaching that those who were humble in their attitude were blessed. This was not a new teaching but was an important teaching in the Old Testament as well. Being humble is the door to God’s further blessings. 1 Peter 5:5 says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” When we are humble we hear the voice of God and obey it. When we are not humble we do not get the blessings God would have poured out to us. In the context of Matthew 5:5, which is the coming Kingdom of Heaven, those who are humble will obey God and thus receive everlasting life in the Kingdom, so they are blessed. References in the Old Testament that humble people would be blessed include Psalm 149:4; Isaiah 29:19; 66:2; and Zephaniah 3:12.

In an interesting and godly irony, it is often the people who are poor (humble, low) in their attitude and very often self-critical who think of themselves as unworthy of salvation and the Kingdom of Heaven, who are the ones whom Christ came to save, and they will be saved through their trust in Jesus. Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Luke 5:32), and in the context, the “righteous” are the ones who are prideful and righteous in their own eyes, while the “sinners are the people who are “poor in spirit” and very aware of their sin and shortcomings. Those “poor” people are the ones who know they could never attain everlasting life on their own merits and come to Christ for his free gift of salvation.

[For more on the “righteous” not really being righteous in the sight of God, see commentary on Mark 2:17. For more about the “poor in spirit” (the humble) being in Christ’s kingdom on earth, see the REV commentary on Matt. 5:5, that the humble will inherit the earth. For more about the uses of *pneuma* (spirit) see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit,’” and also Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, *The Gift of Holy Spirit*: *The Power to be like Christ*, Appendix B.]

**“the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”** The Kingdom of Heaven was still in the future, but Christ was saying that people who are “poor in spirit,” that is, humble in their attitude, were the kind of people who were going to be in the kingdom when it came (cf. Luke 6:20).

[For more on the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 5:4

**“Blessed are those who mourn, because they will be comforted.”** This truth was revealed in the Old Testament in verses such as Isaiah 61:3, and it is not primarily referring to people being comforted in this life. As this verse promises, no matter how sad and difficult a person’s life is here on earth, and even if they die without experiencing true comfort, the promise will be fulfilled and they will be comforted in the next life.

[For more on the Beatitudes being about the future, see commentary on Matt. 5:3. For more on Christ’s coming kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 5:5

**“Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.”** This verse is a quotation, or at least a rephrasing, of Psalm 37:11. The plain and simple meaning of this verse has been lost due to the traditional teaching that saved people go to heaven when they die and then live in heaven forever. Actually, what the Bible teaches is that Jesus Christ will come down from heaven to the earth, fight and win the Battle of Armageddon, and set up his kingdom on earth, which will fill the whole earth (Dan. 2:35, 44; Rev. 19:11-21). He will set up his palace in the newly rebuilt Jerusalem, and for 1,000 years reign over all the earth. Many scholars refer to this 1,000-year kingdom as the “Millennial Kingdom.” It is the “Kingdom” that Jesus spoke about so often. After the 1,000 years are over there will be a great war (Rev. 20:7-10). Then there will be the second resurrection, and after that, the Eternal City will come from heaven to earth, in which the saved will live forever (Rev. 21:1-4).

The reason the “humble” will inherit the earth is that the humble believe and obey God and thus will be granted everlasting life. Furthermore, that future life will be on earth, as many verses of Scripture teach, and as Jesus himself taught here in Matthew 5:5 (cf. Ps. 37:9-11; Isa. 57:13; Ezek. 37:12; Zeph. 3:8-12, Matt. 5:5). Many commentators espouse the erroneous teaching that “the humble...will inherit the earth” means something like, “the humble can enjoy what they have on earth.” But that is not what the verse is saying. Anyone who has lived among the truly poor and destitute knows that their lives are incredibly hard and a daily struggle, and to say, “Well, if they are godly they can enjoy what they have” is ignorant and insulting; they have little or nothing, often not even food, adequate clothing, or health.

Matthew 5:5 says nothing about enjoying life now, nor does it say the opposite—although the opposite is sometimes taught—that wicked people cannot enjoy what they have. The verse is simple and straightforward and says exactly what the Old Testament says: that humble people will be saved and will live in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, which will be on earth. In contrast, we also know from the Old Testament that the wicked will be destroyed and will not live on the earth: “Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more. Yes, though you look all over for his place, yet he will not be. For the wicked will perish. Yes, the enemies of Yahweh will be like the beauty of the fields. They will vanish—vanish like the smoke” (Ps. 37:10, 20).

[For more on the Beatitudes being about the future, see commentary on Matt. 5:3. For more on Christ’s coming kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more about the wicked being totally destroyed and not alive in any form or in any place, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“earth.”** The Greek word *gē* (#1093 γῆ, pronounced “gay”), means the earth as opposed to heaven. The Greek word *ge* has a wide range of meanings that include: 1. arable land; 2. the ground, the earth; 3. the mainland, as opposed to sea or water; 4. the earth as a whole, the world; a. the earth as opposed to the heavens; 5. a country, land enclosed within fixed boundaries, a tract of land, territory, or region, when it is plain from the context what land is meant, as that of the Jews. Here in Matthew 5:5, “earth” is the better translation because the humble, those who are saved, will fill the earth. Psalm 37:11 says the humble will inherit the “land,” which makes sense in the more limited prophecies to Israel at the time of David. The humble were promised the land of Israel. However, by the time of Christ it should have been clear that the humble were going to inherit much more than just Israel, they would cover the earth. God promised Abraham—who was a Gentile—that his descendants would be numerous like the stars of heaven, and so it would be expected that they would occupy more than just the land of Israel.

Mat 5:6

**“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled.”** What Matthew 5:6 is saying is, “Blessed are those who earnestly desire righteousness and justice because they will have what they desire.” This is one of the clear verses in the Beatitudes that shows that Jesus was speaking about the future Hope—his future Millennial Kingdom and his reign on earth—and not about this life. To “hunger and thirst” for something is idiomatic, and means to earnestly desire something, to long for it. But it does not matter how much people hunger for justice in this life, they will not be “filled,” that is, “satisfied.” We live in an evil world and the Devil is the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4) and the earth is under his sway (1 John 5:19). There will not be justice on earth until Christ reigns as king over the earth, and then there will be justice for everyone, just as the Old Testament prophecies say. When Jesus reigns as king over the earth, those who hunger for righteousness and justice will be filled.

It is important to note, however, that even though there will not be justice on earth until the Lord Jesus reigns as king, people who “hunger and thirst” for righteousness and justice on earth should do their best to accomplish what they can here and now. For example, the dedicated believer knows the value of putting on the armor of God to be able to stand in the spiritual battle day after day (cf. Eph. 6:10-17). We can make a difference to some people, and the Lord will reward people for their efforts on his behalf.

**“righteousness.”** To understand what it means to hunger and thirst for “righteousness,” one must understand that there are two aspects, two meanings, to “righteousness” and they both apply here. “Righteousness” refers both to having a right standing in the sight of God and also acting in a godly and just manner toward others. To fully understand that, it is important to know that in Hebrew the word “righteousness” could mean either or both being right in the sight of God and doing what was right, while in Greek, both “righteousness” and “justice” are usually translated from the same Greek words. It has been a general convention in translating the Greek New Testament that when the context is one’s relationship with God the translators use the word “righteousness,” and when the context is how one treats other people the translators use “just” and “justice.”

The meaning that most Christians think of when they think of “righteousness” is being righteous in the sight of God, that is, being accepted by God. In the minds of most Christians, righteousness in the sight of God is equivalent to, or almost equivalent to, being saved. A person who is righteous in the sight of God is saved, and a person who is saved is righteous in the sight of God. So, for most Christians, being “righteous” means having a solid vertical relationship with God and being “right” in His sight. Based on that understanding of “righteousness,” most Christians read Matthew 5:6 as if it said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for salvation, for they will be saved.” While it is true that people who seek salvation will find it, that is not the primary point that Jesus was making in this Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount. For example, people don’t have to “hunger and thirst” for salvation to be saved. There are things to do to be saved, but “hunger and thirst” are not necessary.

The primary meaning of “righteousness” here in Matthew 5:6, as well as in the Old Testament, Gospels, and even many verses in the New Testament Epistles, is “doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God.” God sets the norms of what is right and godly, and He determines how to treat God and others. When we understand that, we can see why there are verses in the Old Testament that say that God acts righteously—He keeps His own laws and norms and treats others “rightly.” God has “righteous acts” because He acts rightly and justly (Judg. 5:11; 1 Sam. 12:7; Mic. 6:5). Nehemiah said God was “righteous” because He acted rightly toward others and treated them as they deserved to be treated (Neh. 9:33).

Similarly, “righteous” people do what is right toward God and to fellow humans. They act as God would have them act, in a loving and godly manner, and with justice. In contrast, “wicked” people are “wicked” because they defy God and do terrible things to other humans. God the Creator set the laws and standards of life, and He sets the definition of right and wrong. Thus, people who love and obey Him and treat other people in a godly and just manner are “righteous,” while people who defy God and hurt other people are “wicked.” Many verses in the Bible contrast the righteous and the wicked, and a study of those verses shows that “righteous” people treat others justly, while “wicked” people hurt others and take advantage of them (cf. 1 Kings 8:32; Ps. 7:9; 11:5; 37:21; Prov. 10:11, 32; 11:23; 12:5, 10, 12, 26; 13:5; 14:32; 15:28; 24:15; 29:7; Hab. 1:4).

This second meaning of “righteous”—treating people in a just and godly manner—is the primary meaning in Matthew 5:6. Based on the use of “righteous” in the Old Testament and many other places in the Gospels, and remembering that Jesus was speaking to a mostly Jewish audience early in his ministry, the people who were hungering and thirsting for “righteousness” wanted “justice” on earth. They were tired and worn down by the evil and injustice of their leaders, the injustice in the courts, and frankly, the injustice everywhere in their lives. By the way, that situation has not changed. Even Christians who know they are saved and are right with God hunger and thirst for the future time in which Christ will reign and there will be justice on earth.

We live in a world controlled by the Devil and there is no way that Jesus could promise that people who hungered for “righteousness”—justice on earth—would be “filled” (satisfied) in this life. Ever since Cain killed Abel there have been countless people who have been treated unrighteously throughout their lives right up to their death. But one of the great promises of the future Kingdom of Christ is that there will be “righteousness” on earth, that is, people will be right in the sight of God and also there will be true justice on earth for everyone (cf. Isa. 1:26-27; 11:4; 16:5; 32:1, 16, 17; 33:5; 56:1; Jer. 23:5; 31:23; 33:15; Dan. 9:24; Zech. 8:8).

When we understand that “righteous” and “righteousness” refer to acting in a way that was “right” and godly in God’s eyes, and that was also “just” and fair, many New Testament verses become clear. For example, still teaching the Sermon on the Mount, just a little while after Matthew 5:6, Jesus said, “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the experts in the law and the Pharisees, you will absolutely not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 5:20). Jesus was not saying, “Unless you are more saved than the Pharisees you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” He was saying “Unless you live a life in which you do more right and godly things than the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom.” Considering the injustice of the Pharisees, he was also saying, “Unless you are more just and fair to other people than the Pharisees are, you will not enter the kingdom.”

Also, even later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). Here again, the primary meaning of seeking God’s “righteousness” was seeking to act like God and do what is right, godly, and just in His sight. The primary meaning of Jesus’ teaching was not, “seek to be saved.” Of course, it is wonderful to be saved, but in teaching us to “seek God’s righteousness,” Jesus was teaching us to act like God acts, in a way that is right, just, and fair.

Matthew 25:31-46 is the record of the Sheep and Goat Judgment, at which time Jesus will judge the people who are left alive on earth after the Battle of Armageddon and will decide who is allowed to enter his kingdom and who is not. The “righteous” get to enter the kingdom (Matt. 25:37). But how were they said to be “righteous”? Jesus made it clear: they did what was right to other people. They fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, showed hospitality to people in need, gave clothes to the naked, and visited the sick and those in prison (Matt. 25:35-36).

Besides the Old Testament and Gospels, we also see “righteous” and “righteousness” with the meaning of “doing what is right” in Acts and the New Testament Epistles. For example, Acts 10:35 (KJV) says, “But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” To “work righteousness” is to act rightly and justly. Ephesians says, “for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (Eph. 5:9 REV). The “fruit” of the light is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God. In Philippians 3:6, Paul said he was blameless concerning “the righteousness that is in the law,” which was all the righteous acts covered in the law. Timothy says that the law was not made for a “righteous” person (1 Tim. 1:9). But that is not saying that saved people do not need law; it is saying that people who act toward others in ways that are right and just in the sight of God don’t need law. 1 Timothy 6:11 (REV) says the godly person should “diligently pursue righteousness, godliness, trust, love, endurance, and meekness.” “Righteousness” in the list does not mean salvation, it means doing righteous acts; doing things that are “right” in the sight of God and people (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). 2 Timothy 3:16 (REV) speaks of “training in righteousness.” That is not training, or instruction, in how to be saved and thus be in a righteous state before God; it means training in how to make right and godly decisions and do what is right and just for God and fellow humans. There are other verses in the New Testament Epistles besides those given above that use “righteous” or “righteousness,” with the sense of doing righteous acts (cf. Titus 2:12; 3:5; Heb. 1:9; 11:33; 12:11, James 3:18; James 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:23, 24; 3:12; 2 Pet. 3:13; 1 John 3:12; Rev. 16:7; 19:2, 11).

Jesus taught that people who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled because there is a time coming when the Lord will come from heaven, set up his kingdom on earth, and rule with righteousness and justice over the whole earth. That is a wonderful message of hope.

[For more on the Beatitudes being about the future, see commentary on Matt. 5:3. For more on the meanings of “righteousness,” see commentary on Rom. 3:22 and commentary on 1 John 1:9. For more on Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“filled.”** The Greek word is *chortazō* (#5526 χορτάζω) and it means “filled” or “satisfied.” When it is used in the context of eating, it means “filled, fully satisfied,” and Jesus used “filled” here because it fits with the idiom “hunger and thirst.” If Jesus had not used the illustration of hunger and thirst, he might have said something like, “Blessed are those who long for righteousness, because they will get what they want and be satisfied.” In the Millennial Kingdom, people will get the righteousness and justice they long for.

Mat 5:7

**“Blessed are the merciful, because they will be shown mercy.”** This is one of the clear verses in the Beatitudes that shows they are about the future Hope, not this life. There are many merciful people who never receive mercy in this life, but they will definitely be shown mercy by God at the Judgment and afterward. In Matthew 25:31-46, Christ said that those who had fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, sheltered the outcast, clothed the naked, and visited those who were sick or in prison would be shown mercy at the Judgment and allowed into the Kingdom where they will enjoy everlasting life with Christ, while those who had not shown mercy would be excluded. Old Testament verses that show that people who are merciful will be shown mercy include Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8; and Zechariah 7:9.

Mat 5:8

**“Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God.”** People who are pure in heart believe God and thus will be saved, which is why Jesus said they would see God. In the future, God will indeed live with His people (Rev. 21:3). That the pure in heart would be saved and live forever, and thus get to see God, was a common teaching in the Old Testament (cf. Ps. 24:3-5; 73:1).

That the pure in heart will “see God” is literal, and mostly refers to seeing God in the future when the Lord returns. In the Millennial Kingdom saved people will see God like the apostles did, by seeing Him in His Son and representative, Jesus Christ, and in the Everlasting Kingdom they, all the saved, will see God face to face (Rev. 21:3). Here in the context of Matthew 5:8, the word “see” would include not only seeing God but understanding Him better. Isaiah 11:9 says, “the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh like the waters cover the sea” (cf. Hab. 2:14). In the future, the people who are saved will physically see God and also know Him.

Mat 5:9

**“Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called children of God.”** This clearly refers to the future because the peacemakers on the earth today are often scoffed at and discounted as cowards and compromisers. This is the case whether the conflicts are interfamily, interracial, or international. Nevertheless, the Lord recognizes their efforts and they will be called “the children of God” in the Kingdom, where they will live forever. That peacemakers would have everlasting life was stated in the Old Testament. Psalm 37:37 says, “there is a future for a person of peace.”

Mat 5:10

**“Blessed are those who have been persecuted because of *their* righteousness, because the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”** Many of the people who have been persecuted died in the persecution, but they are promised “the Kingdom of Heaven,” i.e., everlasting life in Christ’s wonderful future kingdom on earth. In this context, “righteousness” in the phrase “because of their righteousness” refers to both a believer’s righteous standing in the sight of God and the righteous acts that they do. The primary emphasis of “righteousness” in this verse is “righteous acts,” because it is the righteous acts of godly people that draw the attention of ungodly people and incites them to persecute the godly. Thus, in that sense, this verse is very similar to 2 Timothy 3:12, that everyone who lives a godly life will be persecuted. Also, however, on a spiritual level, the Devil and his people cannot be at peace with people who have a right standing in the sight of God (are spiritually “righteous”) and so they persecute them for that reason also. Many verses show that those people who endure persecution will be blessed for their stand for the Lord (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12-16; Rev. 2:10).

[For more on “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right or just (“justice”), see commentary on Matt. 5:6. For more on the meaning of “righteousness” and that word family, see commentary on Rom. 3:22. For more on Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 5:11

**“because of me.”** This is a difficult phrase to translate due to the possible ways people could misinterpret it. The phrase is *heneken emou* (ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ) which can be translated “because of me,” or “on account of me,” or “for my sake.” The phrase usually occurs in a context in which negative events happen to people due to their trust in Jesus. One way to translate this phrase used by Jesus in a consistent way is “for my sake.” The downside to this is that typically “for my sake” in English carries the connotation that Jesus is being benefited by the events that are unfolding, however, in the biblical uses, Jesus is not receiving any benefit and in fact, his people are suffering. Another way to translate it, which the REV has chosen, is to translate this phrase as “because of me.” Although, since Jesus does not cause people to speak evil against his followers (Matt. 5:11), or cause people to lose their life (Matt. 10:39), or cause people to leave their houses (Mark 10:29) it is best to understand that Jesus is more of an indirect cause. All of those things would happen not because of Jesus, but because of one’s trust in Jesus and the repercussions that a life lived for Jesus brings. Therefore, Jesus is not the direct cause of these events, but the indirect cause. Through belief in him, the disciples could expect certain negative consequences to unfold.

Mat 5:12

**“reward.”** The Greek is *misthos* (#3408 μισθός), and it refers to a payment made for work done; wages. As “wages” or “payment,” it can refer to either a reward (cf. Matt. 5:12; 10:41; Luke 6:35; 1 Cor. 3:14) or a punishment (2 Pet. 2:13), depending on what kind of “payment” is due. In the future Millennial Kingdom, when Jesus Christ rules as king on the earth, people will be repaid for what they have done in this life (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil”). Some people might think they have done very little to support God’s work, but if anyone has helped accomplish God’s work on earth, he will be amply rewarded.

In Matthew 5:12 and some other verses, the reward is said to be “in heaven.” The Bible makes it clear that, with the exception of Christians, who are in the Rapture, believers from Old Testament times get up from the dead and live on the earth. Ezekiel 37:12 (KJV) says, “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.” There is no verse in the Old Testament that states that people go to heaven to live forever. The OT states that when people are resurrected they live on earth.

The rewards that people would receive for their works were said to be “in heaven,” meaning, in God’s keeping. God is keeping a record of people’s deeds, and is thus said to be storing up either the reward, or the punishment, that the person deserves and will receive after the Day of Judgment when Jesus is reigning as king on the earth.

It is understandable that Matthew 5:12 and other verses like it, which speak of rewards, treasures, or even a home in heaven, can be confusing and may lead one to believe that righteous people go to heaven when they die. These include verses such as Matthew 5:12 (“your reward in heaven is great.”), Matthew 6:20 (“store up for yourselves treasures in heaven”), Colossians 1:5 (“the hope that is being stored up for you in heaven”), and 1 Peter 1:4 (“kept in heaven for you”). However, Jesus was talking to Jews who knew (or should have known from the Old Testament Scriptures) that they would inherit the earth when the Messiah sets up his kingdom on earth (see commentary on Matt. 5:5: “Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.”). Therefore, the Jews’ understanding of these concepts would not be based on a literal use of the word heaven in the sense that these physical things, namely, rewards, treasures, and homes, were actually in heaven, but rather, that God, who is in heaven, is “storing” them or keeping record of them. The actual receipt of these things will occur in the future on earth.

God is keeping records of the behavior of each person, a fact that is clearly stated in the Old Testament.

* **Malachi 3:16:** Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name.
* **Ecclesiastes 12:14:** For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

The “record books” of God are also mentioned in the book of Revelation. At the Judgment, “The books were opened” and “The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books” (Rev. 20:12).

Because the Old Testament said that God in heaven was recording people’s deeds, it was a common (and true!) concept in Judaism that people could add to that treasure by their good deeds.

“The notion of a heavenly treasure, beyond the reach of corruption, was a common eschatological concept in Judaism. The righteous on earth do not yet possess it, for it belongs to the future; nevertheless they can now add to it”[[58]](#footnote-28913)

“An important concept in Jewish and Christian theology is the belief that sins and virtues accumulate and are “stored” the way money might be stored in a treasury. The Lord was believed to keep records of every sin and virtue and require the books be balanced from time to time.”[[59]](#footnote-29067)

The Jews in Christ’s audience knew that God was keeping track of their deeds with the intention of rewarding them. They will receive what is rightfully theirs when the Messiah returns and establishes his Kingdom on earth.

Mat 5:13

**“if the salt has become unsalty.”** Some commentators say that Jesus is stating something that is unnatural (that salt could become unsalty) to catch people’s attention and make them realize that while salt cannot become unsalty, believers can stop serving God and thus become “unsalty,” and if that happens, how could they become salty again? However, that is much less likely than the fact that biblical salt in Israel came from places such as the salt marshes around the Dead Sea (cf. Ezek. 47:11), and salt that had evaporated from the sea and was sitting on the soil was often mixed with dirt and other minerals such as gypsum. Thus it could happen that over time a block of “salt” could have the actual salt leached out of it, leaving the “salt” unsalty and worthless. At that point it could not be “resalted,” it could only be thrown out as worthless. Similarly, if a believer is exposed to the world and allows the “salt” in them to be leached out, they are in danger of being worthless for the work of the kingdom.

Matthew 5:13 is well explained by William McClure Thomson (1806-1894). Thomson did missionary work in the biblical lands for over 30 years. He acquired a vast knowledge of the customs of the land, many of which had not changed or not changed much since the biblical period. He was used as a guide by some noted biblical scholars, and traveled with Edward Robinson, one of the founders of modern biblical archeology, on Robinson’s second tour of the Holy Land. He was beloved by the locals, who took notice of the broad-brimmed hat he always wore and called him “Abu Tangera,” which means “father of a cooking pan” because of the shape of his hat. His famous book, *The Land and the Book* was first published in 1859, and for several decades was the second-best-selling book in America after Uncle Tom’s Cabin. It was framed around a pilgrimage around the Bible Lands that he took in 1857. As well as describing the places he saw, Thomson weaved many customs and personal experiences into the book that make it invaluable to Bible Study, especially since many of the customs he describes are biblical but are no longer practiced. Thomson’s 1850s English can make the book somewhat challenging in places, but it can be understood. About salt losing its saltiness, Thomson wrote:

“It is plainly implied that salt, under certain conditions so generally known as to permit him [Jesus Christ] to found his instruction upon them, did actually lose its saltness; and our only business is to discover these conditions, not to question their existence. Nor is this difficult. I have often seen just such salt, and the identical disposition of it that our Lord has mentioned. A merchant of Sidon having farmed of the Government the revenue from the importation of salt, brought over an immense quantity from the marshes of Cyprus—enough, in fact, to supply the whole province for at least 20 years. This he had transferred to the mountains, to cheat the Government out of some small percentage. Sixty-five houses in June—Lady Stanhope’s village—were rented and filled with salt. These houses have merely earthen floors [i.e., have only dirt floors], and the salt next [to] the ground in a few years entirely spoiled. I saw large quantities of it literally thrown into the street, to be trodden underfoot of men and beasts. It was “good for nothing.” Similar magazines [storehouses] are common in this country, and have been from remote ages, as we learn from history both sacred and profane; and the sweeping out of the spoiled salt and casting it into the street are actions familiar to all men.

It should be stated in this connection, that the salt used in this country is not manufactured by boiling clean saltwater, nor quarried from mines, but is obtained from marshes along the seashore, as in Cyprus, or from salt lakes in the interior, which dry up in the summer, as one in the desert north of Palmyra, and the great Lake of Jebbul, south-east of Aleppo. The salt of our Sidon merchant was from the vast marches near Larnaca. I have seen these marshes covered with a thick crust of salt, and have also visited them when it had been gathered into heaps like haycocks [haystacks] in a meadow. The large winter lake south-east of Aleppo I found dried up by the last of August, and the entire basin, further than the eye could reach, was white as snow with an incrustation of course salt. Hundreds of people were out gathering and carrying it to Jebbul, where the Government stores were kept.

Maundrell, who visited the lake at Jebbul, tells us that he found salt there which had entirely “lost its savor;” and the same abounds among the debris at Usdum, and other localities of rock salt at the south end of the Dead Sea. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that the salt of this country, when in contact with the ground, or exposed to rain and sun, does become insipid and useless. From the manner in which it is gathered, much earth and other impurities are necessarily collected with it. Not a little of it is so impure that it cannot be used at all; and such salt soon effloresces and turns to dust—not to fruitful soil however. It is not only good for nothing itself, but it actually destroys all fertility wherever it is thrown; and this is the reason why it is cast into the street. There is a sort of verbal verisimilitude in the manner in which our Lord alludes to the act—“it is cast out” and “trodden underfoot;” so troublesome is this corrupted salt that it is carefully swept up, carried forth, and thrown into the street. There is no place about the house, yard, or garden where it can be tolerated. No man will allow it to be thrown on to his field, and the only place for it is the street; and there it is cast, to be trodden under the foot of men.”[[60]](#footnote-31268)

**“thrown out *into the street*.”** The words “into the street” are added for clarity. Although the text just says “thrown out,” to most people today that means “thrown into the trash.” But there were no trash cans in the biblical world, and no trash collectors. “Thrown out,” meant “thrown out of the house into the street,” and that happened with most unwanted things. For example, in the Roman world, sewage was almost always simply thrown into the street, which was a major reason for the horrible stench in the cities, the prevalence of disease, and why it was important to wash one’s feet upon entering a house (and why that job was given to the lowest slaves in the household). Salt that had lost its saltiness was thrown out into the street and was trampled on by the street traffic.

Mat 5:15

**“basket.”** The Greek is *modios*, a dry measure of about a peck, or 9 liters.

Mat 5:17

**“I did not come to destroy *them*, but to fulfill *them.*”** Jesus makes this remark to clarify his purpose. He is a Jew, not an insurrectionist, and came to fulfill the law, not to destroy it. Jesus has just finished teaching some new things (Matt. 5:3-16) and will practice some things (healing on the Sabbath) which more legalistic Jews might interpret as Jesus overthrowing the law.[[61]](#footnote-20831) However, Jesus makes his intentions clear upfront, he is going to fulfill the law and prophets, although at times he does not fulfill the Pharisee’s version of the law (Mark 7:8-9).

Notice how Jesus did not just say that he has come to fulfill just “the Law” but “the Law and the Prophets” which often means the whole Old Testament. So, not only did Jesus fulfill every single letter of the law perfectly (1 Pet. 2:22) which is miraculous on its own, he also fulfilled “the prophets.” Jesus is the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, the son of man in Daniel 7:13-14, the new King David of Ezekiel 37:24, and the everlasting King of 2 Samuel 7:16.

There is an apparent dilemma when we look at Hebrews 10:9 which teaches that Jesus abolishes the first *covenant* to establish the second, alongside of Matthew 5:17. So, what is happening here? Has Jesus come to destroy the law or not? When we read the context of Hebrews 10:9, it is clear that Jesus abolishes the first covenant because he fulfills it, not because he is overthrowing it. Hebrews 10:18 explains this, “Now where *there is* forgiveness of these things, *there is* no longer an offering for sin.” In other words, since Jesus has provided the once-for-all atonement for our sin, the sin offerings mentioned in the Law of Moses do not need to be mentioned anymore. Thus, Jesus did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them, thereby abolishing them and accomplishing their purpose (Rom. 10:4).

Mat 5:18

**“not…will ever.”** This phrase is constructed in the Greek by *ou mē*, an intensified form of “no.” Literally, it is composed of two words for no, “no not.”

**“smallest letter.”** Matthew 5:18 is an interesting study in translation. The ESV says, “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” But what are an “iota” and a “dot”? An “*iota*” is the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet, and the “dot” is from the Greek *keraia*, which means “little horn.” Of course, Jesus was speaking Hebrew or Aramaic to his audience, and the King James Version picked up on that and brought the Greek into Hebrew, using “jot,” which is more properly “*yod*,” the tenth and smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and tittle, which are the little horns or ornaments on nicely drawn letters in the Hebrew text. Most modern translators do not want to force their readers to know details of Greek or Hebrew, and so translate the phrase something such as, “not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen,” as the NIV does. The point of what Jesus was saying was that nothing would pass from the Law until all was fulfilled.

Mat 5:19

**“whoever does *them* and teaches *them* will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.”** The “Kingdom of Heaven” will be a kingdom on earth in the full sense of the word “kingdom.” Christ’s kingdom will fill the whole earth (Ps. 2:8; 72:8-11; Dan. 2:35; 7:14; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10; Rev. 2:8; 19:11-21), and Christ will rule as king. As with any kingdom, there will be different jobs with differing prestige and glory. The person who obeys the commandments and teaches other people to do so as well will be considered “great” in Christ’s kingdom.

[For more on rewards in Christ’s future kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.” For more specifics about Christ’s kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 5:20

**“your righteousness exceeds.”** This is one of the places where the word “righteousness” does not refer to salvation, but refers to doing right in the sight of God and others. It is obeying God and treating others in a godly and just fashion. The Pharisees were hypocrites and were not doing right by God and others, which is why Jesus called them “snakes” and challenged them with, “How can you escape the judgment of Gehenna” (Matt. 23:33). Here in Matthew 5:20, Jesus boldly stated to the people that unless they obeyed God and treated people in a godly and just manner, and certainly better than the Pharisees did, they would not be granted everlasting life.

[For more on this use of “righteousness,” see commentary on Matt. 5:6.]

**“enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”** In this context, the phrase “enter the Kingdom of Heaven” means to enter the future kingdom of Jesus Christ when he reigns as king on earth. It means being in the resurrection of the righteous (the first resurrection) and being granted everlasting life.

[For more on Jesus reigning on earth and the names of his future kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the resurrections in the future, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

Mat 5:22

**“I.”** The addition of the first-person personal pronoun *egō* along with the first-person singular verb, *legō* (I say) is emphatic.[[62]](#footnote-27944) Jesus not only demonstrated his authority when he taught by doing signs and miracles, he taught with authority, i.e., he taught as one who had the authority to say what he was saying (cf. Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:27).

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**“You idiot!”** An Aramaic word meant to be an insult, probably meaning something like “empty,” with the idea of denoting someone as having an “empty head” or “blockhead.” The point Jesus is making has little to do with the exact word, as if there was some “magic word” that got you in trouble with God. The point is that the word—in this example, *raca*—expresses the contempt of the heart and one person’s judgment on another person, and it is that contempt and judgment that is the real sin in the eyes of God.

**“the fire of Gehenna.”** The Greek is literally, “the Gehenna of the fire,” which can be understood as “the fiery Gehenna” (Rotherham), or more clearly, “the fire of Gehenna,” because Revelation 20:14-15, combined with other scriptures about “Gehenna” and/or “the Lake of Fire” indicate that the Gehenna of the Day of Judgment refers to the Lake of Fire and not a literal garbage dump in the Valley of Hinnom.

There are levels of sin and darkness in the human heart. We all have some darkness because we all have a sin nature, but sin does not keep a person from being saved, or else no one would be saved. It is the rejection of God and his ways of forgiveness that keeps a person from being saved. Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was using an example that in the biblical culture was so heinous and unfeeling that it revealed a heart that had never known forgiveness and salvation, so the person would be in danger of death in the Lake of Fire (Gehenna) if they did not change. Although what Jesus said sounds harsh, it is a great example of being a loving, honest teacher. If a person finds themselves constantly saying hateful, hurtful, and nasty things about others, then they have a dark heart (Matt. 12:34), and it is likely that they are unsaved or at least are in danger of having little or no rewards in the Kingdom of Christ. Christ’s warning could help people see the danger they were in and decide to change their ways.

**“Gehenna”** is Greek for the “Valley of Hinnom.” *Gehenna* is the Greek word that comes from the Hebrew words “*ge*,” meaning “valley,” and “*Hinnom*,” which was a man’s name. In the Old Testament, the valley is known both as the Valley of Hinnom (Neh. 11:30; and some Hebrew texts of Josh. 15:8) and also as the “Valley of the sons (or son) of Hinnom” (Josh. 18:16; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31). It seems that Hinnom’s descendants eventually took over and controlled the valley, and thus “the Valley of Hinnom” became “the Valley of the sons of Hinnom.” The “*Ge Hinnom*,” the Valley of Hinnom, is first mentioned in the book of Joshua as part of the northern boundary of the tribal area assigned to Judah (Josh. 15:8). It is the valley immediately south of the city of Jerusalem. This geographical point is very important because the history of the *Ge Hinnom* is closely tied to Jerusalem.

In Old Testament times, the Valley of Hinnom became associated with pagan sacrifice and even child sacrifice. For example, Ahaz, king of Judah, offered his children as human sacrifices there (2 Chron. 28:1-3). The prophet Jeremiah spoke out against these evils and foretold that the Valley of Hinnom would be so full of buried bones that there would finally be no more room to bury anyone else (Jer. 7:31, 32). Although Jeremiah spoke of dead bodies and ashes being thrown there, he also mentioned that it would one day be clean, which will happen in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ (Jer. 31:40). The bones made the whole area a place to avoid, because if an Israelite touched a human bone then that person would be unclean for seven days (Num. 19:16). This could be a serious hindrance to worship, especially if someone had come a long way to Jerusalem to worship but then became unclean and unable to worship for seven days because he or she accidentally touched a bone on the way into the city.

Because it was unclean, the Valley of Hinnom came to be used as a garbage dump by the people of Jerusalem. This was very handy because, as anyone who has to take out the garbage knows, it is always nice if you can carry it downhill and not too far. The inhabitants of Jerusalem would just carry their garbage, including dead animals, bones, and other waste, outside the south gate of the city (still to this day called “the dung gate”), down the hill, and into the “Valley of Hinnom”; into *Ge Hinnom*. The waste that was dumped there was then either burned up in the fires that usually burned there, or it rotted away, being eaten by maggots and worms. The fire and maggots that continually consumed the garbage in the Valley of Hinnom are the reason Scripture says that after the Judgment, the fire will not be quenched nor the worm die (Isa. 66:24; Mark 9:48). By the time of Christ, the Valley of Hinnom had been used for centuries by the inhabitants of Jerusalem as their local garbage dump.

When the Hebrew words, “*Ge Hinnom*” were translated into Greek in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the “*Ge Hinnom*” became the “*pharagx Hennom*,” because “*pharagx*” is the Greek word for “valley.” Then, by the time the New Testament was written, the Greek name for the valley had simply become “*Gehenna.”* The Greek word for “valley,” *pharagx*, dropped off and the Hebrew word for valley, “*ge*,” was brought directly from the Hebrew into the Greek even though it did not have a meaning in Greek. Of course, something got lost when that happened, and what got lost was that *Gehenna* was a real geographical valley south of Jerusalem, and that real place became thought of as some otherworldly fiery region and eventually translated “hell” in some English Bibles, including the King James Version.

Christ spoke in Aramaic or Hebrew, so his audience was never confused about the identity of the place he was talking about. Christ’s audience knew the *Ge Hinnom* very well, and a large percentage of them had probably thrown garbage there. They understood perfectly what Jesus was saying and the seriousness of his words: if someone purposely continues in flagrant sin, then on the Day of Judgment that person would not be let into the wonderful Millennial Kingdom, but like the garbage, would be thrown out and destroyed. The garbage was worthless, and people who arrogantly and flagrantly lived a life of sin were worthless to their Creator, and both the garbage and the unsaved sinners were to be destroyed. These are hard words, but they are the truth, and Christ taught them.

Christ’s audience knew about the Valley of Hinnom where the garbage was burned until it was gone, but they would have known nothing about a place where people are burned alive forever. The Old Testament certainly does not mention such a place. However, when *Gehenna* is translated as “Hell,” English readers are led to believe that when Christ spoke of *Ge Hinnom* he was speaking of a place of eternal torment. He was not. He was speaking of the simple concept that the wicked and unsaved will be destroyed. The wicked will, like the garbage, be totally consumed into nothingness. Their lives will end in every way—they will be annihilated.

The concept of “burning forever in hell” came into Christianity from the Greeks who believed in an “immortal soul.” It is important, however, to realize that the phrase “immortal soul” is not in the Bible. Eternal torment is not the teaching of Scripture. John 3:16, and many other verses teach the simple truth that each person will either live forever or be destroyed and be totally gone.

Although many Christians believe that the unquenchable fire and worms that do not die refer to everlasting torment, that is not the case. No one in Christ’s audience thought the garbage thrown into Gehenna burned forever or that the worms (maggots) were “eternal maggots.” Christ’s audience knew that the fire burned and the worms ate until the garbage was gone, and after the judgment, the garbage people thrown into Gehenna will one day be gone too. The picture of Gehenna is one of the total destruction of the sinner.

At the Judgment, sinners will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15), which Christ compared to the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna). In the Lake of Fire, sinners will burn until they are completely consumed. There will be no repentance accepted and no restoration to life. The punishment is not for a specific time of repayment, as if the sinners were only in jail, after which they are restored to everlasting life. The death of the unsaved sinner will be ultimate and final. The fire will not be “quenched,” it will burn until all the garbage is gone. Similarly, the worms in Gehenna (if there are actually some kind of maggots there) will not die off until there is no more garbage to consume. Thus, the “punishment” of the sinners is eternal. The people whose bodies are burned up in the Lake of Fire (which Jesus compared to the Valley of Hinnom) never receive eternal life. They die, and that punishment, their death, lasts forever.

Some scholars teach that when Christ mentioned *Gehenna*, he was referring to the Valley of Hinnom and thus only referring to bad things that can happen to people in this life. That is not the case at all. Reading the uses of Gehenna in the New Testament shows that it is a reference to future destruction, not ruin in this life (cf. Matt. 5:22, 29; 10:28; 23:33; Luke 12:5).

It is not clear when “Gehenna” began to be used for the Lake of Fire in which the unsaved will be thrown and destroyed (cf. Rev. 20:11-15), but by the intertestamental period it was, and it clearly was by Jesus Christ in his teaching. The analogy is a good one. That the wicked will be destroyed in the Lake of Fire, Gehenna, was clearly taught by Jesus and recorded in the Gospels. It is not nearly as clear in the Old Testament. There are some verses about fire, but not many. One of the clearest is Malachi 4:1.

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, Gehenna, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Mat 5:24

**“and then come and offer your gift.”** This teaching of Jesus shows that having the right heart toward God and other people is much more important in God’s sight than sacrifices and offerings. By extension, this teaching also means that loving God and people is also more important than the other “religious duties” that make people feel accepted in the sight of God. Offerings and sacrifices were never designed to make a person with an evil heart acceptable in the sight of God. An evil and arrogant person who has no real intention of obeying God cannot simply do a sacrifice, make an offering, or pray, and by doing that be accepted by God.

The sacrifices and offerings in the Law were designed to be an outward show of an obedient and humble heart; they were not designed to allow the person to gain favor in the sight of God if the person was evil and unrepentant, as if God would overlook evil as long as the person offered sacrifices. God is much more interested in obedience and a humble heart than in a person’s making sacrifices (1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 40:6-8; 51:16-17; Jer. 7:22-23; Hos. 6:6 [quoted in Matt. 9:13 and 12:7]; Mic. 6:6-8).

In fact, the Bible is quite clear that when a person is evil and unrepentant, the sacrifices and offerings he makes, including prayers, are simply rejected by God. God’s favor is not for sale: no amount of sacrifices, offerings, or prayers, can buy God’s favor or prod Him into giving His grace. God is looking for a humble heart, and that is what He responds to. This is a huge point with God, and so He makes it over and over (cf. Prov. 15:8; 21:27; 28:9; Isa. 1:11-15; 58:1-8; Jer. 6:20; 14:10-12; Hos. 5:5-6; Amos 5:21-23; Mal. 1:10; 2:13-14; James 4:6. Verses that specifically mention prayer include: Job 35:12-13; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 59:1-2; Ezek. 8:17-18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13; James 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:7).

Jesus corrected many religious errors in the Sermon on the Mount, and here he corrected the self-righteous attitude of many of the religious leaders and people who were hypocrites and who made sure they paid tithes from their herb gardens and gave mint, dill, and cumin, but who omitted the much weightier matters of justice, mercy, and trust (Matt. 23:23). The Jews were treating the sacrifices like they were gifts that bought God’s favor instead of being offerings that expressed their love and thankfulness for God’s favor and forgiveness.

Being truly humble and loving is much harder than giving offerings and prayers. In this teaching of Jesus, the man going to the altar with his gift had a fairly easy road: procure the gift, go to the Temple, offer the gift, and leave feeling righteous in the sight of God (but sadly, perhaps not being righteous in the sight of God). On the other hand, going to another person who is offended at you and doing what it takes to mend the relationship—well, that can be difficult indeed. We all know how hard it can be to mend a broken relationship. Proverbs 18:19 says an offended brother or sister is harder to win than a strong city.

Of course, there are some people who simply refuse to mend a relationship, and Jesus does not speak about those people in this context; he is only speaking about the person who wants to offer the gift to God. If the offended person does not want to heal the relationship, then Romans 12:18 applies: “as far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people.”

[For more on God not being as concerned with sacrifices as obedience, see commentary on Jer. 7:22.]

Mat 5:25

**“accuser.”** The Greek word is *antidikos* (#476 ἀντίδικος), and it has two meanings: to be constantly against as an enemy to, or to be an opponent in a court of law (thus, an “accuser” or “plaintiff”). The word *antidikos* occurs five times in the New Testament, and here in Matthew, it has the legal meaning of an opponent in a lawsuit (cf. NASB in Matt. 5:25). The other occurrences seem to fit the general situation of an accuser well (see commentary on 1 Pet. 5:8).

Mat 5:26

**“quadrans.”** The quadrans was a Roman coin, and was worth 1/4 of an asserion (also known as an “as”), which was the same as 1/64 of a denarius (at the time of Christ, there were 16 asserion in a denarius). A denarius was a day’s wage for a common laborer. So, for example, if a laborer makes eight dollars an hour for eight hours (64 dollars a day), a quadrans would be worth one dollar.

Mat 5:29

**“causes you to fall away.”** The REV has translated the Greek as “causes you to fall away,” a translation of *skandalizō* (#4624 σκανδαλίζω). “Offends you” misses the mark, because many people are not offended by sin, especially their own. You may or may not be offended by your own sin, but that is not the point of the verse. The idea is that if your hand causes you to fall away from obedience, then something has to be done. We felt that “cause you to stumble” was too weak, given that by definition stumble means “almost fall.” Christ is not saying that if your hand almost makes you fall, then cut it off, but rather if your hand causes you to fall into sin and disobedience, do what it takes to stop the situation from happening. Christ’s making this point is important and occurs three times (Matt. 5:29; 18:9; and Mark 9:47).

**“gouge it out.”** This is the figure of speech hyperbole (exaggeration).[[63]](#footnote-16542) The people of the Eastern culture often use hyperbole to make a point, even as we Westerners do. We say, “I’m starved,” when we mean we are hungry, or “I’m freezing” when we are uncomfortably cold. In the same way, people in the biblical culture overstated points to make a point. In this case, Christ was saying that people need to take drastic action to keep from sinning. This is a lesson we all need to learn: many people make peace with their sin rather than deal with it and stop sinning.

**“Gehenna.”** For information on Gehenna and that people do not burn forever, see commentary on Matthew 5:22.

[For information on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Mat 5:30

**“cut it off.”** This is the figure of speech hyperbole (see commentary on Matt. 5:29).

**“Gehenna.”** See commentary on Matthew 5:22.

[For information on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Mat 5:32

**“sexual immorality.”** The Greek is *porneia* (#4202 πορνεία). *Pornē* (#4204 πόρνη) is traditionally a female prostitute, while *pornos* (#4205 πόρνος) is masculine and in the Greek culture, especially in the early centuries, referred to a male prostitute. However, in the New Testament, the words were often used in a more general sense and so often referred to sexual immorality of many kinds, even though the Greek words still retained some of the gender overtones. In this context, which is a man divorcing his wife for “sexual immorality,” the obvious assumption would be that she had committed adultery. Although the Old Testament stated that adulterers were to be executed (Lev. 20:10), by Roman times that was seldom done, in part because the Romans had taken the authority for capital punishment away from the Jews (cf. John 18:31). Generally, husbands who thought their wives had committed adultery just divorced them, as Joseph initially intended to do to Mary (Matt. 1:19).

**“makes her look as if she had committed adultery.”** To properly and fully understand Jesus’ teaching about divorce and remarriage, we need to closely examine the three different times he addressed the subject in his teaching ministry, which were:

1. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:32).

2. When the Pharisees specifically questioned him about it (Matt. 19:3-9, esp. verse 9; and Mark 10:2-12, esp. verses 11 and 12).

3. When he directly confronted the Pharisees (Luke 16:14-18, esp. verse 18).

Matthew 5:32 seems almost identical to the records in Matthew 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; and Luke 16:18, but the three events are actually different in important ways (Matt. 19 and Mark 10 are the same event with different details). In the culture in which Christ lived, the prevailing belief among the people—promoted by the rabbinic school of Hillel and opposed by the rabbinic school of Shammai—was that a man could divorce his wife for any reason whatsoever. Although Jesus addressed the debate among the Jews about “easy divorce” in Matthew 19, that is not what he was doing here in the Sermon on the Mount. Here, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was trying to get the people to return to God; he is not promoting any specific rabbinic school of thought over another.

[For Jesus’ comments on divorce in the context of the debate about it going on between the Jews, see commentaries on Matt. 19:3 and 19:9.]

Matthew 5:32 occurs in a teaching context, and we will understand it better if we grasp that context. After teaching the people about anger and the need for reconciliation with others (Matt. 5:21-26), Jesus turned his attention to the foundation of the family, and thus of society itself, which was the marriage of a man and a woman. Marriage was under attack in Jesus’ day just as it is in ours, and it was common for men to have wandering eyes, something perhaps made easier by the nudity, prostitution, and easy divorce that was common at that time (also, any slave was considered the sexual property of the owner and sex with one’s slaves was commonplace). The people had become lax about the fact that God’s original intention for marriage was that it was to be something the husband and wife could both depend on—providing a life partner—and that the marriage “glued” the couple together as “one flesh” until one of them died.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not start talking about divorce and remarriage “out of thin air.” He had been talking about adultery, which usually starts with wandering eyes and lust (Matt. 5:27-30). That also explains why Jesus spoke of the right eye and the right hand causing a man to fall (Matt. 5:29-30). Sexual sin usually starts with a lax mindset, then a wandering eye, and then it moves on to physical touch. Once a man has lusted after another woman and his eyes and hands have become involved and he is physically touching her, leaving his wife for his “new love” can be a small step. So we can see why Jesus, after speaking about adultery, lust, and watching what you see and touch, talked about divorce.

To properly understand Matthew 5:32, we must pay close attention to “who” the verse is speaking about, “what” the verse is actually saying, and also to the Greek verbs, which sadly have not been accurately translated in most English versions. Matthew 5:32 is one of the verses in the Bible that people do not really read accurately. Instead, most people read what they think it says. To rightly understand it, we must read what it actually says.

As we read the verse, we see that it is the man who divorces his wife. That certainly was the most common situation in the biblical culture, but Jesus’ teaching applies in today’s culture to both men and women, because both sexes are victims of unwanted divorce. In the biblical culture, a man divorcing his wife almost always left her in a very difficult situation. The usually mostly innocent woman had to suffer many things: the disgrace of being rejected by her husband; frequently, the terrible loss of her children; and the hardship of how to provide for herself unless her parents or a sibling would take her into their home. But Jesus seems to make her situation even worse—the way most English versions are translated, Jesus says that the woman is an adulteress! Furthermore, any man who married her, which would almost certainly be a huge help to her, became an adulterer. This just does not seem to make sense.

The way Matthew 5:32 is translated in most English versions, there are many things that should alert us to the fact that something is wrong. For one thing, although it was the husband who broke the original intention of God by divorcing his wife, there is nothing in the verse that says he did wrong or became an adulterer. The verse makes the wife guilty, not the husband, even though he is the guilty party.

Also, the way most English versions are translated, the woman is made to be an adulteress simply because her husband divorced her. For example, the NASB says, “everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery.” But why would being divorced make a woman an adulteress? Just because a man divorces a woman does not make her an adulteress; she could have been faithful to her husband before the divorce and then chosen to remain unmarried after the divorce. So why would her divorce make her an adulteress? It would not.

Most commentators explain away that fact by saying that in that culture, a man’s divorcing his wife basically forced her to remarry to survive in society, and thus commit adultery. But there are two big problems with that interpretation—for one thing, it is not what Jesus actually said, and secondly, it does not fit the facts. Just being divorced does not make a woman an adulteress. There were women who were pure in their marriage and then did not remarry after their divorce. Some were taken back in by their families, and a few others, like Lydia in Acts 16, did well on their own. Thus we can see that Matthew 5:32 has been misunderstood and mistranslated.

Moses allowed a divorced woman to remarry and not be an adulteress and so did Paul (1 Cor. 7:27-28). Nevertheless, there are commentators who say Jesus contradicted Moses and set new standards of sexual behavior, allowing for divorce only where there has been sexual sin. However, that does not make sense. For one thing, the words of Moses, Jesus, and Paul came from God, and it does not make sense that it would be okay with God for a divorced woman to remarry throughout the 4,000 years of the Old Testament, and then again as soon as the Church started after Jesus’ ascension, but for the short time of Jesus’ public ministry, if she remarried it would be adultery. Furthermore, Moses allowed divorce if the husband would not feed, clothe, or provide for his wife’s future and protection by having sex with her so she could have children who would care for her (Exod. 21:10-11). It does not make sense or represent the love of God that in the Old Testament, God allowed a woman to remarry after divorcing a man who refused to feed, clothe, or care for her, but somehow now that Jesus was on the scene she could only leave if the man was sexually unfaithful, no matter how badly he treated her.

Actually, Jesus did not contradict Moses, and the woman did not become an adulteress if her husband divorced her, even if she remarried. Furthermore, her new husband did not become an adulterer by marrying her. The key to understanding Matthew 5:32 is that the two Greek verbs for “adultery” in this verse are in the passive voice. They are passive verbs, not active verbs, despite the fact that most English versions translate them as if they were active verbs. William Hendriksen writes: “The Greek, by using the passive voice of the verb, states not what the woman becomes or what she does, but what she undergoes, suffers, is exposed to. She *suffers* wrong.”[[64]](#footnote-10846) R. C. H. Lenski agrees, and writes:

A further complication is due to our helplessness in translating this passive infinitive (also the passive *moichatai*) into English. We have no passive corresponding to the active “to commit adultery.” But this is no justification for translating these two passives like the two actives in [Matt. 5:27-28]. Since our English fails us, we must express the two passive forms as best we can to bring out the passive sense of the Greek forms. We attempt this by translating the [passive] infinitive, “he brings about that she is stigmatized as adulterous” and the finite verb as “he is stigmatized as adulterous.”[[65]](#footnote-14376)

What Hendriksen and Lenski are saying is profound. Because English has no passive voice for verbs like “commit adultery,” it is very challenging to translate the passive Greek verb into English. But, as Lenski points out, that is no reason to twist what Jesus said and distort the meaning of the verse.

The passive voice of a verb describes what happens to someone, not what they do. In the phrase, “She hit the ball,” the verb “hit” is active; the woman acted and hit the ball. To make the sentence passive we have to say, “She was hit by the ball.” The passive describes what happened to the woman, not what she did. But how can you “passively” commit adultery? You cannot. So the passive verb describes what happens to the woman, what she suffers, just as Hendriksen said. The woman “looks as if she committed adultery” and suffers because of it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was talking about divorce and showing the harm that it does. If a man divorced his wife, what would people think? They would think she must have committed adultery. She did not commit adultery, but that is what people would think and accuse her of.

The passive verb in Matthew 5:32 shows us that the woman is made to seem like she and the man she later married had committed adultery even though they had not. Thus, one way of translating Matthew 5:32 is: “…everyone who puts away his wife, except for the cause of sexual immorality, makes it seem like she is an adulteress, and whoever marries her when she is put away seems like he is committing adultery.” In that culture, the man was the provider and protector, so Jesus says if a man divorces his wife everyone will think it is due to sexual sin.

Now we see why, in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about divorce. He was trying to call the people back to God and convince them to live godly lives, so he emphasized how God never intended for married couples to divorce, and he strengthened his point by speaking about the terrible consequences of divorce: if a man divorced his wife, unless it really was because she committed adultery, he stigmatized her in society because people branded her as an adulteress, and furthermore, any man who married her was branded as an adulterer.

Jesus did not contradict Moses (or Paul) in his Sermon on the Mount. He did not forbid a divorced person from marrying again. He pointed out to the people God’s original intention in the marriage, and also pointed out that anyone who divorced his wife caused her great hardship, including the burden of being thought of as an adulteress. The English version, *God’s Word to the Nations*, gets the sense of Matthew 5:32: “But I can guarantee that any man who divorces his wife for any reason other than unfaithfulness makes her look as though she has committed adultery. Whoever marries a woman divorced in this way makes himself look as though he has committed adultery.”

Now that we have seen that there are cases in which a divorced woman (or man) is not an adulterer and can remarry with God’s blessings, we need to honestly remember that Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:32 is different from his teaching in Matthew 19:9, Mark 10:11-12, and Luke 16:18. Not all divorcees are “mostly innocent victims.” Some people force a divorce upon their spouse for reasons that are unacceptable to God, such as unbridled lust, and God refers to that behavior as adultery.

From God’s standpoint, there is little difference between staying married but committing adultery, and getting legally divorced just so you can be with someone you like better than your spouse. Both behaviors destroy the marriage and harm society. God’s advice to people who divorce due to wandering eyes or just to better their financial or social position is given in 1 Corinthians 7:11, which is spoken in the context of women but also applies to men: stay unmarried or be reconciled to your former spouse.

[For more on Jesus’ teaching about marriage and divorce, see commentaries on Matt. 19:3; 19:9; Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18; and for more information on divorce and remarriage, see commentary on 1 Cor. 7:27.]

Mat 5:33

**“Do not break your oaths.”** Jesus’ statement about oaths is a summary taken from the Old Testament from verses such as Leviticus 19:12 and Numbers 30:2. It is not an exact quote from the Old Testament. The Bible instructs us to keep the oaths we have made (cf. Ps. 15:4; Eccl. 5:4-7).

**“the Lord.”** For more information on “the Lord” see commentary on Matthew 3:3.

Mat 5:34

**“God’s throne.”** In the OT, heaven is ascribed as God’s throne (cf. Isa. 66:1).

Mat 5:37

**“comes from *the influence of* the Wicked One.”** In this verse, Matthew 5:37, Jesus is trying to address a matter of personal integrity and being a trustworthy person. In other words, you should not need to make oaths for people to trust you, you should be trustworthy enough without them.

The Devil is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44), and he influences people to do ungodly things.

The Law of Moses clearly allowed for oaths and vows (Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2-16, esp. v. 2; Deut. 23:21-23; cf. Ps. 76:11; Eccl. 5:4) and godly people throughout the Old Testament vowed and made oaths (cf. Judg. 11:30; 1 Sam. 1:11; Isa. 19:21). So why would Jesus say not to make vows? The answer has to do with the culture of the time.

The Old Testament Scriptures seem straightforward when it comes to vows: “You must not swear by my name falsely and profane the name of your God” (Lev. 19:12). “When a man vows a vow to Yahweh or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he must not break his word; he must do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth” (Num. 30:2). “When you vow a vow to Yahweh your God, you are not to delay paying it” (Deut. 23:21). But by the time of Christ, the religious leaders had changed the clear meaning of the Mosaic Law.

The heart of the Law was that if you vowed, pay your vow, but at the time of Christ the religious leaders had perverted the Law and interpreted it to say, “When you vow a vow **to Yahweh** your God, you are not to delay paying it.” In other words, they taught, “I have to pay the vows I make ‘to Yahweh,’ but I can make vows to and about other things and not be obligated.” Matthew 5:33-36 shows us that at the time of Christ people were making vows based on things besides Yahweh, including heaven, earth, Jerusalem, and their own head.

We get a very good look at how the religious leaders’ lying system of vows and oaths worked from Matthew 23:16-22. That section of Scripture shows that the religious leaders had devised a dishonest system of making vows such that a person could swear by the Temple (the “sanctuary”) and the vow be worthless, but an oath on the gold of the Temple had to be kept. Similarly, a vow on the altar in the Temple was worthless, but a vow made based on a sacrifice on the altar was binding. This meant that anyone who did not know the “secret code” of which vows were considered binding and which vows could be ignored was open to being deceived when dealing with those who purposely made vows they did not think they needed to keep.

In saying what he did, “let your word ‘Yes’ mean ‘yes,’ *and your* ‘No’ mean ‘no.’ Anything more than this is from *the influence of* the Wicked One,” Jesus did not change the Mosaic Law concerning oaths and vows. Instead, he brought them back to God’s original intent. Any vow or oath must be kept, and in fact, even if a person did not vow but just said “yes” or “no,” that must be kept too. Like his other teachings here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is going above and beyond the Old Testament commands and getting to the heart of the issue. He is not just saying that one should keep their oaths, but that something less than an oath, a simple “yes” should also be kept.

We know Jesus did not change the Law concerning oaths because he himself took one at his trial (Matt. 26:63-64). Also, Hebrews 6:16 confirms that oaths were still being made and ending disputes, and people such as Paul and James were still involved with oaths and vows after the time of Jesus (Acts 18:18; 21:23). On the other hand, people were still dishonest and trying to hoodwink people by false oaths, so James repeated what Jesus had said years before and tried to impress upon people that whatever they said or promised was binding (James 5:12).

Ecclesiastes expresses the heart of God concerning what we say: “It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your *whole* body to sin. Do not say before the messenger that it [your vow] was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands (Eccl. 5:4-6)?

Believers should pay close attention to what the Bible says about making false statements because it is a serious sin in the eyes of God. Today many untrue things are regularly said in many and various contexts. Advertisers regularly are deceptive about their products; the news media and politicians regularly distort the truth, and average people regularly lie about things to get their way, stay out of trouble, or gain some perceived advantage. All this lying in the world around believers makes it seem like lying is no big deal. But it is. We should make no mistake: lying is a way of the world, comes from the Devil, and is a sin. Believers should not lie.

**“Wicked One.”** The Greek is *ponēros* (#4190 πονηρός), “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’”[[66]](#footnote-10914) *Ponēros* is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun). A good example of a substantive in English is the adjectives in the well-known Clint Eastwood movie, “*The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*.” The adjectives “good,” “bad,” and “ugly” refer to people (“good people,” “bad people,” “ugly people”), and thus the words function as nouns even though they are adjectives. Similarly, “the wicked” here in Matthew 5:37 is a substantive and means, “the Wicked One,” which is the translation in most modern versions.

Other substantives in the Bible include: 1 John 5:19 where “the wicked” also means “the wicked one”; Revelation 1:18, where “the Living” actually is “the Living One”; Matthew 10:41, where “a righteous” actually refers to “a righteous *one*” (or *someone* righteous); Matthew 12:41, where “a greater” means “a greater *one*”; Romans 8:28, where “called” refers to “the called ones” (although some versions translate “called” in that sentence as if it were a verb, which it is not); 1 Thessalonians 4:6, where “avenger” is “an avenging *one*” and 1 Corinthians 2:6, where “the perfect” refers to “the perfect [or mature] ones.” In Acts 2:11, the adjective *megaleios*, which means “great, powerful, magnificent,” is used as a substantive, such that “the *megaleios*” means “the magnificent acts” or “the mighty works.”

Some translators do not believe that *ponēros* is a substantive, but is only the word “evil.” However, evil does not “just happen.” The wording the Bible uses, that sin is “from” evil, points to a source. “Evil” is not just floating around, it comes from somewhere. The evidence is that if the Lord simply meant to say that swearing oaths by Jerusalem, or by your hair, was evil, he would have simply said, “it is evil,” and not, it “is from the evil.”

The Devil (Slanderer) is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time, he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness.

[For more names of the Devil and their meanings, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Mat 5:39

**“turn the other cheek to him also.”** See commentary on Luke 6:29.

Mat 5:40

**“And let the one who wants to sue you and take away your tunic.”** What is understood in the context is that the offended person thinks that he is due some payment for something that has happened, and so he sues to get his money (or whatever) back.

Mat 5:41

**“forces you *to carry his things for* one mile.”** Here in Matthew 5:41, Jesus is likely referring to the practice of Roman soldiers wherein they would force private citizens to carry equipment or items for them.[[67]](#footnote-20812) We see an example of this when Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry Jesus’ cross (Matt. 27:32). Jesus’ heart for service shines through here. If someone asks something difficult of you, do even more than they asked. As usual, Jesus is taking our understanding of what it means to be selfless to another level.

Mat 5:43

**“and hate your enemy.”** We can see why the religious leaders would teach that. It does seem to be the message of the Old Testament. Yahweh hates the wicked person (Ps. 11:5). He hates prideful people, liars, murderers, wicked people, and those who do evil, false witnesses, and divisive people (Prov. 6:16-19). Jesus’ message was thus very new and very different. He indeed brought “a new commandment” to the people.

[For more on “hate” and the semantic range of “hate,” see commentary on Prov. 1:22.]

Mat 5:44

**“Love your enemies and pray.”** The word “love” is the verb *agapaō* (#25 ἀγαπάω; the more familiar noun is *agape*). In this context, to love one’s enemy does not mean to “feel good” about them, but rather to act toward them in a loving manner. To better understand what God is telling us when He says, “love your enemies,” see the commentary on John 21:15, “I am your friend.”

The words, “bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you,” which appear in the KJV, NKJV, and YLT, and partially in Darby’s NT, were not in the original text of Matthew. They were added by scribes who took them from Luke 6:27-28. Early manuscript evidence from Alexandrian, pre-Caesarean, Western, Coptic, and Syriac texts, indicates that the words are not original in Matthew. Also, some early manuscripts do not have both phrases, which is still more evidence that these two phrases were not in the original text of Matthew.[[68]](#footnote-12789)

**Matthew Chapter 6**

Mat 6:1

**“acts of righteousness.”** This is the figure of speech, metonymy.[[69]](#footnote-30600) The result, righteousness, is put instead of the action that produces it. A more literal rendition of the verse, without the figure, would read, “Take care that you do not do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them….”

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

**“you have.”** The Greek is in the present tense, “you have,” and it is making the point that God is storing up rewards now, and will dispense them later.

**“no reward *stored up* with your Father.”** This is a very strong warning for people to watch the motives that drive their actions. If a person does good deeds, which normally would be rewarded by God in the future Paradise, but he only does them to impress people, when people are impressed that is his payment. God will not pay us for work we do not do for His glory. Instead of “from your Father,” the more natural meaning of the Greek preposition *para*, translated “with” in the REV, is “beside,” but that is not as clear as “with” is to the average reader. If we have the translation as “with,” or even more literally, “beside,” combined with the present tense of “having” a reward, then the translation is: “you have no reward *stored up* beside your Father.” The picture being painted by this verse is very biblical and very oriental: God is in heaven sitting on His throne, and he is watching what people are doing on earth and making up rewards and setting them beside Him so that He can give them out in the future. The biblical picture is that God makes the rewards as the people do the good deeds, He does not manufacture them in the future and distribute them at that time. Of course, we learn from other verses, such as 2 John 1:8, that if we are not faithful, we can lose the rewards we have stored up for ourselves.

Mat 6:4

**“repay you.”** God promises to repay those who give to the poor and needy: “The one who shows favor to a poor person lends to Yahweh, and he will repay him according to his *good* work” (Prov. 19:17).

The word “openly,” which occurs in versions such as the King James, was added by scribes to some Greek texts, but it is not in the original text.[[70]](#footnote-17809)

Mat 6:5

**“like to.”** The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). See commentary on John 21:15.

Mat 6:6

**“inner room.”** A room in the interior of the house. Calling it a “closet” misses the point, since most people think of closets as a place to store clothes. Jesus was saying to go into an inner room where no one would see, so your devotions could be private.

**“repay you.”** The word “openly” occurs in some versions but was added by scribes to some Greek texts. It was not in the original text (See commentary on Matt. 6:4).

Mat 6:7

**“keep repeating the same phrases.”** The Greek word is *battalogeō* (#945 βατταλογέω), and it means, use the same words again and again,[[71]](#footnote-16486) “to babble” in the sense of trying to achieve success in prayer by heaping up repetitions.[[72]](#footnote-28042) Williams translates it as “keep on repeating set phrases.”[[73]](#footnote-10504) That is what many religions do, repeat set prayers because “they think that they will be heard because of their many words.”

**“like the Gentiles do.”** Many pagan religions had formulaic prayers that were repeated over and over, or they repeated the names of the gods over and over. God is not swayed by such behavior. He looks on the heart, and the earnestness of the person praying. Simple, heartfelt prayers associated with the circumstances in which one needs God’s help are the prayers that God desires.

Mat 6:8

**“your Father knows what you need.”** It is often asked, “If God knows what I need before I even ask Him, why do I need to ask Him?” The reason has to do with the fact that God gave people free will to choose their own way and their own life. Many people do not want God’s help and/or they choose not to have Him help, and God cannot give people the power to accept or reject His help but then take that choice away from them by barging into their lives when they need Him.

Parents often experience this with their children. A child may need help with their homework but not want any help. In that situation, the parent has to wait until the child figures things out for themselves or asks for the help. Similarly, we may need help, and God knows we need help, but until we ask Him for it He is not free to give it. That is why prayer is so vital to the Christian life. Prayer is asking God for things, and when we ask God for the help we need, He is free to give it. No wonder God says to be steadfast in prayer (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2) and to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). Here in Matthew 6:8, Jesus told the people that God knew what they needed before they asked him, but he was teaching about prayer, so the context was that the people would be asking God for things as part of their prayers. Jesus’ comment that God already knew what they needed even before they asked was to give them confidence in their prayer life that God cared for them and was listening to them.

Mat 6:9

**“So pray in this way.”** Matthew 6:9-13, five verses, are commonly known as “The Lord’s Prayer,” and it is found here in the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus also taught it in an abbreviated form months later (Luke 11:2-4). The two prayers are quite similar, but Matthew’s prayer consists of seven requests and Luke has five. Luke omits the requests, “May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” and “Deliver us from the Wicked One.”

1. May your name be treated as holy (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2).
2. May your kingdom come (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2).
3. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10)
4. Give us today our daily bread (Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3)
5. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors (Matt. 6:12; Luke 11:4)
6. And do not bring us into temptation (Matt. 6:13; Luke 11:4).
7. Deliver us from the Wicked One (Matt. 6:13).

By teaching on how to pray in the Sermon on the Mount, which was Jesus’ first major teaching to the crowds after he started his ministry, Jesus emphasizes the importance of prayer.

Although the Lord’s Prayer is repeated verbatim on many occasions, Jesus taught not to repeat the same prayers over and over (Matt. 6:7). So the Lord’s Prayer is a model prayer, pointing out things that are important for us to pray for, but as we see from reading the entire New Testament, especially the writings of Paul, there are lots of different things that believers need to be praying for.

**“in heaven.”** The Greek text literally reads “in the heavens.” While Jesus would have been speaking Hebrew (possibly Aramaic), and in Hebrew, “heavens” is always plural, the Greek text reflects this Hebraism that Jesus would have likely been using here. It is always best to represent the idioms of the culture accurately if possible in English. Sometimes that means replicating them literally and other times it means adapting them to the understanding of the reader.

**“may your name be treated as holy.”** This is a reference to the coming kingdom when the people will “keep My name holy” (Isa. 29:23) and Cf. Ezekiel 36:23.

Mat 6:10

**“May your kingdom come.”** The “Kingdom” that Christ prayed about had not come in his lifetime and has still not come; it is still future. The Kingdom that Christ prayed about, and that the people wanted to come, was the future time when Christ will rule the earth and the earth itself will be restored to a paradise state. Although there are some aspects of Christ’s future Kingdom that we enjoy today, such as the presence of the gift of holy spirit in believers, the fullness of the Kingdom is still future.

Paul wrote that we are still in the “present, evil age” (Gal. 1:4), not “the Kingdom,” and we can tell that just by looking around. Evil is all around us, and believers experience sickness and death, but that will not be the case when the Kingdom comes.

Many verses indicate the Kingdom of God is future.

* Jesus instructed people to pray for the Kingdom to come (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2).
* Just before his crucifixion, Jesus told the apostles he would not drink wine again “until the Kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:18).
* When Jesus was on the cross, one of the criminals said to Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your Kingdom,” indicating that even criminals knew the Kingdom was future.
* After Jesus died on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea, a dedicated disciple of Jesus, was still “waiting for the Kingdom of God” (Luke 23:51).
* At Christ’s Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, the people shouted “Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our father David” (Mark 11:10).
* When the Kingdom finally comes, the apostles will sit at the table with Jesus and dine with him, and judge the twelve tribes of Israel, and other faithful people will also sit with Jesus (Luke 22:30; Matt. 8:11).
* When Jesus’ Kingdom comes to earth it will fill the earth and be the only kingdom on earth (Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45; 7:13-14). The book of Revelation confirms Daniel’s prophecy, and when the earthly kingdoms are destroyed, voices from heaven will shout, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ” (Rev. 11:15).
* In Luke 21 Jesus spoke of signs that would precede the Kingdom, including false Messiahs; wars; earthquakes; famines; pestilences; great signs in heaven; great persecution; Jerusalem being trampled on by Gentile armies; signs in the sun, moon, and stars; great tumults in the ocean; and the Son of Man coming in the clouds. Then Jesus said, “when you see these things coming to pass, then you know that the Kingdom of God is near.”
* After Jesus was raised from the dead the apostles asked him if he was going to restore the Kingdom, to which he replied that it was not for them to know the time that would happen (Acts 1:6-7).

When the Kingdom of God does come, all the Kingdom promises will be fulfilled. Wicked people will be destroyed and the righteous will live forever on a wonderful restored earth. At that time the deserts will bloom, wild animals will not be dangerous, and there will be plenty of food (Isa. 11:6-9; 30:23-25; 35:1-7; Amos 9:13). Christ called this wonderful time “the New Beginning” (Matt. 19:28) and it will be. The Kingdom of God cannot, and does not, co-exist with the kingdoms of men, but it is coming in the future.

There are a few verses that seem to indicate the Kingdom is here now in some way. These include Matthew 12:28 (Luke 11:20), Matthew 23:13, and Luke 17:21. These few scriptures have swayed many theologians into believing the Kingdom is here now in some way, but that is not what those verses mean. For example, in Matthew 12:28, Jesus casts out a demon and says, “But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.” Does Jesus driving out a demon mean the Kingdom has come? No, it does not. David drove demons out of Saul by his music (1 Sam. 16:23) but that did not mean the Kingdom had come. That Jesus, and later his disciples, drove out demons shows what will happen in the Kingdom, that people will be healed of every kind of sickness and disease, was happening in the ministry of Jesus Christ and pointing to him as the Messiah. When the Kingdom does come, every person, not just some people, will be healed (cf. Isa. 35:5-6). Jesus told people that his works testified to the fact that he was the Messiah, and that they should believe his works (John 10:25, 37, 38; 14:11). Jesus’ healings pointed to the certainty of the Kingdom coming, not that it was actually there, and the people listening to Jesus were not confused by what he said. They knew the Kingdom was future, and the apostles even asked when it was coming after Jesus was raised from the dead (Acts 1:6-7).

Another scripture that confuses some people is Matthew 23:13. Jesus said to some religious leaders, “You shut the Kingdom of Heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.” What Jesus was saying was that the religious leaders were putting so many rules and regulations on being righteous before God that it seemed impossible to be saved. Jesus called those regulations, “heavy burdens” (Matt. 23:4), and they discouraged people from making the effort to be saved and thus enter the Kingdom when it comes.

The most common unclear scripture that theologians use to show the Kingdom is here now is Luke 17:21, which in many English versions reads, “the kingdom of God is within you.” This verse is often quoted as if it were the only clear verse on the subject of the Kingdom of God and absolutely self-explanatory. Ironically, it is perhaps the most obscure verse on the subject. First of all, there is no other verse of Scripture that indicates the Kingdom of God is “in” anyone. Many scriptures show that the Kingdom of God is a real kingdom that will be ruled by the Messiah and fill the earth. Furthermore, when Christ said, “the Kingdom of God is within you,” he was speaking to the Pharisees, who opposed both him and his Father. It was to them that he said, “You do not know me or my Father” (John 8:19). The Kingdom was certainly not within *them*—they were even in danger of being excluded from it altogether (Matt. 21:23-31, especially verse 31).

To properly understand Luke 17:21, it helps to know the Greek word translated “within” in many English versions is better translated as “among” or perhaps even better, “in your midst.” There is an impressive list of versions that read “among” or “in your midst,” including the NASB, ISV, NEB, JB, RSV, The Emphasized Bible (by J. B. Rotherham), The Bible: James Moffatt Translation, Complete Jewish Bible (by David Stern), God’s New Covenant (by Heinz Cassirer), and the acclaimed translation in contemporary idiom, The Message (by Eugene Peterson). Jesus was the King, and so he told the religious leaders that the Kingdom of God was in their midst, not in its fullness, but in the person of the king himself.

After telling the people that the Kingdom was among them (in the person of the king), he told them that when the Kingdom did come they would not have to look for it, they would know it was there. Jesus said that when the Kingdom comes it will be like lightning that lights up the entire sky—so everyone will see it (Luke 17:24). That makes perfect sense because the prophecies of the Kingdom show it will fill the whole earth. Jesus went on to say that as it *was* (in the past) in the time of Noah, so it *will be* (in the future) in the “day the Son of Man is revealed” (Luke 17:26-30). The Flood was universal and some were saved and most were not, and that is the way it will be when Christ comes and sets up his future Kingdom.

Lastly, it is a well-entrenched doctrine in the Church that “the Kingdom of God” is a phrase that refers to the rule of God in people’s hearts. But the Scripture says the Kingdom of God will fill the whole earth and destroy the human kingdoms that are on earth. Furthermore, there are dozens of verses that speak of what that future Kingdom on earth will look like. There is no scriptural reason to take the clear verses about an actual kingdom ruling over the whole earth and making it into a spiritual kingdom that only exists in the hearts of believers. There is no reason to say “the rule of God in people’s hearts” is the Kingdom. For one thing, there is no place where Jesus told people plainly that God ruling their lives was the Kingdom. Also, what would it then mean for verse after verse to say the Kingdom was future? And how could the apostles sit with Jesus at a table and eat or rule on twelve thrones over Israel in a person’s heart? Those prophecies are literal and will be fulfilled in the future Kingdom of God on earth. The many prophecies and clear scriptures that tell us what the Kingdom of God is, and that it is future, must be allowed to rule the day and guide us into what the Kingdom is: a wonderful paradise Kingdom that God will set up on earth that will be ruled by His Son.

[For more on the Kingdom of God, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth i,.”]

**“May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** The will of God is not always done on earth, and so we need to pray that it is. Also, the will of God occurring on earth starts with each Christian doing the will of God. If we are going to pray that the will of God is done on earth we need to start by doing the will of God ourselves. The earth is a war zone between God and the Devil; between Good and Evil. Some battles are won by God, and some are won by the Devil.

[For more on the war between God and the Devil, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

Mat 6:11

**“Give us today our daily bread.”** This is very similar in meaning to the line in Proverbs, “provide to me my portion of bread” (Prov. 30:8). That line is in the only prayer to God in all of Proverbs (Prov. 30:7-9). It is quite possible that Jesus got the idea for this line in his prayer from Proverbs, the Word of God.

Christ mentioned “our daily bread” because daily bread was a foundation of life. However, Christ did not mean this to just be about food. Christ was using “daily bread” as an example of something we needed that day. The proper way to think of Christ’s prayer as a model prayer is that we are supposed to pray for the things we need in life—things that we need that day, that week, that month, that year. We are to pray for things that we need in life.

Mat 6:12

**“And forgive us our debts.”** In the Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:12, the word “debts” is in the text instead of “sins,” which is what Luke 11:4 has. The prayer is the same, and the Bible is telling us that one way God thinks of sin is that it is a debt that must be paid. The idea that sin was a debt seems to have existed to some extent in the minds of the Jews before the Babylonian Captivity (Lev. 26:34; Isa. 40:2; 50:1), but it became a common way of thinking under the influence of the Aramaic language during and after the Babylonian Captivity. In Aramaic, one of the words for “sin” also means “debt.” That sin was thought of as a debt is clearly represented in the Aramaic Targums and is also represented in the New Testament.

When Matthew 6:12 reads, “and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors,” but Luke 11:4 reads, “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us,” these are not two different teachings. The people listening to Christ and the early Christians reading the Gospels were used to thinking in terms of sin being debt, so to them, Matthew and Luke were simply saying the same thing in two different ways—and if Jesus was speaking Aramaic at the time he spoke his prayer, which he most likely was, then both “sin” and “debt” were meant in the same word.

It is common in translations that words are translated in a way that best relates to the reading audience. The more Greek audience of Luke would not be used to thinking of sin as a debt because “sin” and “debt” are totally different words in Greek, so in writing down the words of Christ, Luke would say “sin” to clearly communicate to his audience what Jesus was saying. Matthew, however, was the most Jewish of all the Gospels and his audience would understand that when Jesus says, “forgive us our debts,” he meant “forgive us our sins,” so Matthew has “debts.” We can also tell that “debt” meant “sin” in the Gospel of Matthew because when Jesus starts explaining his prayer to the people, he makes it clear he is referring to sins and says, “For if you forgive people their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their transgressions, your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Matt. 6:14-15).

[For more on “sin,” see commentary on 1 John 1:7.]

Mat 6:13

**“Wicked One.”** The Greek is *ponēros* (#4190 πονηρός), “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’”[[74]](#footnote-26173)

*Ponēros* is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun). A good example of a substantive in English is the adjectives in the well-known Clint Eastwood movie, “*The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*.” The adjectives “good,” “bad,” and “ugly” refer to people (“good people,” “bad people,” “ugly people”), and thus they function as nouns even though they are adjectives.

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time, he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness.

[For more on substantives, see the commentary on Matt. 5:37.]

[For more on the names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**[“For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”]** There are some manuscripts that have this longer reading at the end of Matthew 6:13. However, most of those manuscripts are ninth or tenth century or later, the earliest being the fifth century (Codex Washingtonianus), and all of the Syriac manuscripts. Yet, the earliest and best manuscripts do not have this longer reading, and thus, following the Nestle-Aland 28th edition, this reading has not been included in the REV.

In textual criticism, typically the shorter reading is the correct one, and the textual evidence supports that this is what happened in Matthew 6:13. It is more likely that scribes added in a longer ending to the prayer than that they took out this long ending, because the longer ending does not teach anything that would be controversial that would cause scribes to omit it. Almost all modern versions have the shorter reading (e.g., ASV, CSB, CEB, ESV, Mounce, NAB, NASB2020, NET, NIV, NRSV, RSV).

Mat 6:16

**“when you fast.”** The Jews had regular fast days built into their calendar by tradition, but the Day of Atonement, the tenth day of Tishri, was taken as a fast day that was commanded by God (Lev. 16:29; 23:26-32). This was so much the case that “the Fast” became a name for the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9). The fasts in the Jewish calendar were the reason Jesus said, “when you fast” and not “if you fast.” Today fasts are not commanded for Christians, but many Christians fast for different reasons. If a person is fasting for the Lord they should do so in the knowledge that it is something they do as a blessing to them or to others, and they should follow Christ’s directive to fast between themselves and the Lord and not do things that make their fasting obvious to others.

Mat 6:18

**[“openly.”]** The word “openly” was added by scribes to some Greek texts, but it is clearly not in the original.[[75]](#footnote-27525)

Mat 6:19

**“where moth and rust ruin *them*, and where thieves break in and steal.”** The lesson that Jesus is teaching here is a valuable one. There is the common saying, “You can’t take it with you” when you die, but that does not seem to keep people from spending most or all of their time and money on themselves and their pleasures in life. The wise person stores up treasure in heaven by giving of their time and material things to God’s work.

Earthly possessions are transitory at best, and especially so in the ancient world. Moths, rust, and thieves were great enemies in the biblical world, and they are just three examples that Jesus used here; there were many other things that destroyed earthly possessions as well. The modern things we have that preserve and protect what we have just did not exist in the ancient world. Warm wool clothing was always in danger of being eaten by moths, so being eaten by moths occurs elsewhere in the Bible (cf. Job 13:28; Ps. 39:11; Isa. 50:9; 51:8). Rust would attack and degrade anything made of iron, and so things made of iron had to be constantly cared for and protected. A common protectant among the Gentiles was pig fat, but the Jews would not use that.

Also, thieves were a huge problem. For one thing, there was no police force. A person could not just “call the cops” even if something was stolen. Furthermore, in the biblical world, many things looked very much alike. My clay pots looked like your clay pots, so who was to say that I took your pots or your things? Also, even if I knew you stole something, how would I get it back? The only way to do that was to have enough “family muscle” (men in the household) or neighborhood pressure that the thief could be pressured or forced to return what they took. Much that was stolen was simply never recovered. So, as Jesus said, the best solution was not to try to store up wealth here on earth, but store up treasure in heaven by providing for others who are less fortunate.

Mat 6:20

**“treasures in heaven.”** See commentary on Matthew 5:12.

Mat 6:22

**“generous.”** The Greek word translated “generous” is *haplous* (#573 ἁπλοῦς), and means “single,” therefore “unmixed.” The key to this saying about the “single” eye and the “evil eye,” in this context of wealth, is to realize they are Semitic idioms. In this context the “single eye” is the “generous” eye, it is unmixed with worldly desires for wealth and possessions, and is therefore generous toward others. In contrast, the “evil eye,” is used idiomatically in the Semitic languages for a person who is greedy, covetous, and envious. Not content with what he has, he casts his eye upon the things that others have, and desires them. The well-known Semitic scholar John Lightfoot writes that the saying about the single and evil eye is “From a very usual manner of speech of the [Jewish] nation. For *a good eye*, to the Jews, is the same with *a bountiful mind*; and *an evil eye* is the same with *a covetous mind*.[[76]](#footnote-11038)

Romans 12:8 says that the person who gives must give with “singleness” (*haplotēs*), again, idiomatically meaning “generously.” In James 1:5, the related word *haplōs* (simplicity, openness) is used idiomatically for “generously.”

It is easy to see how the words “good eye,” or “single eye,” became connected with generosity, and were used idiomatically for someone who was generous. The single eye was an eye that was unmixed with ulterior or selfish motives, and so the person was generous.

In Western cultures, the “evil eye” was a look or glance that meant harm and brought harm. Although this use of the “evil eye” may have existed in ancient Judaism, there is no reason to think it is used in Matthew or Luke. The Semitic idiom of the “good” or “single” eye being generous, and the “evil eye” being greedy, covetous, and stingy, holds true throughout the Bible. The “good eye” of Proverbs 22:9 is generous, and the “evil eye” of Deuteronomy 15:9; 28:54; Proverbs 23:6; 28:22 refers to someone who is greedy and stingy.

Once we understand that the “single eye” is generous, and the “evil eye” is greedy and envious, we can see why Jesus used it in this context. Jesus starts in Matthew 6:19 talking about laying up treasures in heaven, not on earth, and to do that one must have a single eye and be generous, and not have an evil eye and be greedy. Then he explains that no one can have two masters: you cannot try to serve heaven and earth. You cannot effectively love both God and wealth. The dialogue develops from there: if you are truly trying to serve God, then you cannot be worried about your earthly possessions. You must let go of your love for them and trust God to meet your needs.

Mat 6:23

**“But if your eye is stingy, your whole body will be full of darkness”** The “evil eye” is a Semitic idiom for being greedy, stingy, and selfish. In contrast to the “evil eye,” which is greedy, stingy, selfish, the “good eye,” or a “single eye,” is generous. This statement of Jesus is a serious warning to people who are stingy and greedy. It may be hard for a greedy, selfish person to change, but it can be done, and it will yield great reward.

[For more on idioms involving the good eye, see commentary on Prov. 22:9. For more on the idiom of the evil eye, see commentary on Prov. 28:22.]

Mat 6:24

**“two masters.”** Matthew 6:24 has three difficult phrases, and to properly understand the verse we must understand its vocabulary and customs. Jesus told us plainly about what would happen if a person tried to serve two masters. One was that the person would love one master, and thus serve that one well, and “hate” the other, and thus not serve that one as well. It helps us make sense of the verse when we realize that in the Eastern mindset and vocabulary, “hate,” does not always mean “hate” as we generally use it today, in the sense of extreme hostility or intense dislike. Especially when used in contrast to “love,” in the biblical culture (both Hebrew and Greco-Roman) the word “hate” often means “love less.”

The second difficult phrase in the verse, in typical Eastern fashion of teaching, is an amplification and clarification of the first phrase. Jesus made sure we understood what he meant by saying that a person trying to serve two masters would “hold to the one, and despise the other.” As in the first phrase about love and hate, we must understand the biblical vocabulary to understand this phrase. The first phrase, translated “hold to” in the KJV, is cleared up for us in most modern versions, which read, “be devoted to” (HCSB, ESV, NET, NIV). However, the use of “despise” in both the KJV and many modern versions, is less clear and needs to be properly understood.

It is surprising that many modern versions continue to use the word “despise,” even though it gives most readers the wrong impression. The Greek word translated “despise” is *kataphroneō* (#2706 καταφρονέω), and it has a range of meaning that encompasses looking down on someone or something with contempt or aversion; considering something not important and thus disregarding it; and not caring about, or ignoring, someone or something. In defense of the modern version’s use of “despise,” it is true that one of the primary meanings of the English word “despise” is to look down on with contempt or to regard as worthless (this is even the first definition in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). However, the much more well-known use of “despise” is one of its other definitions: an intense dislike and even loathing.

Jesus was not saying a person would be devoted to one master while intensely disliking or loathing the other master. Jesus was making the simple statement that if a person had two masters, he would often be devoted to one and end up ignoring the other.

There are other uses of the Greek word *kataphroneō* that are translated “despise” in many versions, which can give us the wrong impression of what the verse is saying. One is when Paul writes to Timothy and says, “Let no one despise you for your youth” (1 Tim. 4:12 ESV). No one would hate someone who was young; the better way to understand the verse is just like Matthew 6:24 about the two masters; Paul told Timothy not to let anyone ignore him just because he was young. Similarly, in many versions Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus endured being crucified, “despising the shame.” It was indeed a shameful thing to be crucified, but Jesus did not “hate” it, he ignored it. In doing that he set a wonderful example for us to follow. Many times we will find that if we are to be a true follower of Jesus, we will have to ignore the shame and mistreatment we endure.

[For more on the large semantic range of “hate” and its use in the Bible, see commentary on Prov. 1:22, “hate.”]

**“Wealth.”** The Greek is *mammōnas* (#3126 μαμμωνᾶς). “Mammon” is an Aramaic term for wealth, property, or anything of value. “Mammon” was the Syrian god of riches. Thus, the idea is that you cannot serve both God and the idol of Wealth. In Luke 16:9, “mammon” is not compared to serving God, so simply “wealth” is a better translation there. Furthermore, “Wealth” is a better translation than “money.” There are Greek words that specifically mean “money,” and that would have been used in the verse if Jesus had meant only “money.” In contrast, “Mammon” refers to total “wealth,” including money, property, and possessions, any or all of which some people serve instead of God.

It should catch our attention that the Greek text does not say “wealth,” but rather retains the Aramaic term that is transliterated in the KJV as “Mammon.” The Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible has the right idea when it translates “Mammon” with a capital “M.” Jesus was speaking of “Mammon” as if it were a god. It was much easier to personify “Wealth” in the Greco-Roman world than it is today because the Greeks and Romans often personified concepts as gods and goddesses. For example, [*Abundantia*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abundantia) was the divine personification of abundance and prosperity, [*Aequitas*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aequitas) (Equity) was the divine personification of fairness, [*Bonus Eventus*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonus_Eventus) was the divine personification of “Good Outcome,” and [*Mors*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mors_%28mythology%29) was the personification of death (the Greek personification of death was [*Thanatos*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanatos)). Thus, to a person living at the time of Christ, it was clear that Jesus was making a kind of play on words, and saying in a very graphic and clever way, “You cannot serve God and the ‘god of Possessions’” (wealth, things, stuff). In Acts 28:4, “Justice” is personified.

Mat 6:25

**“life” (2x).** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and *psuchē* has a large number of meanings, often “soul” or “life.” Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Mat 6:26

**“Look at the birds in the sky.”** The Greek word translated “sky” is *ouranos* (#3772 οὐρανός) and it is commonly translated as “heaven” (the ASV reads, “the birds of the heaven”). It is important to be aware of this because the word “heaven” does not always refer to the place “somewhere up there” where God lives, but can refer to the air just above the ground where the birds fly.

Mat 6:27

**“one hour.”** The Greek text does not use the common word for “hour,” which is *hōra* (#5610 ὥρα), instead, it uses *pēchus* (#4083 πῆχυς), which is the normal word for “cubit,” a unit of measure. However, although *pēchus* (“cubit”) is normally a measure of length, it can be used idiomatically as a measure of time.[[77]](#footnote-15336) The fact that *pēchus* can be used as a measure of length or a measure of time explains the different English translations, e.g., “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” (ESV) or “Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?” (NKJV). Given the culture, adding a “cubit”—a foot and a half—to the average man who in Christ’s time was only about five and a half feet tall, would seem ridiculous. The seven-foot-tall man would not be able to walk into many of the doorways or stand inside many of the common houses. Given that, the more reasonable interpretation is that *pēchus* (“cubit”) is being used in its idiomatic way to describe a small measure of time. Worrying does not add time to one’s life.

Mat 6:30

**“grass.”** This is not “grass” as we think of in the United States today, green grass that we care for and cut with a lawn mower. In the biblical world, most field plants did not have names; typically, only the edible plants had names. The rest of the field weeds were simply called “grass.” Green lawn grass does not burn well, even when dry, but a stack of field weeds burned fast and hot, and was commonly used to start campfires or heat the oven.

Mat 6:33

**“seek.”** The Greek word is *zēteō* (#2212 ζητέω), and it means to seek, to search for, to crave. It is present tense, active voice, imperative mood, which means it is a command that we should be continually doing. “Be seeking first the Kingdom of God!” Charles Williams’ translation reads, “But as your first duty, keep on looking for….” Sadly, people do not “keep seeking first” the Kingdom, but get distracted. Sinners ignore God, and can appear to be doing better (or having more fun) than those who are obeying God, so God admonishes us: “Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day” (Prov. 23:17 ESV).

**“righteousness.”** There are two aspects to “righteousness” and they both apply here. “Righteousness” refers both to having a right standing in the sight of God and also acting in a godly and just manner toward others. “Righteousness” has a vertical meaning to it—how we stand in the sight of God—and also a horizontal meaning to it—how we treat other people. God’s “righteousness” in the Old Testament referred to how He related to people in godly and just actions. Here in Matthew 6:33, by using the word “righteousness,” Jesus is encouraging people to live in a way that one has a right relationship with God and also is living in a godly and just manner toward others and seeking justice on earth. No one is demonstrating God’s righteousness unless they are being helpful, just, and doing what is right for other people. This is not new information; what Jesus says here in Matthew 6:33 is quite similar to Zephaniah 2:3.

[For more on “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right or just (“justice”), see commentary on Matt. 5:6. For more on the meaning of “righteousness” and that word family, see commentary on Rom. 3:22. For more on Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“and all these things will be provided for you.”** This is an example of a promise and prophecy that might be fulfilled here on earth in this life but definitely will be fulfilled in the future Kingdom of Christ on earth. It is always God’s intention to bless His people, and the general principle is that if a person is godly and wise they will be blessed on earth. But not everyone who seeks righteousness here on earth gets what they deserve (“all these things”). Sadly, many people are poor and persecuted here on earth and die that way, but even so, Jesus’ prophecy will come to pass because they will get everything that they deserve in the next life, in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom.

[For more on “ideal” prophecies and promises that are not fulfilled in this life but will be in the next, see commentary on Prov. 19:5.]

**Matthew Chapter 7**

Mat 7:1

**“Do not judge.”** When Christ said for us not to judge here in Matthew 7:1 and in Luke 6:37, we can tell from the context that he meant for us not to condemn others unrighteously, like the religious leaders around Jesus were doing when they judged (condemned) him for healing on the Sabbath or telling someone his sins were forgiven. As Christians, we not only have to judge just so we can function in day-to-day life, but God expects us to judge others so our lives, and the Church, are not destroyed by the Devil and evil and ungodly people.

The Greek word translated “judge” is *krinō* (#2919 κρίνω), and basically, it means to make a selection or express an opinion about something. It is used in many contexts, including to separate, to select, to approve, to be of the opinion of, to determine, to judge, to rule, to contend together (of warriors and combatants), to dispute, or in a forensic sense, to have a lawsuit with. So whether “judging” is a good thing or a bad thing, or even just a part of life, must be determined from the context in which the word is used. For example, in Romans 14:5, a person “judges” what days he considers special (we, for example, might judge Christmas Day to be a special day, but many people would not).

Here in Matthew 7:1, *krinō* means to pass an unjust judgment upon someone or something. Not just an unfavorable judgment, but an unjust judgment. We can tell that from the context of pointing out the sin of others, and also from Luke 6:37, a parallel verse. There are times when an unfavorable judgment is a righteous judgment. For example, in this verse, “Do not judge so that you are not judged,” the last “judged” is a judgment from God, and His judgment, even if it declares someone unrighteous, is a righteous judgment. God is not unrighteous for judging us, or even condemning the unrighteous.

*Krinō* can also refer to the righteous judgments that we make. In fact, no one can live wisely without making judgments, and Christians are called to make correct judgments about others. If we do not make judgments about others, the Devil will take advantage of our weakness or indecisiveness and wreak havoc on the Church. In John 7:24, Jesus called upon us to “judge with righteous judgment.”

In 1 Corinthians 5:12, Paul told the Corinthians that it was their responsibility to judge other Christians. The Corinthians had been blind and weak, too affected by the culture around them, which was very sexual. Corinth was a center of sexual profligacy in the Roman world, so much so that a common Latin slang term for a prostitute was a “Corinthian girl.” The Corinthians had allowed egregious adultery in their congregation—a man having sex with his father’s wife. Paul told them he had judged that person (1 Cor. 5:3), and they were to throw him out of the Church.

Other uses of “judge” in the NT that show it is something we have to do include: in Luke 7:43, Jesus praised Peter for making a correct judgment about what he was teaching, and in Luke 12:54-56 he reproved the religious leaders for correctly judging the weather, but not making a correct judgment about the times of the Messiah in which they lived. In Acts 20:16 Paul made a judgment while traveling not to stop at Ephesus. We are to judge the things of this life (1 Cor. 6:3). We are to judge what we hear people say (1 Cor. 10:15).

In the wider context of living life, we can see that it is impossible to live wisely without making judgments. We make judgments about everything we do and everyone we are with all day long. The judgments we make are expressed in words such as “test,” and “determine.” In 2 Corinthians 13:5, we are to test ourselves; in 1 John 4:1 we are to test the spirits, and in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 we are to “test everything *and* hold on firmly to what is good.”

Considering the wide range of meanings of “judge,” and the fact that Christians are called upon to judge others in the Church to keep the congregation godly, it is amazing that the Adversary has been so effective at using the phrase, “Do not judge, so that you will not be judged,” to keep people from standing against evil. In the first place, the context of this verse is verse 2, that we will be judged by the same standard we use to judge. We should correctly judge others because we want God to correctly (and graciously) judge us. But what if we will not make any judgments against others? Can we “opt out” of judging? No, we cannot. Opting out of judging was what the people of Corinth were trying to do in 1 Corinthians 5. There was evil in their midst, but rather than make a difficult judgment, they allowed the evil. Christians must accept the fact that living wisely means making judgments, and all judgment against evil is difficult and distasteful; no one wants to do it, even though it has to be done. Was it a blessing for the people in Corinth to be able to go before God and say, “Even though there was sin in our church, at least we did not judge anyone.”? No, instead they were reproved by God for their lack of making the kind of difficult judgment that protected the Church—a judgment Paul ended up having to make for them.

It should go without saying, however, that Christians should not make judgments about people based on information they cannot know. For example, sometimes you will hear a Christian say of another person, “That guy is not saved.” That is an unrighteous and fleshly judgment. Perhaps the person is behaving badly or sinning, but that does not mean the person is not saved. Maybe they aren’t, but maybe they are; we humans cannot know that, so to make that judgment about someone is ungodly and should not be done.

Mat 7:4

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 7:6

**“dogs…pigs.”** Here in Matthew 7:6, “dogs” and “pigs” represent, by the figure of speech hypocatastasis, those things that are most unclean and vile to the Jew. Although in some contexts, “dogs” represent Gentiles, that is not the case here, for even Jesus gave pearls of wisdom to Gentiles (cf. the Samaritan woman in John 4). Here they refer to those who are unclean and ungodly in their thoughts and lifestyle. Those who reject the pearls of love and blessings that are given to them will not only reject what was said to them, but often use what was said to them against the one who spoke to them. The verse is a lesson in that we have to use wisdom in what we say to whom. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge, but fools show contempt for wisdom and *sound* teaching.”

[For more on the figures of speech of comparison, and the figure hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“pearls.”** Pearls were very expensive in the ancient world, and very highly valued.

[For more on pearls, see commentary on Rev. 18:12.] **“otherwise.”** The Greek μήποτε (*mēpote*) is better translated as “otherwise” so as to not imply a potential contingency (e.g., “perhaps,” “lest”) but the more properly understood negated purpose (e.g., “so that…not”).

Mat 7:7

**“keep asking.”** If we want to receive blessings from God and get our prayers answered, it is important to know that most of the time we have to ask and keep asking for them. We should not think that we can just ask God one time for things that we are praying for and He will get them for us. We must repeatedly ask, just as the widow kept asking the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). The verb translated “keep asking” in Matthew 7:7 is in the active voice, present tense, and imperative mood. The present tense in this case is what is known as a broadband present, or continuous present.[[78]](#footnote-20470) This form indicates a continual action that takes place over a long time, rather than a one-time event. Wallace explains the present tense here in Matthew 7:7 this way: “The force of the present imperatives is ‘ask repeatedly, over and over again…seek repeatedly… knock continuously, over and over again.”[[79]](#footnote-14988) The imperative mood is the mood of command or of exhortation. Jesus is not just making a statement that we should ask, as if he thinks it would just be a nice thing to do. He is making an impassioned plea, an earnest exhortation that believers ask and keep asking for what they need.

One of the faults that Christians have is that they stop praying for things before they get an answer. Of course, there are times when we learn that something we are praying for is not God’s will. In that case, we should stop praying for that thing. Also, there are times when we are praying that the circumstances change, such as if we are praying for a sick person to get healed but they die, which occasionally happens. In these cases, too, we should stop praying. But otherwise, we need to be like the persistent widow in Luke 18 who keeps coming to the judge time after time. We need to pray and pray and pray. When Daniel wanted an answer from God about the revelation he received from God, he prayed for three weeks (Dan. 10:2) before he got an answer, and we do not know how much longer he would have prayed if an answer had not come to him when it did.

Some Christians teach that it is disrespectful to God, or shows a lack of trust (“faith”) if we pray more than one time for something. Their theology is that if you pray one time with trust, that is enough, and then just wait for the prayer to be answered. That sounds good, but it is unbiblical. The Bible says if we want to get our prayers answered we are to keep praying for what we want, keep asking, and keep knocking. Cf. Luke 11:9, John 16:24, and commentary on 1 John 3:22.

**“keep seeking, and you will find.”** God said basically the same thing to the Judeans (Jer. 29:13).

Mat 7:12

**“Therefore.”** The “therefore” goes all the way back to Matt. 7:1 about judging. We should not judge others, but treat them like we would want to be treated.

**“however you want people to treat you, treat them the same way.”** We know this as “the Golden Rule,” and it is generally stated as, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” The parallel is Luke 6:31.

Mat 7:13

**“gate.”** The Greek word translated “gate” is *pulē*, (#4439 πύλη, pronounced 'poo-lay), and it means “gate,” and is used just as we use the English word “gate,” usually referring to entering a city, yard, courtyard, or some other type of wide area like a park. In contrast, the Greek word *thura* (#2374 θύρα) is “door,” and usually referred to the door of a more enclosed or defined area, such as a house or a room. Thus, Jesus called himself the “door” of the sheepfold (see commentary on John 10:1, “door”). The fact that Matthew 7:13 says that it is a gate that leads to death and a gate that leads to life helps make the point that life and death are wide areas that can accommodate many people. Every person who has ever lived will enter either the wide gate to their death or the narrow gate to everlasting life.

In this teaching, the “road” and the “gate” are the figure of speech hypocatastasis (see commentary on Rev. 20:2). They illustrate in a way that is easy to understand that not many people would make the effort to live the lifestyle that results in everlasting life, while lots of people will live an undisciplined life which results in everlasting death. Thankfully, now, in the Administration of Grace, salvation is by faith alone based on Jesus’ accomplished work (cf. Rom. 10:9).

[For more information on the salvation that was made available due to the work of Christ, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

**“destruction.”** The Greek word translated as “destruction” is *apōleia* (#684 ἀπώλεια). *Apōleia* means “the destruction that one experiences; annihilation.”[[80]](#footnote-25548) Jesus said that the road is narrow and the gate small that leads to “life” (everlasting life), while the broad road and broad gate leads to “destruction.” Philippians 3:19 and 2 Peter 3:7 say the end of ungodly men and the enemies of God is “destruction,” and Romans 9:22 speaks of vessels (i.e., people) prepared for “destruction.” Hebrews 10:39 (KJV) says that believing results in the “saving of the soul,” while unbelief results in “destruction.” In each of these cases, “destruction” means total annihilation, where the person ceases to exist in any form; flesh or spirit. To contrast *apōleia* with other words that mean destruction or total destruction, perhaps “annihilation” would be a clear translation. *Apōleia* is just one word that shows us the end of the unsaved is annihilation, not eternal torment.

[For more information on the annihilation of the unsaved, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Mat 7:14

**“How narrow is the gate and constricted is the road.”** Today, after Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, salvation is a free gift (Rom. 5:15, 16; 6:23), so getting saved is easy. Romans 10:9 makes this clear: “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from among the dead, you will be saved.” So getting saved is easy. That being said, then why is the gate narrow and the road constricted that leads to everlasting life? The road is narrow because there is only one way to be saved, and that way is through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Christ is the “narrow road.” There may be many roads to Rome but there is only one road to salvation: Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I am the way, the ‘road.’” (The Greek word generally translated as “way” is *hodos* (#3598 ὁδός, “road”). Many people would like to define their own reality and believe they will be saved because they are “good” or because although they don’t follow Jesus they worship other gods, but God says, and means what He says, that the only road to everlasting life is through Jesus Christ. So although salvation is free, the road to salvation is narrow.

**“life.”** This refers to “everlasting life.” See commentary on Luke 10:28.

Mat 7:15

**“who come to you in sheep’s clothing.”** The false prophets don’t actually wear sheep’s clothing. But that graphic description depicts what Proverbs 26:24 says, that a person who hates “disguises himself with his lips.” The false prophets and other ungodly people who hate disguise themselves and their true character and intentions by lying. Sadly, lying often turns out to be a very effective disguise and many people are hurt by liars. The best way to find out the true character of a person is to look for the fruit in their lives (Matt. 7:16, 20).

**“destructive, greedy.”** The Greek is *harpax* (#727 ἅρπαξ), an adjective, and it means, 1) vicious, ravenous, destructive, like a wild animal (Matt. 7:15) (2) violently greedy (Luke 18:11). When *harpax* is used substantively [when it is used as a noun], it means robber or swindler (1 Cor. 6:10).[[81]](#footnote-15076) Jesus, speaking of the false prophets, compared them to wolves, and used the adjective *harpax*, which means both destructive and greedy. Most versions chose one definition or the other so that the one word in the Greek text matches one word in the English translation, but we felt that the greedy and destructive nature of wolves and false prophets needed to be accurately represented in English. The one Greek word, *harpax*, carries both meanings, but two are necessary in the English translation. False prophets are very destructive, and greedy in that they never seem to be satisfied, pouring out their evil prophecies upon unsuspecting people.

Mat 7:16

**“You will recognize them by their fruit.”** For people to do well in life, it is vital that they make accurate judgments about others so they know who to trust and who not to trust. Jesus taught here in Matthew 7 and later in Matthew 12 that we can recognize people by their fruit (see commentary on Matt. 12:33). Some people are talked out of making judgments about others because they are told it is wrong to judge. It is wrong to make evil judgments, but Christ taught the Jews to judge with righteous judgment. He said, “Stop judging by the outward appearance! Instead, judge with a righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

Mat 7:17

**“good fruit.”** A good example of “fruit” that is good in the eyes of God is the list of the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control. The list in Galatians is not complete, but that list gives us an idea of things that are good fruit.

Mat 7:18

**“tree.”** Although the illustration that Jesus is using certainly applies to literal trees, the illustration is made more powerful and relevant because in the Bible the powerful people in a kingdom were sometimes referred to as “trees,” something that would not have been missed by Jesus’ audience (cf. Judg. 9:8-15; Song 2:3; 7:8; Isa. 56:3; Ezek. 17:22-24; Dan. 4:10, 22; Zech. 4:3-14; 11:1-3; Luke 3:9; Rom. 11:16-24). Calling people “trees” is usually the figure of speech hypocatastasis.

[For an explanation of the figure of speech hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

Mat 7:20

**“So then, you will recognize them by their fruit.”** A good example of needing to see fruit is in the Old Testament with the example of the evil man, Ishmael. He lied and deceived people with his actions and people died because of it (Jer. 41:1-7, esp. v. 6).

Mat 7:21

**“will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”** The Kingdom of Heaven will be the kingdom that Jesus will set up on the earth after he comes down from heaven and fights the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21). People who get to enter the kingdom live forever, so in this context, the phrase means having everlasting life and living in the kingdom, complete with all the kingdom blessings of perfect health, safety, no hunger, etc.

[For more information, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 7:23

**“I never knew you.”** Matthew 7:23 shows us that we are supposed to do things the way God wants us to, and not make up our own agenda and expect that it will be acceptable to God. Jesus does not contest the fact that the people had cast out demons and done miracles in his name. They almost certainly did those things. However, they did things in their own way, in their own timing, and for their own glory, because Jesus calls them workers of “lawlessness.” Thus, when Jesus said he never “knew” the people, he is not saying that he did not know about them or have intellectual knowledge of them, but rather that he had no experiential knowledge of them—they did not really love him or walk in fellowship with him.

The word “know” is the word *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω), which occurs more than 200 times and has a wide semantic range including intellectual knowledge (Acts 1:19; 23:28) and experiential knowledge. For example, when the Bible says that Jesus “knew” no sin (2 Cor. 5:21 KJV), it is not that he did not have intellectual knowledge of sin, but rather that he had no experiential knowledge of sin. Similarly, when Romans 3:17 says the wicked have not “known” the way of peace, it is not saying that the wicked do not know what peace is, but they have not experienced it. The semantic range of *ginosko* also includes “knowing” someone intimately and experientially via sexual intercourse (see commentary on Matt. 1:25).

This verse applies to Christians because even though a Christian’s salvation will not be in doubt at the Judgment, there are Christians who live “lawlessly” and never really follow or obey Jesus. Jesus will not “know” those people in the sense of having fellowshipped with them, and the works they did that were not built on Christ will be burned up (1 Cor. 3:10-15). 1 Corinthians 8:3, which says, “but if anyone loves God, that one is known by him.” In this verse, God “knows” the people who love Him. God “knows” everyone, but in this verse, like Matthew 7:23, “know” means to know on an experiential level, not just “have mental knowledge of” (cf. 2 Tim. 2:19).

**“Depart from me.”** This verse is written about people before the Day of Pentecost who acted as if they are walking with Christ and obeying God but were not. Today a Christian can turn from God and live lawlessly and selfishly without his everlasting life being in jeopardy, but before the Age of Grace that was not possible because there was no New Birth and no guarantee of salvation.

[For information on salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

It is very important that Christians understand this verse in Matthew, even though it was written to people who lived before the Administration of Grace. The general principle is that even if people do some good things or utilize the power of God, if their use of God’s power is outside the will of God such as being for their own aggrandizement or done without love, it is not pleasing to God. The phrase “depart from me” has to be taken in the context of Matt. 7:21, which speaks of entering into the Kingdom of Heaven and having everlasting life. Before the Day of Pentecost, those people who were not faithful to God will have to depart from Christ and will not receive everlasting life.

We should ask the question, “When can we use the power of God and be outside the will of God?” The abilities, talents, and ministries that people have are given to them by God. In contrast to our God-given talents, which we naturally possess, is godly character, which takes a lot of effort to develop. Developing godly qualities such as the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) or the character that leaders are supposed to have (1 Tim. 3:3-12; Titus 1:6-9) is hard work. In the systems of the world that Satan sets up or oversees, talent is more valuable than character. If a person is a good singer and can pack an auditorium, the fact that he or she is a drunkard, sexually immoral, mean-spirited, etc., gets overlooked by the world. This attitude must never be allowed to leak over into the way believers do things.

Every believer has God-given talents. There are believers who are great singers, administrators, teachers, businesspeople, etc., but their talent and their success are never as important as whether or not they exhibit the character of Christ. That was the case in this section of Matthew. Jesus teaches us that at the Judgment, men and women with ministries and abilities in prophecy, working miracles, and discerning of spirits will come forward, proud of their “great accomplishments.” However, if these people did not develop the character of Christ and did not walk in obedience to God, then they “did their own thing,” and thus they are said to “work lawlessness,” i.e., do things in a way that does not follow the ways and laws of God. This is made clear by the last phrase in Matt. 7:21, which makes the point that these people did not do the will of God.

We must not be confused by the fact that the people Jesus was referring to here in Matthew had holy spirit and were casting out demons, and think because of that, this was a reference to people who were born again, like Christians are today. The New Birth that we Christians have started on the Day of Pentecost, but God had given the gift of holy spirit to many people in the Old Testament. Many leaders of Israel had it (cf. Num. 11:17, 25), the prophets, the judges in the book of Judges, many kings like David and Solomon, and others, had the gift of holy spirit upon them.

**“lawlessness.”** The Greek word is *anomia* (#458 ἀνομία), literally, “*a*,” without, and “*nomos*,” law, therefore “lawless, contempt for and violation of, the law (lawlessness can also be due to ignorance of the law). Although some English versions have “iniquity” (KJV), “evildoers” (NIV), or “you people who do wrong” (CEB), those translations are not as accurate as “lawlessness.” Usually casting out demons is a good thing, but these people were doing it “lawlessly,” meaning they were doing it outside the law of God, and therefore for their own purposes and self-aggrandizement, not for furthering the Kingdom of God. Many people use the power of God to further their own cause, not God’s cause. It has been said, “The gifts and talents we have are God’s gift to us; the way we use them is our gift to God.” The people in Matthew 7 were not being faithful to God in their use of His power; they were being selfish and unloving. So Christ said he did not know them.

Mat 7:24

**“will be like.”** The Greek is *homoioō* (#3666 ὁμοιόω). The verb is in the future tense, passive voice, so “will be like” is a good translation. The future tense, “will be like,” is important here, although some English versions ignore it and say “is like.” The context is the future, i.e., Judgment Day (Matt. 7:21, 23). Today people who build their lives on “sand” may be rich and powerful, but deny and defy God and His laws. They are building on sand, but do not appear to be doing that as far as the world is concerned. Nevertheless, on Judgment Day, they “will be like” people who built on sand—their life’s work will be demolished and they will be destroyed. In a similar way, many people who are actually “wise” today seem foolish to the world; indeed, many people even lose their lives because of Christ. The true wisdom of these people will not be revealed until the Day of Judgment, when the words that Jesus spoke, that the one who will lose his life for Jesus will find his life (Matt. 10:39), will be seen to be true.

**“wise.”** The Greek word is *phronimos* (#5429 φρόνιμος), and it refers to using one’s thoughts, being prudent, thoughtful, sensible, intelligent, wise. Although it is not the common word for “wise,” *sophos*,(#4680 σοφός), in this context the concept of “wise” fits very well.

Mat 7:25

**“beat violently against.”** In this parable, Jesus shows the importance of a person building his “house,” his life, on a firm foundation. One of the important changes that is missed in many versions is that the wind did not just “beat upon” both houses (KJV), or “beat against” both houses (NIV). The Greek words are different. The Greek word we translate as “beat violently against” is *prospiptō* (#4363 προσπίπτω) and its meaning in this context is to rush against, to move with force against. In contrast, the word “beat against” in Matt. 7:27 is *proskoptō* (#4350 προσκόπτω) and it means to beat on in a violent manner, bruise, cause to stumble. It is clear that the way these two verbs are juxtaposed in this parable that the second one, *proskoptō*, has less force than the first. Lenski addresses this well: “[*Proskoptō*] is the weaker verb, “to stumble against,” “to strike the foot against,” while...[*prospiptō*] means “to fall upon suddenly,” “to strike.” The idea suggested is that the house on the rock withstood all the pounding of the winds and the waters while the house on the sand gave way as soon as the tempest stumbled against its foundation.”[[82]](#footnote-18391)

Mat 7:26

**“foolish.”** The Greek word is *mōros* (#3474 μωρός), which means “foolish,” or “stupid,” but is also used for godless or impious. This is a good example of a place where the full meaning of the Greek word cannot be brought into the English translation unless it is expanded. The man was likely not just “foolish,” but was probably “godless” as well, because he is a man who would build on sand and the parable is about people who hear the words of Christ but do not believe or act on them.

Mat 7:29

**“as one who had authority, and not as their experts.”** Jesus taught “as one who had authority.” He taught in his own name. He taught saying, “but I say to you.” This was in sharp contrast to the way the religious leaders taught. The rabbis of the day constantly quoted earlier rabbis and made reference to precedents that were given by man. Jesus taught as one who knew the Scriptures and their Author, and spoke what the Author, God, meant. The rabbis of the time not only quoted earlier rabbis but often quoted rabbis that disagreed, leaving the audience with no clear idea of what the Scripture meant or what God wanted. When Jesus taught the crowds, they knew what God wanted to be done.

**Matthew Chapter 8**

Mat 8:2

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“bowed down before.”** See commentaries on Luke 5:12 and Matthew 2:2.

**“are willing.”** The Greek is *thelō* (#2309 θέλω), which means to want or to desire, or to have a willingness. However, when it comes to healing and miracles, someone usually has to be more than just “willing,” he must really want it. Similarly, the one doing the miracle must be more than just “willing,” he must want the miracle to occur. The force of Jesus’ energy and desire comes out in the way he says “Be clean” in Matt. 8:3, which is in the imperative mood in Greek (the mood of command), and which we translate with an exclamation point to alert the reader to that fact.

Mat 8:5

This record about the centurion is also found in Luke 7:1-10.

**“a centurion came to him.”** This verse reflects the custom of “agency” in the biblical world, and in this case also has the custom of using an intermediary to represent oneself to a person of “higher” position, power, or influence, instead of direct person-to-person negotiation. Although the text seems to say that the centurion came to Christ, that actually never happened, as we can see from the parallel record in Luke 7:1-10. Instead, the centurion sent intermediaries who acted as his agents to speak to Christ. The custom of agency is that a representative, intermediary, or “agent” can speak and act on the full behalf of the one who sent him, who is usually referred to as the “author” or “principal,” In fact, the agent can represent the one sending the agent (the “author”) so fully that the agent is actually called by the name or title of the author.

There were various reasons why a person would use an agent or intermediary, and although the functions often overlapped and an intermediary would also be an agent, there were differences between an intermediary and an agent. If a powerful person needed work done that he himself could not do, he used an agent who was empowered to speak and act on his behalf. If a person of less status or power needed something from someone of more status, he used an intermediary who often also acted as an agent. It often happened in the biblical world that a person of high rank or position simply would not bother to see someone who was considered somehow “lower,” especially since that lower individual almost always needed something. So, it was incumbent on that lower person to find an intermediary who would be considered respectable enough to get an audience with the person of higher rank. That was the case here in Matthew 8. The centurion, who was a Roman soldier and Gentile, would likely have thought that a great healer and rabbi like Jesus would never see him, so he sent intermediaries as agents to make contact for him. Another example in the Gospels is when some Greeks wanted to see Jesus, they went to Philip and asked to see him rather than trying to go to Jesus himself (John 12:21).

Because of the very limited nature of communication in the biblical world (i.e., no phones, cell phones, etc.), it was necessary, especially for people of status and power, to use agents to represent them and get their work done. The agent would speak and act with the full authority of the one who sent him, the author, as if he were that person. In the Bible agents sometimes speak in the third person, as when a prophet says, “The Lord says…,” but sometimes the agent can so fully represent the author (or “principal”) that the agent actually uses the word “I” or speaks as if he were the person that he represents. In our modern world, the concept of agency is commonly practiced in what is known as power of attorney. The person with the power of attorney speaks on full behalf of the person, the principal, who gave him the power of attorney.

In Roman custom, an agent of the Emperor was sometimes called the Imperial Legate, although today the word “legate” usually refers to a representative of the Pope. The Greeks used the word *presbeuō* (pronounced pres-'boo-ō), which occurs in 2 Corinthians 5:20. The Jews had the same custom, where the agent was regarded as the principal person himself. This is well expressed in *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*:

“Agent (Heb. *Shaliah*): The main point of the Jewish law of agency is expressed in the dictum, ‘a person’s agent is regarded as the person himself’ (*Ned.* 72b; *Kidd*. 41b). Therefore any act committed by a duly appointed agent is regarded as having been committed by the principal, who therefore bears full responsibility for it with consequent complete absence of liability on the part of the agent.”[[83]](#footnote-22597)

One major difference between the biblical agent and an agent in our modern world is that today the agent makes it clear that he is an agent, and not the principal, but that was not always the case in the biblical text, as we will see from the examples below. That means that in reading the Bible we must often study the scope of Scripture to see if it is the principal or an agent of the principal who is speaking and acting.

The record of Jesus healing the Roman centurion’s servant is a clear example of agency (and the use of intermediaries). Reading only Matthew 8:5-13, it seems clear that a Roman centurion came to Jesus to ask him to heal his servant. Scripture records the scene as if the centurion and Jesus are having a conversation. However, when the same record is read in Luke 7:1-10, we find that the centurion never actually spoke with Jesus, but had acted through agents, in this case, Jewish elders. The concept of principal and agent was so firmly cemented in the minds of the people of the first-century culture, both Jews and Gentiles, that people had no problem harmonizing Matthew and Luke and seeing that when Matthew said, “a centurion came to him [Jesus]” it meant he came in the form of the agents he sent.

One reason it is important to understand the law of agency is that Christians are agents of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, the Greek text says we are the *presbeuō* (#4243 πρεσβεύω) of Jesus Christ. Although *presbeuō* is usually translated “ambassador” in English Bibles, in the Greco-Roman world it was used for elders, ambassadors, and legates. As was stated above, the Emperor of Rome used legates—people who spoke and acted in his place—to get his work done across the empire. Similarly, there are times when Christians speak and act for Jesus. There are clear places in the New Testament when people did healings or miracles and identified themselves as agents of Jesus Christ by using the formula, “in the name of Jesus Christ,” that is, “by the authority of Jesus Christ” (Acts 3:6; 16:18). However, there are times when believers simply represented Christ without using any kind of formula that identified them as agents of Christ (cf. Acts 9:34, 40; 13:10-11; 14:10). If we Christians are going to be fully effective in this world, we must recognize that we are agents of Jesus Christ and many times he will use us to do his work.

The lack of knowledge of the custom of agency has caused a lot of confusion when it comes to properly understanding the Bible, especially in the area of the Trinity. Many Trinitarians see verses where angels refer to themselves as “God,” and instead of properly seeing that the angels are simply agents of God who can speak on His behalf, they try to prove the Trinity. The Bible has a number of records where an agent of God is referred to as “God” or “the LORD” (“Yahweh”), but those verses only show that God used angels as His agents to do His work. The prophets spoke for God, but it was God’s angel-agents who represented Him so powerfully that the biblical text and people sometimes referred to seeing them as having seen God. The following are examples of angels standing in the place of God such that afterward the human beings involved said they had encountered God Himself. We must emphasize, however, that when angels acted as God’s agents, their identity as angels is unmistakably preserved in Scripture. The Bible says they were angels, and they were angels.

HAGAR AND THE ANGEL (Gen. 16:7-14). In Genesis 16:7-10, 13-14, the angel who appears to Hagar speaks as God, identifies himself with God, and claims to exercise the prerogatives of God. Many orthodox Bible commentators say Old Testament accounts of angelic manifestations such as this one are appearances of Jesus in his “pre-incarnate” state, but there are Trinitarian commentators who recognize that is just a supposition and is never directly stated. For example, Charles Ryrie calls this use of “the angel of the Lord” a “theophany, a self-manifestation of God.” However, Ryrie does recognize that the doctrine that this “angel” is the pre-incarnate Christ is an inference based on Trinitarian doctrine; it is never directly stated in the Bible.[[84]](#footnote-11847)

We assert that when Ryrie and other theologians say that in these “theophanies,” God Himself is present and acting in the form of the pre-incarnate Christ, they are missing the point that the angel is an angel acting as an agent of God. Trinitarian theologians often say that Jesus is probably “the angel of the Lord” because the angel of the Lord never appears after Jesus’ birth, and it seems “reasonable” to Trinitarians that the angel of the Lord would appear in the Bible until the end. But the angel of the Lord does appear after Jesus’ conception, as we can see from Matthew 1:24. Since Jesus was already in Mary’s womb when the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph we can conclude that “the angel of the Lord” cannot be Jesus. Furthermore, once Jesus ascended, he took charge of God’s creation, so there would be no need to emphasize that it was an angel of God.

The *NIV Study Bible* acknowledges the principle of divine agents being identified with God Himself, and says:

“Since the angel of the Lord speaks for God in the first person and Hagar is said to name ‘the Lord who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,”’ the angel appears to be both distinguished from the Lord (in that he is called ‘messenger’—the Hebrew for ‘angel’ means ‘messenger’) and identified with him. Similar distinction and identification can be found in Gen. 19:1, 21; 31:11, 13; Exod. 3:2, 4; Judg. 2:1-5; 6:11-12, 14; 13:3, 6, 8-11, 13, 15-17, 20-23; Zech. 3:1-6; 12:8. Traditional Christian interpretation has held that this ‘angel’ was a preincarnate manifestation of Christ as God’s messenger-Servant. It may be, however, that, as the Lord’s personal messenger who represented him and bore his credentials, the angel could speak on behalf of (and so be identified with) the One who sent him. Whether this ‘angel’ was the second person of the Trinity remains therefore uncertain.”[[85]](#footnote-17179)

We are glad that scholars like Ryrie and the authors of the *NIV Study Bible* accept the possibility that it could have been an angel, not the “pre-incarnate Christ” who spoke to Hagar, but we strongly assert that the Bible says in black and white that the speaker was an angel. In order to make the jump from the speaker being an angel to the speaker being the pre-incarnate Christ, there would have to be some clear scriptural evidence, and that evidence does not exist. The biblical record makes it clear that Hagar was speaking to an angel of God acting as God’s agent.

SODOM AND GOMORRAH (Gen. 19:1-15, 21). God is said to have destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah but actually, He sent two angels to do the job. The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening (Gen. 19:1). They informed Lot that “we” are going to destroy this place. Lot called the angels “my lords” (Gen. 19:18), asking them if he could flee to Zoar. God spoke via the angels: “He” [God, singular, not “they,” the angels] said to Lot that his request was granted. Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire, and He overthrew those cities (Gen. 19:24). These scriptures combine to portray a beautiful picture of agency. Of course, God is the One who supplied the power and authority, but the angels did the work. We use the same kind of language today. The owner of a construction company might be showing off some of the buildings his company had built. He might well say, “I built that building over there,” and everyone would understand that he did not actually do the physical work, but was the planner and the authority behind the job.

THE ANGEL AND ABRAHAM (Gen. 22:15-17). The angel who stopped Abraham from killing Isaac (Gen. 22:15), then uses the first person “I” as if he were God. He was God’s agent.

JACOB’S DREAM (Gen. 31:11-13). Jacob said to his wives, “The angel of God said to me in a dream…I am the God of Bethel…” Jacob’s statement shows that the concept of agency was not confusing to the people who knew the customs and the culture. Jacob was comfortable saying that an angel said, “I am the God of Bethel.”

JACOB WRESTLES WITH “GOD” (Gen. 32:24-30). In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestled with “a man” until daybreak (Gen. 32:24), but in verse 30, Jacob said he had “seen God face to face.” We might think this was one of the times that God took on the form of a man in order to better relate to mankind (for information on God appearing in human form, see commentary on Acts 7:55). However, the book of Hosea speaks of the same record and lets us know that the one who wrestled with Jacob was an angel (Hos. 12:3-4). Thus, the one who is called “God” in Genesis is identified as an angel in Hosea, a clear example of agency.

MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH (Exod. 3:2, 4, 6, 16). Exodus 3:2 says, “And the angel of Yahweh appeared to him [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.” Yet the record then goes on to say that “God” and “Yahweh” spoke to Moses. The reader has to pay attention in this record because, although the angel is said to be in the fire, the record never says that the angel speaks. It is possible that this is an example of agency and the angel spoke for God, or it could be that the angel was involved with the fire and when Moses drew near the bush, then *Yahweh* Himself spoke.

TRAVEL IN THE WILDERNESS (Exodus-Deuteronomy). Understanding the concept of agency allows us to better understand the records of the Lord accompanying the Israelites in the wilderness. Some records indicate an angel was in the pillar of fire, while others indicate that it was God in the pillar of fire (cf. Exod. 13:21; 14:19; 23:20-23). Exodus 23:21 gives us more evidence of the custom of agency because God said that His “name” was “in” the angel. A study of the culture and language shows that the word “name” stood for “authority.” Examples are very numerous, but space allows only a small selection. Deuteronomy 18:5 and 18:7 speak of serving in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. Deuteronomy 18:22 speaks of prophesying in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. In 1 Samuel 17:45, David attacked Goliath in the “name” (authority) of the Lord, and he blessed the people in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. In 2 Kings 2:24, Elisha cursed troublemakers in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. These scriptures are only a small sample, but they are very clear. God told the Israelites to obey the angel because God’s name, *i.e.,* His authority, was in him, and thus the angel represented God. Today we use “the name of Jesus Christ,” meaning the authority of Jesus Christ.

THE ISRAELITES AND THE ANGEL (Judg. 2:1-5). Judges 2:1 identifies the speaker as “an angel of Yahweh” (many English versions say “The angel,” but the Hebrew text is “an angel”), and verse 4 also says the speaker was an angel. But then the angel says “I brought you up out of Egypt and I led you to the land…,” speaking in the first person as if he were God.

GIDEON AND THE ANGEL (Judg. 6:11,12,14,16,22). Judges 6:11, 12, say that an angel spoke to Gideon. However, in verses 14 and 16, “Yahweh” spoke. This may be confusing to English readers, but Gideon was not confused. In Judges 6:22 he said, “I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face.” Gideon knew the custom of agency, and had no trouble understanding that the angel could represent God.

MANOAH AND THE ANGEL (Judg. 13). The record in Judges 13 is very interesting because when the angel first showed up, Manoah and his wife did not recognize him as an angel, they thought he was a man of God (Judg. 13:3, 6, 21). Finally, they realized it was an angel (Judg. 13:21). However, immediately after Manoah realized that, he exclaimed, “We are going to die, yes, die, because we have seen God.” (Judg. 13:22). So Manoah knew he had seen an angel, but he also knew the angel was God’s agent and representative, so he said he had seen God.

BEFORE GOD OR BEFORE THE JUDGE? The concept of agency can cause translators some real difficulties. The Hebrew word *elohim* can refer to “God” (which is how it is used most often), “a god,” “gods” (because *elohim* is plural), “angels,” “heavenly beings,” or human beings who represent God, such as judges. So in verses like Exodus 21:6, different translators think differently: “Then his master shall bring him unto the judges” (KJV and NIV); “Then his master shall bring him to God” (NASB and RSV). Human judges are sometimes called *elohim* because they are agents of *elohim* (although sometimes they don’t do a good job of it).

Exodus 21:6 is about a slave who did not want to be released. In those cases, the master was to bring him to “the *elohim*” to become a slave forever. But does *elohim* mean “God” or “judges?” Because the judges represented God as his agents on earth, they are called by His name, “*elohim*.” There is a sense in which both of the above translations are correct. The judges did, in fact, represent God, *elohim*, and so were called *elohim*. But also, in bringing the slave to the judges, he was being brought to God, *elohim*. In this case, because the actual representatives of God were the judges, and it was the judges who actually witnessed the slave’s vow, “judges” seems to be the better contextual translation of *elohim* in Exodus 21:6 and 22:8, 9.

It is important to understand the custom of agency and the use of intermediaries to properly understand the Bible, and the Bible contains examples of men being agents of other men, men being agents of God, and angels being agents of God. It also helps to remember that the custom of agency was much more prevalent in biblical times than it is today. Our swift and reliable means of direct communication, such as by telephone or email, or swift travel by car, train, and airplane, have made the actual practice of agency much less necessary.

[For more on the use of intermediaries, see commentary on John 12:21.]

Mat 8:11

**“many will come from the east and the west.”** Jesus taught this truth again at a different time in his ministry (see Luke 13:22-30, esp. Luke 13:29). These people who come from the east and west are Gentiles, not Jews, as we see from Matthew 8:12 which refers to the Jews as the “sons of the Kingdom” because as God’s chosen people they were the rightful heirs of the land and kingdom, but they rejected God and so were rejected by him. In contrast, many non-Jews throughout history kept the heart of the Law by being loving, giving, and kind, and they are granted everlasting life and so get to eat at the feast in the Kingdom of Christ. The Old Testament foretold that people would come from the east and west and be in the Kingdom (cf. Isa. 59:19).

[For more on Gentiles being saved, see commentary on Rom. 2:14.]

**“recline *to eat at the banquet*.”** Jesus is referring to the great banquet or feast that God will hold in the future Messianic Kingdom on earth. Many Jews thought of everlasting life in the Messianic Kingdom as a giant banquet, where they would get to recline and dine with other saved people and biblical greats like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and a huge banquet is certainly part of the biblical picture of the Messianic Kingdom. The banquet referred to in Isaiah 25:6, called the marriage banquet (or “wedding supper”) of the Lamb in Revelation 19:9, is most likely near the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom, and thus would be a giant inaugural banquet at the start of the Kingdom. But the abundance of food that will be present in the Millennial Kingdom, along with the peace, prosperity, and joy in the Kingdom will make life there seem like it is a continual feast.

Although there are not a lot of verses in the Bible that refer to the great feast in the Messianic Kingdom, clear verses like Isaiah 25:6 caught the imagination of the Jews and so the feast was well-known, which was why Jesus could mention it in his teachings without many explanatory remarks. Culturally, this is similar to the way that most Christians know about the shepherds in the fields on the night of Christ’s birth even though there is only one small passage 11 verses long about them in the entire Bible.

The Greek word translated “recline” in Matthew 8:11 is *anaklinō* (#347 ἀνακλίνω), and it means “to recline, lie down, lean against or lean on, or to ask (or make) someone to recline or lie down.” It was the standard word used when reclining to eat, so “recline to eat,” or a similar English translation catches the meaning well. Eating in the biblical world was done by reclining on the left side, usually on pillows or rolled-up blankets (or couches in the Roman world), and then eating with the right hand. The feet were behind the person, away from the food, and no one ate with the left hand, which was used for washing oneself after going to the bathroom. The “table” with the food was usually just a rug or blanket spread out on the ground, but may have been an actual very low table, a few inches off the ground.

Our Western way of eating with a table about 30 inches off the ground with chairs around it was not used for eating in the biblical world, so using the translation “sit” or “sit down” in Matthew 8:11 and other verses that speak of sitting to eat is misleading to the modern reader. In most contexts, we would simply translate this verse as “recline to eat” or “recline at the table” (NASB), but in this context, Jesus is talking about eating at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven, so the translation “recline at the feast” is contextually acceptable (cf. CJB, NAB, NIV).

Isaiah 25:6 speaks specifically about the feast in the future Messianic Kingdom. It says: “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines” (NIV). The mountain Isaiah refers to is Mount Zion where the rebuilt Jerusalem and the Millennial Temple described in Ezekiel 40-47 will be. Proverbs 9:1-5 also speaks of a feast and portrays “Wisdom,” personified as a woman, throwing a huge feast and inviting people to it. Many verses in the Old Testament refer to the large amounts of food for both people and animals that will be in the Kingdom (Isa. 25:6; 30:23-26; 32:15; 35:1-7; 41:18-20; 44:3; 51:3; Jer. 31:5, 11-14; Ezek. 47:1, 2, 7-12; Hos. 2:21-22; Joel 2:18-26; 3:18; Amos 9:13).

The New Testament also speaks of a feast in the Messianic Kingdom. Jesus mentioned it on a number of occasions, and an unnamed man who was eating with Jesus mentioned it (Luke 14:15). The book of Revelation calls this great feast, “the marriage banquet of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9). Jesus taught that this wonderful future feast was not just for the Jews, in fact, many of the Jews would be excluded because of their unbelief (Heb. 4:6-11). The feast will be for the righteous—those people who trust God. Jesus made this clear in his teachings. For example, after healing the servant of a Roman centurion who trusted in God and loved the Jewish nation enough to build a synagogue for the Jews (Luke 7:5), Jesus said, “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be sobbing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:11-12; cf. Luke 13:28-29).

The people who come from “the east and the west”—places outside Israel—are Gentiles, while the “subjects of the kingdom” (the Greek literally reads, “the sons of the kingdom”) are the Jews. The salvation and everlasting life given by the Messiah was not just for the Jews. The first prophecy of the Messiah is the one God made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:15, and that was thousands of years before the Jews existed. About 2,000 years after that first prophecy of the Messiah, God promised Abraham that all the people of earth, not just the Jews, would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3; 18:18). Then God repeated that promise to Isaac (Gen. 26:4); and to Jacob (Gen. 28:14). Besides those promises, the Old Testament has a number of verses that speak of Gentiles being included in the Messianic Kingdom (Ps. 102:15; Isa. 2:2-4; 19:23-25; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4-5; 56:3-7; 60:3; 66:18-21; Ezek. 39:21, 27; Mic. 4:2; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 2:11; 8:22).

Despite all the verses about the nations being blessed in connection with the Messiah, the Jews seemed to ignore them and think that the Messianic Kingdom was just for them. Yet many Gentiles will be included in the feast, while many Jews will be left outside in the “darkness”—and since the Messianic Kingdom fills the whole earth (Dan. 2:35, 44), a person is either in the Kingdom or cast into the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:34, 41; Rev. 20:12-15), and in terms of the well-lighted banquet in the Kingdom, the Lake of Fire is the “darkness” outside the feast.

Jesus taught about the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven on a number of different occasions, although, since the feast was so well-known to his audience, he often did not describe it fully enough that the modern Bible reader picks up on what he was saying. This is the case with Matthew 8:11-12. Jesus taught about the feast and his Messianic Kingdom in a parable that compared the Kingdom of Heaven to a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son (Matt. 22:1-13, esp. v. 2). God is the king who throws a wedding feast for His Son—a great feast that includes oxen and fattened cattle (Matt. 22:4; cf. Isa. 25:6 NIV, “the best of meats”). But the people the king had originally invited, referring to the Jews, refused to come, so the king sent his servants out to bring anyone who would come, including both the bad and the good (Matt. 22:10); and that would mean the Gentiles would be included. Those people who did not come to the feast were killed (Matt. 22:7), and the unsaved will be destroyed in the Lake of Fire (Matt. 10:28; Rev. 20:13-15). Jesus taught a different parable about a man putting on a great banquet in Luke 14:16-24.

In a different parable, Jesus taught about wise virgins who got to go into a wedding feast while foolish virgins were shut out (Matt. 25:1-12, esp. v. 10). Then, at the Last Supper, Jesus held up the wine and said, “And I say to you, I will absolutely not drink of this fruit of the vine again until that day when I drink new wine with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26:29; cf. Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). Jesus knew from the Old Testament that there would be wine at the feast in the Kingdom, and he promised his apostles he would wait until the Kingdom to drink wine again.

The Bible does not tell us when, in Christ’s future Messianic Kingdom on earth, the wedding banquet will occur. We surmise that it will be quite close to the start of the Kingdom itself since it was customary for a king to start his reign with a feast to celebrate his inauguration (1 Sam. 11:15; 1 Kings 1:9, 25). However, it would have to be after the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46) and the First Resurrection (Rev. 20:4; Ezek. 37:11-14) so the righteous people like Abraham would be there as Matthew 8:11 says. Also, it seems that it would be after the Temple was built in Jerusalem so that God could be properly honored (Ezek. 40-43). In Haggai 1:1-11, God rebuked His people for taking care of themselves and building nice houses before they took care of Him and built the Temple. So too, it would seem that in the Millennial Kingdom, Jesus Christ would want to make sure that the Temple was built so God could be worshiped before anyone sat down to a wedding banquet.

We should notice that when Jesus spoke of this future feast in the Kingdom, no one in his audience said, “What feast? What are you talking about?” They all had been told about the great feast in the future Messianic Kingdom even if they did not believe it themselves. Today very few people understand anything about the magnificent feast that will occur at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom—in fact, most people have no idea about the Millennial Kingdom on earth at all. The proper understanding of the feast, the marriage banquet of the Lamb, has been obscured by many false doctrines. Most Jews today do not believe, or have only a very vague belief, in an afterlife, so a Messianic Kingdom on earth with a large feast is not part of their thinking. In a similar vein, most Christians believe that people die and go to heaven or “hell” forever, and so they think the verses in the Bible about Christ reigning on earth are figurative and refer to some kind of spiritual reign. That belief does not leave room for a magnificent feast in Christ’s future kingdom on earth. With the loss of understanding about the Kingdom of Heaven and Jesus’ rule on a restored earth, there is no proper understanding of the wonderful feast at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom.

The stark reality about the future feast in the Kingdom is that you will either be part of it or you will be excluded from it. There will be no “visitors” or “bystanders.” Every person will either be in the feast or out in the darkness. This great banquet, and everlasting life, will be a blessing that words cannot express, and every person should make sure they will be included by accepting the salvation that is in Christ (Rom. 10:9).

[For more on the attributes of the Messianic Kingdom on earth and the names by which it is called, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more information on the people who are not included in the feast, see the commentary on Matt. 8:12, “cast out into the darkness outside.” For more information about Isaiah’s prophecy of the feast, see commentary on Isa. 25:6. For more about the unsaved being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not burning forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“Kingdom of Heaven.”** This is one of the many names for the future Messianic Kingdom on earth, the Millennial Kingdom. There is only one future kingdom, and it has many names. Luke 13:28-29 uses “Kingdom of God” instead of “Kingdom of Heaven” when speaking of the same subject.

[For more on the many names of the Millennial Kingdom,” see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 8:12

**“the sons of the Kingdom.”** This is a designation for the Jews, who were called “the sons of the Kingdom” because so many of the Kingdom promises pertained directly to them. The Jews should have all been in the Kingdom, but many (perhaps most of them) rejected God and His Messiah, and they will be excluded from the Messianic Kingdom (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8; Hos. 1:9; Rom. 10:1-3, 21; 11:1-8).

**“cast out into the darkness outside.”** The “darkness outside” is the darkness that is outside the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven (Jesus spoke of the feast in the Kingdom in Matt. 8:11). The “darkness outside” the feast is the darkness of the Lake of Fire, where the unsaved will be destroyed.

The Bible has different ways of portraying that some people will be saved and the rest will be destroyed in the Lake of Fire, but what we must keep in mind is that there is only one fate for the saved, which is life in the Messianic Kingdom on earth followed by everlasting life in the New Heaven and New Earth. Also, there is only one fate for the unsaved, which is to be destroyed in the Lake of Fire. Once we understand that, we can see that Jesus was teaching that when people are not allowed into the brightly lit Kingdom and feast, the only alternative they have is to be “cast out into the darkness;” into the Lake of Fire.

God describes the fate of the unsaved in different ways to emphasize different aspects of their experience. For example, Jesus taught that the unsaved would be thrown into “Gehenna.” “Gehenna” was the garbage dump south of Jerusalem where much of the garbage of Jerusalem was dumped and then either burned or consumed by maggots (worms). By saying the unsaved would be thrown into Gehenna, Jesus was emphasizing that at the Judgment, the unsaved would be thrown out and destroyed. Historically, the word “Gehenna” came to be used of the Lake of Fire itself, but at the time of Christ, it still retained the image of being the garbage dump south of Jerusalem (Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33, etc.).

In one of his parables, Jesus compared the unsaved “children of the wicked one” to the “darnel” (“tares” KJV), that are gathered up and thrown into the fire (Matt. 13:36-43). In that parable, Jesus was emphasizing that the darnel were poisonous and harmful, and were gathered and burned up. In another parable, Jesus compared the unsaved to foolish virgins who were denied entrance to the wedding banquet (Matt. 25:1-13). Besides the obvious lesson about making foolish decisions, in that parable Jesus emphasized that salvation would not always be available—there will be a time when the door will be shut and the Day of Judgment will begin. In another place, Jesus compared the unsaved to “bad fish” that are thrown away in contrast to good fish that are kept (Matt. 13:47-50). One of the things Jesus emphasized by that teaching was that not every person will be kept—some people are wicked (unsaved) and they will be thrown out.

When Jesus taught about the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven and compared it to the “darkness outside,” he was pulling together a number of scriptures and biblical images. Of course, there is the feast itself with “the best of meats and the finest of wines” (Isa. 25:6 NIV). Then there is the fact that the feast, and the Kingdom itself, is brightly lit, more brightly lit than any feast on earth has ever been. Isaiah 30:26 says that in the Messianic Kingdom, the light of the moon will be as bright as the sun is now, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter than it is now. Even if that is hyperbole, exaggerating the situation somewhat, the fact is that the Kingdom and the feast will be very brightly lit, while those not in the feast, in the Lake of Fire, will be in the “darkness” outside the feast. So when Jesus speaks of the feast in the Kingdom, he is bringing to mind and emphasizing a sumptuous, brightly lit banquet with all the food, fun, and fellowship with all the biblical “greats” like Abraham and David, and at the same time contrasting that wonderful experience with the unsaved who are in the darkness—the darkness of burning sulfur, sadness, crying, pain, anger, and eventually death.

Matthew 8:12 can be difficult to understand because the Greek is an idiom, and idioms can be hard to translate. The Greek text reads *ekblēthēsontai eis to skotos to exōteron* (ἐκβληθήσονται εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον), which literally means “they will be cast out (or “thrown out” or “driven out”) into the outer darkness.” In their Greek-English Lexicon*,* the authors Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida point out that this expression is “an idiom.” Translating idioms is very challenging, and the only way to do it correctly is to understand the meaning of the idiom and then bring that meaning into the receptor language with a comparable expression. Louw-Nida says this idiom is referring to “a place or region which is both dark and removed (presumably from the abode of the righteous)…‘outer darkness, darkness outside.’ …In a number of languages, this expression in Matt. 8:12 must be rendered as ‘they will be thrown outside where it is dark.’”[[86]](#footnote-25000)

Many English versions translate the Greek idiom literally and read that the unsaved will be cast out into “outer darkness,” but translating the idiom literally causes problems. For one thing, what the verse means becomes unclear, and that has led to some false teachings, such as there is an “inner darkness” that is not very dark, and an “outer darkness” that is very dark. Thankfully, many English versions have brought the Greek idiom into English in a way that makes the verse more clear:

* “But the sons…will be put out into the dark” (BBE; cf. CJB, GW).
* “But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness” (NIV).
* “but the children of the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness outside” (NJB; cf. NEB, Douay-Rheims, Rotherham, *The New Testament* by Charles Williams, *The New Testament* by E. Goodspeed).

Many commentators understand that Matthew 8:11-12 is a reference to the banquet in the Kingdom and the darkness is referring to being excluded from it. Robert Gundry writes about the “outermost darkness,” and says it “refers to the darkness outside the brightly lit hall where the festivities are taking place.”[[87]](#footnote-13608) Newman and Stine write that “The outer darkness is also used elsewhere by Matthew as a description of the doom that awaits people who reject God.”[[88]](#footnote-21017)

Matthew 8:11-12 is a graphic portrayal of the future. There will be a huge and wonderful feast in Christ’s future Messianic Kingdom on earth, and many people, both Jews and Gentiles, will be included. Sadly, while the righteous are enjoying the feast, the unsaved, including the Jews who rejected God and His Messiah, will be outside in the darkness; the darkness of the grim flames of the Lake of Fire.

The darkness outside the feast is not well understood by Jews or Christians, and this is usually due to misconceptions that obscure what the Bible is really saying. For example, people who believe that when a person dies they go immediately to heaven or hell think that a person’s judgment happens right when they die, and thus, the “Day of Judgment” is not a “day” at all, but a continuous event. So those people never understand the impact of the resurrection and what it will mean when millions of people all come to life from the dead at the same time, experience the Day of Judgment, and then enter the Messianic Kingdom en masse as a large group.

Similarly, those people who believe that “heaven” is where the saved live and will live forever can never really understand all the hundreds of verses about the restored earth (which is restored to an almost Eden-like state and called “Paradise”), the rebuilt Temple (Ezek. 40-47), Jesus reigning from Jerusalem, the new boundaries of Israel (Ezek. 47:13-48:29), the prophecies of the nations in the future and Christians administering the world to come (1 Cor. 6:2), and much more.

Once we understand that Jesus will come back from heaven and conquer the earth, we get a whole new understanding of the Bible. Jesus will come back from heaven and fight the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21), and conquer the earth. Christians, who were Raptured into heaven will come back down from heaven with him and continue to be with him, as 1 Thessalonians 4:17 promises. Then, Jesus will set up his Kingdom on earth. There will be the Resurrection of the Righteous, when millions of righteous people from the Old Testament, Gospels, and Tribulation come to life and live in the Kingdom (Ezek. 37:12-14). Also, the people in the Kingdom include the “sheep” (believers) of Matthew 25:31-46. Once all the believers are gathered and the Kingdom is set up, there will be a great, brightly lit feast for everyone. Meanwhile, the unsaved who are alive, such as the “goats” of Matthew 25 and the Antichrist and False Prophet (Rev. 19:20), are not allowed in the feast but are thrown into the darkness of the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41, 46; Rev. 19:20; 20:13-15).

[For more on the attributes of the Messianic Kingdom on earth and the names by which it is called, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more about the feast in the Kingdom, see commentary on Matt. 8:11, “recline *to eat at the feast*.” For more about the unsaved being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not being tortured forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more about the different resurrections—the Resurrection of the Righteous and the Resurrection of the Unrighteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more about the “sheep” and the Sheep and Goat Judgment, see commentary on Matt. 25:32.]

**“sobbing and gnashing of teeth**.**”** This phrase expresses some of the horror and sadness that the unsaved will feel on Judgment Day and afterward as they face annihilation in the Lake of Fire. The Greek text reads, “the” sobbing and “the” gnashing of teeth, and one purpose the double article serves is to emphasize both things: sobbing and gnashing. The word “gnashing” can also be translated “grinding.” People will gnash or grind their teeth because Judgment Day and the time following it will be a terrible time for the unsaved.

There is no reference in the Old Testament associating sobbing and gnashing of teeth with the Day of Judgment, but it is certainly implied. Daniel 12:2 says some people will be resurrected and experience “shame” and “contempt.” Furthermore, a large number of verses speak of the wicked being destroyed, which they will obviously be unhappy about, especially when they see so many people who are going to live forever with God and the Lord Jesus (cf. Job. 20:7; Ps. 1:6; 37:10, 20; 73:17-19; 92:7; 145:20; Prov. 10:25; Isa. 41:11; Ezek. 18:4; 33:13-16).

The Bible says in many places in very straightforward language that the wicked will be destroyed by being burned up. They will be consumed like dry stubble (Nah. 1:10, cf. Isa. 29:20), and will vanish like smoke (Ps. 37:20). God’s fire will consume them (Ps. 21:9). Malachi 4:1 says there is a day coming that will burn like a furnace and all the evil people will be like stubble and will be set on fire. Then they will be ashes under the feet of the righteous (Mal. 4:3). John the Baptist and Jesus both spoke of the wicked being burned up, as do many verses in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 3:12; 10:28; 13:40; 18:8; 25:41; Mark 9:43; Luke 3:9; John 15:6; Heb. 10:27; Rev. 19:20; 20:14-15).

While it is possible, even likely, that some people will burn up immediately in the Lake of Fire, the Bible implies that many will suffer for a period of time before being consumed by the fire. The Bible says in many different places that people will be repaid for what they have done on earth (cf. Job 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:5-6; 1 Cor. 3:8), and during that suffering, there will be sobbing and gnashing of teeth.

Like many words and phrases in the Bible, the phrase, “sobbing and gnashing of teeth,” has a wide range of meanings. But it is used to describe the disgruntled and inflamed emotions of the unsaved at that time. Sobbing and gnashing of teeth imply a feeling of great loss as well as great pain, and those things will certainly be present. But the gnashing of teeth also implies anger and indignation (Job 16:9; Ps. 37:12; Lam. 2:16; Acts 7:54).

No doubt some of the unsaved will be very sad and sorry, but many others will be angry at God, thinking they are being treated unfairly, and will gnash their teeth at God. Also, it seems certain that some people will be angry and disappointed in themselves—people who “knew” to do better on earth but were too weak-willed to stand up for God against the peer pressure around them. On earth they went along with the crowd even though God said not to do that: “You must not follow a crowd to do evil” (Exod. 23:2), and so after the Judgment they will again “go along with the crowd” and be part of those who suffer until death consumes them.

The mention of sobbing and gnashing of teeth occurs seven times in the Bible (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). All of these occurrences are in the Gospels, and they are set in three different contexts: two are in the context of the unsaved being thrown into the Fire, and these are more straightforward because of all the clear verses that say the unsaved will be destroyed by fire.

Three of the seven occurrences of sobbing and gnashing of teeth are in the context of the Kingdom being like a great, well-lit banquet where the saved enjoy the blessings of food, fun, and the favor of the Lord (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; Luke 13:28). Many Jews rightly believed that there would be a huge banquet in the Messianic Kingdom, and they would get to recline and eat with all the other saved people and the biblical greats like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David—and that banquet is certainly part of the biblical picture of the Messianic Kingdom. Isaiah 25:6 shows us that God will have a great feast for the saved in the future Messianic Kingdom on earth: “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines” (Isa. 25:6 NIV). However, the unsaved are excluded from this great and wonderful banquet, and are left outside in the darkness—actually the darkness of the Lake of Fire—and they will sob and gnash their teeth.

The last two occurrences of sobbing and gnashing of teeth are in the general context of not being pleasing to the Lord and ready for him when he comes (Matt. 24:51; 25:30). In Matthew 24:51, the evil person is given a place with the hypocrites where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, and the scope of Scripture shows us that place is the Lake of Fire. In the parable of Matthew 25:14-30, the master of the house leaves on a trip and entrusts his household and money to his servants. When one of his servants turns out to be “worthless,” the master has him “cast” into the darkness outside, meaning the darkness outside the master’s household. Thus, in the cultural context of the Bible, we can understand that the master’s household is put for the Messiah and his kingdom, and the good servants are the faithful ones who will be included in the Kingdom, while the worthless servants, the unsaved, are excluded and left in the darkness outside to be destroyed in the Lake of Fire, where there will be sobbing and gnashing of teeth.

[For more on the attributes of the Messianic Kingdom on earth and the names by which it is called, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more about the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven, see the REV commentary on Matt. 8:11, “recline *to eat at the feast*.” For more about death being actual death and “dead” people not being alive in any way or form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more about the unsaved being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not burning forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more about the different resurrections—the Resurrection of the Righteous and the Resurrection of the Unrighteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

Mat 8:14

**“his mother-in-law.”** Peter was married (cf. 1 Cor. 9:5), but typical of the biblical culture we know little about Peter’s family. Clement of Alexandria said Peter had children (*Stromata*; book 3, chap. 6). They are protected by the silence from personal intrusion. This record is in Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31, and Luke 4:38-39.

Mat 8:16

**“with *his* word.”** For people who have been involved in deliverance ministry, this seems so natural that it can escape our notice. We think, “Of course he cast out demons by his word, how else would he do it?” We have to remember that in the cultures of the biblical world, if there was deliverance from demons at all it usually involved complicated exorcism ceremonies. In stark contrast to those involved ceremonies, all Jesus did was command the demon to go and it left the person.

Mat 8:19

**“an expert in the law came.”** This incident is also recorded in Luke 9:57-58. See commentary on Luke 9:58.

Mat 8:20

**“the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”** See commentary on Luke 9:58.

Mat 8:21

**“another of his disciples.”** The expert in the Law, who said he would follow Jesus wherever he went, was a disciple, and now another disciple and Jesus are speaking together. We learn from Luke 9:59 that Jesus requested this next disciple to follow him, but this second disciple wanted to stay home until his father died. See commentary on Luke 9:59.

Mat 8:22

**“leave the dead to bury their own dead.”** This incident also occurs in Luke 9:59-60. See commentary on Luke 9:60.

Mat 8:23

**“And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him.”** The record of Jesus calming a storm—which is immediately followed by the record of Jesus healing a man afflicted by demons—occurs in Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41, and Luke 8:22-25. The most detail occurs in Mark (see commentary on Mark 4:35).

Mat 8:24

**“look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“A violent storm rose up on the lake.”** The “sea” of Galilee is actually quite a small lake, only 7 miles (11.2 km) across and 12 miles (19.3 km) long, and the entire lake can be seen from the escarpments on both the east and west sides. The Greek word *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα), lake, sea, or ocean, does not really refer to the size of the body of water, and thus has to be translated into the English “lake,” “sea,” or “ocean” by knowing the body of water that is being referred to (see commentary on Matt. 4:18).

Mat 8:26

**“subdued.”** The Greek word translated “subdued” is *epitimaō* (#2008 ἐπιτιμάω). Usually, *epitimaō* means to express strong disapproval of someone: rebuke, reprove, censure; or to speak seriously, and thus warn in order to prevent or end an action. It can also mean “punish.”[[89]](#footnote-16801)

In this context, *epitimaō* has a technical meaning: it is used in Greek religion of gaining control over a spirit, a demon. Robert Guelich writes that *epitimaō* can mean “a commanding word uttered by God or by his spokesman, by which evil powers are brought into submission.”[[90]](#footnote-20551) Jesus subdued the storm, which was no doubt caused by a demon, by the power of God that he wielded, which he expressed in words. The power came from God and was used by Jesus. Jesus did not gain control over the storm by some “magic words” or formula that he used. “It is not a magical incantation...it is powerful Word of the Son.”[[91]](#footnote-16390) This storm on the Sea of Galilee is recorded in Matthew, Mark 4:35-41, and Luke 8:22-25, and in every record, *epitimaō* is used.

[For more on *epitimaō*, and Jesus’ use of the power of God, see the commentary on Mark 1:25.]

Mat 8:28

**“two men who were afflicted by demons met him.”** This record of Jesus casting out demons that then went into pigs occurs in three of the four Gospels: Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; and Luke 8:26-39. As we would expect, although the records are of the same event, the different Gospels give different, but not contradictory, accounts.

Almost never are the details of an account the same in all the Gospels that record it, and there are a number of reasons for that. One reason is that the Four Gospels are specifically written from four different perspectives, and each Gospel is written in a way that highlights the perspective from which it was written

[For more on the different perspectives of the Four Gospels, see commentary on Mark 1:1.]

Another reason is that the different details in the different Gospels allow us to get a “larger picture” of what happened than just a *verbatim* repetition of the account could ever give us. For example, in the record of the trial of Jesus Christ before Pilate, the different Gospels have somewhat different details as to what Pilate and Jesus said to each other, with the Gospel of John giving the most information. But in reality, even the Four Gospels combined don’t give us anywhere near the full conversation between them. Jesus was on trial for his life, and Pilate did not want to crucify an innocent man—and he knew Christ was innocent (Matt. 27:18)—so he surely would have pressed Jesus very hard for details. But the details of the conversation are not important for God to make His point and the end result—Jesus’ crucifixion—would have been the same whether they were given or not, so the Bible only records the conversation in brief.

Most of the records of Jesus speaking only contain a very small portion of what he said. For example, the record of Jesus with the woman at the well (John 4:4-42) records Jesus speaking to the woman in only 12 verses, but we know he said a whole lot more than that to her, because she told the people of her village that he told her everything she ever did (John 4:29). Of course the woman was exaggerating, but the point is that Jesus had told her more than enough to convince her he was the Messiah. Had that record in John 4 been recounted in other Gospels, no doubt what Jesus said to the woman would have been recorded differently, with each Gospel picking up different details of the account, but even then the full conversation would not have been recorded.

Still another reason that the Four Gospels give different details of an account, or express what happened in different terms, is to make it clear as to exactly what happened and what was being communicated. For example, in the Lord’s prayer in Matthew, Jesus says, “and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). In contrast, Luke 11:4 reads, “And forgive us our sins….” It is possible that Jesus repeated the prayer, or lines of it, for emphasis and used the words “debts” and “sins,” and the different Gospels reflect that fact, but there is another possible explanation as well. During the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews began to equate sin with debt, and a sin was a debt that had to be repaid.

[For more on sin being referred to as a debt, see commentary on 1 John 1:7, “sin.”]

Matthew is the most Jewish of the Four Gospels and his audience would not misunderstand that when he wrote “Forgive us our debts,” he was referring to sins. Luke, on the other hand, was likely a Greek (he may have been a Hellenistic Jew) and his audience would not instinctively equate debt with sin, so he would have taken what Jesus most likely said to his audience, “debt,” and translated it for his more Greek audience and wrote “sin.” Thus Luke would have written what Jesus meant but not the exact word he spoke, which is the way translation always works.

Still another reason for the different Gospels to give different details is so that anyone who really wants to find out what happened in the life of Jesus must read all Four Gospels. The whole Bible is “God-breathed,” and God is not interested in giving us an “easy way out” so we don’t have to work to get to really know Him and His Word. It honors God when we take the time to read His whole Word and learn from the details.

Returning to the record of the men in the tombs, we can see from the context and content of the accounts in the three different Gospels that they are the same account. It would stretch the limits of credulity to say that Jesus went twice to the east coast of the Sea of Galilee, twice met demonized people from the tombs who kept people from passing by there, twice cast out demons who caused pigs to drown themselves in the Sea, and so forth. The records are of the same account with differing details, and the details never contradict one another.

One differing detail is that Matthew says the region of the “Gadarenes,” while Mark and Luke say “Gerasenes.” Although there are a number of manuscripts that make all the names the same, that is most likely an attempt to harmonize the three Gospels. The more likely explanation is that to Matthew’s more Jewish audience, the region was best known for the important Jewish city, Gadara, and thus the region was called that of the Gadarenes, while the Gospels that were written from a more Greek perspective, Mark and Luke, would label the region by the more well-known Greek city, Gerasa, and thus have the regional name Gerasenes.

Matthew tells us there were two men, and that is almost certainly correct. Mark and Luke mention only one, but never say there was “only one,” and thus there is no contradiction in the Gospels, just differing details. The point is not how many people there were, the point is to show Jesus’ love for otherwise unlovable people and how he can deliver them and turn their lives around.

The records have many details that differ but do not contradict. For example, Matthew uses the Greek word “*daimōn*” for “demon,” while Mark and Luke use the word “*daimōnion*,” and for the reason for that see commentary on Matthew 8:31. Mark mentions that the man cut himself with stones (Mark 5:5), a typically demonic activity, but Matthew and Luke omit that detail. Similarly, Luke says the man was naked (Luke 8:27) which is a detail that neither Matthew nor Mark mention.

[For more on the demonic activity of self-mutilation see commentary on 1 Kings 18:28.]

The three records show the great love that Jesus Christ had for people—even the most sinful and unlovable of people—and how anyone who comes to him can be saved and have everlasting life.

Mat 8:29

**“look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

“**What do you want with us?”** The literal Greek is, “What is there to us and to you?” This was originally a Semitic idiom, but it was pulled into the Greek idiomatic language. As with many idioms, its meaning is somewhat flexible, depending on the context in which it is used. Here, the essence of the message is “Leave me alone.”[[92]](#footnote-13449) Mark Strauss writes, “The question ‘what do you want with us’ comes from a Hebrew idiom. It is a response to (perceived) inappropriate intervention and can mean ‘What do you have against me?” or ‘Why are you trying to involve me?’ (cf. Judg. 11:12; 2 Sam. 16:10; 19:22; 1 Kings 17:18; 2 Kings 3:13; 2 Chron. 35:21; cf. Matt. 8:29; Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28; John 2:4) Here the question is rhetorical: ‘Mind your own business!’ or ‘Get out of my face!’”[[93]](#footnote-18214) However, the phrase is also used when Jesus was speaking to his mother about changing water to wine, and there the essence is more, “What *is that* to me and to you?” (see commentary on John 2:4). This phrase is spoken by demons five times in the Four Gospels, but two are in the singular, as here, and three are in the plural. This is important and gives us a peek into how demons work. In this record in Matthew, while there are many demons in these men, Matthew has more than one speaking, while Mark and Luke are singular, as if only one demon were speaking. Thus, one is in charge, but others are chiming in. The demons are bothered by Jesus Christ and are challenging him; they are not asking him a serious question as if they cared to get an answer.

The Word of God records several incidences of demons speaking to Jesus: In the Synagogue: Mark 1:24, Luke 4:34 (τί ἡμῖν καί σοι [both plural]); from the tombs: Matthew 8:29 (τί ἡμῖν καί σοί [plural]); and Mark 5:7, Luke 8:28 (τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί [singular]).

The slight difference in the Greek words in the record of the tombs shows that there was one demon who was the main speaker, but also that the demons spoke as a group. The Greek word *hēmin* (ἡμῖν) is plural, “we,” while *emoi* (ἐμοι) is singular, “I.”

**“torment us before the appointed time.”** The Greek word translated “torment” is *basanizō* (#928 βασανίζω), and in this context, it means “torment” or “torture.” The demons knew that they rebelled against God and sinned horribly throughout the millennia, and that they would suffer greatly in the Lake of Fire along with the Devil (Rev. 20:10). Although Revelation 20:10 does not mention the demons along with the Devil, that was often done in the Bible and literature, where only the leader was mentioned but it included his or her followers.

[For the Devil and demons being destroyed in the future, see commentary on Mark 1:24.]

The word translated “appointed time” is *kairos*, whereas the Greek word for the flow of time is *chronos*. The Devil and the demons know that there is a time coming when they will be tormented in Gehenna and eventually destroyed. They understand God’s retributive justice, and they understand the meaning of the Flood, which was the destruction of the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:5); and the meaning of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, which was also an example of the destruction of the ungodly (Jude 1:7). They know they will be bound, tormented, then destroyed (Dan. 7:12; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10). They knew, however, that the Messiah was to have his heel bruised before he bruised the head of the Serpent (Gen. 3:15), and so they asked if he had come to torment them before the proper time. There were demons who had caused the Nephilim (Gen. 6:4) during the days of Noah that led to the hardening of the human race and its eventual destruction. Genesis 6:5 describes how great mankind’s wickedness had become in the days of Noah by saying that “every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” The demons who caused that hardening were now imprisoned in Tartarus, “gloomy darkness,” awaiting the Judgment (1 Pet. 3:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:4). Although not the Gehenna, Tartarus must be very unpleasant, to say the least. These demons thought Jesus might send them to Tartarus too, so they asked if he had come to torment them before “the time,” i.e., their being bound in the Abyss (Rev. 20:1-3) and then eventually thrown into Gehenna (Rev. 20:10).

Mat 8:31

**“demons.”** The Greek word for “demons” is *daimōn* (#1142 δαίμων), and in the Bible it means “demons,” evil spirit beings who are fallen angels. Demons are evil spirits, fallen angels, the 1/3 of the angels that followed “the Devil” and rebelled against God. Both the Greek words *daimōn* and *daimōnion* mean “demon.” The word *daimōn* occurs only once in the New Testament, here in Matthew 8:31, while the word *daimōnion* occurs 63 times, for a total of 64 occurrences. (This count is based on the better Greek texts. In the Western Text family, the word *daimon* occurs 5 times and the word *daimonion* occurs 60 times. The difference between 64 total occurrences in the Nestle-Aland text and 65 in the Western texts is due to the addition of *daimon* in Mark 5:12 in the Western text.)

To the average Greek, a *daimōn* was a god, the spirit of a dead person, or a supernatural being, and could be either good or evil, or like people, could do both good and evil depending on the circumstances. In fact, in the Greek classics, a *daimōn* was more often than not a force for good. In contrast, the word *daimōnion*, especially by New Testament times, was considered to be a god, the spirit of a dead person, or a supernatural being, but was generally thought of as being evil or hostile. This fact explains why the word *daimōnion* is used almost exclusively in both the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and in the Greek text of the New Testament. To the Greek readers in the first century, using *daimōnion* would make it clear that the demon spirits were evil, while using *daimōn* would not unless the context clearly dictated it, which it does in Matthew 8:31.

The word *daimōn* also appears one time in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament. *Daimōn* is the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew word *gad*, the goddess of Good Fortune, in Isaiah 65:11. Translating *gad* as *daimōn* makes sense, because, “the Greek tragic poets use *daimōn* to denote fortune or fate.”[[94]](#footnote-21692)

Since a *daimōn* was often thought of as doing good, and the demon “Good Fortune” brings “good things” (like winning in gambling, which only lures people into evil behavior and gets them hooked on it), the Greek translation of *gad* as *daimōn* makes sense in Isaiah 65 given the Greek culture.

The New Testament use of *daimōn* is in Matthew 8:31 where it is used in the plural for the demons who were inside the man who lived in the tombs. The record of the man of the tombs occurs in Matthew 8, Mark 5, and Luke 8. Mark does not use *daimōn* or *daimōnion*, but uses “unclean spirit.” Luke uses both *daimōnion* and “unclean spirit.” By comparing all three records, the reader can see that the Greek words *daimōn* and *daimōnion* referred to evil spirits, something that the Greek-speaking believers would need to know to be fully equipped in the spiritual battle.

It is sometimes taught that *daimōnion* is a diminutive form of *daimōn* as if *daimōn* ruled over *daimōnion*, but the two uses of *daimōn* in the Bible (Isa. 65:11; Matt. 8:31), as well as the use of the words in Greek literature, do not support that conclusion. Furthermore, *daimōnion* is not technically the diminutive form of *daimōn*. It is the substantive of the neuter adjective *daimōnios*, i.e., “pertaining to a demon.”[[95]](#footnote-23019)

[For information on the actual existence of the Devil, the “Slanderer,” and Demons, see commentary on Luke 4:2, “Slanderer.” For more on the Devil as the “serpent,” see commentary on Rev. 20:2. For more on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Mat 8:32

**“And he said to them, ‘Go.’”** The Bible does not state why Jesus allowed the demons to enter and possess the pigs, but it is clear that he did (cf. Mark 5:13; Luke 8:32). A number of explanations have been given to try to make sense of what Jesus did, but the Bible does not tell us why, so we don’t know for certain. The most logical explanation is that the owners of the pigs were Jews. In that case, as Lenski points out, “It was illegal for Jews to possess swine; their destruction, therefore, was the execution of God’s law.”[[96]](#footnote-20187) Although the area east of the Sea of Galilee was mostly Gentile, there were Jews there, and if the owners were Jews we can see why they kept the pigs in the Transjordan east of the Sea of Galilee; it would have been difficult indeed for them to have such a herd in Israel proper. Also, if they were Jews, then as Jews they were operating outside of God’s law and would not have gotten His protection. In that case, it seems that the demons could have possessed the pigs anyway, with or without Jesus’ permission, and Jesus would have known that. In fact, the demons may have done what they did in order to cast Jesus in a bad light so the people of the area would reject him, which they did in spite of the fact that he had healed the men who were afflicted by the demons (Matt. 8:33-34; Mark 5:16-17; Luke 8:34-37).

**“And they came out and went into the pigs.”** Matthew 8:32 reveals the fact that demons can possess animals, and cause them to do things that they would not normally do. Believers should be aware of that, because many animals that are behaving in a very unusual manner, and especially if they become dangerous, need to be destroyed. Many “animal lovers” are ignorant of this and try to keep dangerous animals alive “because they love them,” and someone ends up getting hurt. The Bible makes it clear dangerous animals must be destroyed (cf. Exod. 21:28-32).

**“look*.*”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“steep bank.”** On the east side of the Sea of Galilee is a place just south of where Jesus cast the demons out of the men, today called the Nokeib Overlook, where the steep bank runs right down to the lake.

Mat 8:33

**“who were looking after them.”** Herding pigs was hard, lonely, and dangerous work. The pigs were outside the city, so there was very little social interaction with other people. Also, the herdsman had to keep watch day and night, so if the animals were nervous for whatever reason, the herdsman could go night after night without a good night’s sleep, as well as be out in the weather by day and night, whatever that may have been. Also, both robbers and wild animals were a constant source of danger, and the herdsman was expected to protect the herd from both. Also, if any pigs were missing, the herdsmen were immediately suspected of slaughtering them to eat or selling them for profit, and that partly explains why, when the herd ran into the Sea of Galilee, the herdsmen went into the city right away to report what had happened.

Mat 8:34

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“the whole city.”** This is the figure of speech synecdoche, the “whole” being put for the greater part.

[See Word Study: “Synecdoche.”]

**“territory.”** See commentary on Mark 5:17.

**Matthew Chapter 9**

Mat 9:1

**“the boat.”** This would have been the boat that he had come over on (cf. Mark 5:18). It seems most likely that Jesus would have gotten into the same boat he came in, and the Gospel of Mark says, “the boat.” Also, many Greek manuscripts read “the boat” here in Matthew 9:1.

**“*the lake*.”** The “sea” of Galilee is actually quite a small lake, only 7 miles (11.2 km) across and 12 miles (19.3 km) long, and the entire lake can be seen from the escarpments on both the east and west sides. The Greek word *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα), lake, sea, or ocean, does not really refer to the size of the body of water, and thus has to be translated into the English “lake,” “sea,” or “ocean” by knowing the body of water that is being referred to (see commentary on Matt. 4:18).

**“his own city.”** Capernaum. Jesus moved to Capernaum after the people of his hometown, Nazareth, tried to kill him (Luke 4:29-31; cf. Matt. 4:13). Jesus either bought or rented a house in Capernaum, because John 2:12 indicates he even moved his family there. As we see in this verse, Capernaum became known as Jesus’ “own city.” One of the likely reasons Jesus chose to move to Capernaum was that it was on the Via Maris, the Road of the Sea, which was the great trade route from Egypt in the south to Damascus in Syria and on to Mesopotamia (see commentary on Matt. 4:15).

[For more about Capernaum being Jesus’ hometown, see commentary on Mark 2:1.]

Mat 9:2

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“brought to him a paralyzed man.”** This record of the healing of the paralyzed man occurs in Matthew 9:2-8; Mark 2:3-12; and Luke 5:18-26.

**“lying on a bed.”** This was not a modern bed, but mats for sleeping.

[For more on beds in the biblical culture, see commentary on Matt. 9:6.]

**“child.”** See commentary on Mark 2:5.

Mat 9:3

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“speaks blasphemy.”** The religious leaders thought that by forgiving sins, Jesus was harming the reputation of God, who was alone thought to be able to forgive sins.

[For more on forgiving sins, see commentary on Mark 2:7.]

Matthew 9:3 is the first use of the 34 uses of the Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω, pronounced blas-fay-'meh-ō). The noun form of the word is *blasphēmia* (#988 βλασφημία, pronounced blas-fay-'me-ah), which occurs 18 times. Both *blasphēmeō* and *blasphēmia* are transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” There is a problem with that, however, because “blasphemy” in English has a different meaning than *blasphēmeō* and *blasphēmia* do in Greek. In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. It is insulting God or a god, insulting something considered sacred (like defacing a cross or statue of Jesus), or claiming to be God or a god in some way. BDAG correctly says that the English word blasphemy “has to some extent in English gone its own emotive way semantically and has in effect become a religious technical term, which is not the case with βλασφημέω.”[[97]](#footnote-32703)

In Greek, *blasphēmeō* and *blasphēmia* did not have to refer to God or a god but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning of *blasphēmeō* and *blasphēmia* as they were used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. In the honor/shame society of the biblical world, that was even more heinous an act than we would think of it today because honor and reputation were at the very core of societal status and were the basis of all social interaction. Perhaps a good comparable analogy is how horrible “losing face” is in Asian society, which is an honor/shame society.

For the definition of *blasphēmia*, Louw-Nida says: “to speak against someone in such a way as to harm or injure his or her reputation (occurring in relation to persons as well as to divine beings) — ‘to revile, to defame, to blaspheme, reviling.’”[[98]](#footnote-20884) BDAG has: “speech that denigrates or defames,” hence “reviling, denigration, disrespect, slander.”[[99]](#footnote-10302) Thayer defines *blasphēmia* as, “speech injurious to another’s good name” and lists railing, reviling, and slander, as some of the definitions.[[100]](#footnote-29013) Thayer also points out that not only is “blasphemy” a loanword into English, but it is in Latin also, and is “*blasphēmia*” in the Latin Vulgate.

*Blasphēmeō* and *blasphēmia* are used in the Bible of blasphemous speech toward God (e.g., Rom. 2:24; Rev. 13:6), but also it is often used of people; for instance, in Titus 3:2, we are commanded not to speak in this way toward anyone. Other examples of blasphemy against humans can be found in Acts 18:6; Romans 3:8; 1 Peter 4:4; and Revelation 2:9. Besides God and humans, the Bible also refers to “blasphemous” speech toward angelic beings (2 Pet. 2:10-12; Jude 8-10; Rev. 13:6). Lastly, it is also possible to blaspheme against impersonal things, such as the Word of God (Titus 2:5), or the way of the truth (2 Pet. 2:2).

Given that the essence of *blasphēmeō* and *blasphēmia* is speaking words that injure or harm the reputation of another, “blaspheme” is generally the best definition of those words in contexts where it is used in reference to God or a god, and “insult” or “slander” seems to be a better fit when the context is about people. This is because English speakers do not use “blasphemy” in reference to other people, but they do use “slander” or “insult.”

Mat 9:5

**“which is easier.”** Which is easier to say and accomplish, declaring someone’s sins are forgiven, or divine healing? They are equally easy. See commentary on Luke 5:23.

Mat 9:6

**“you.”** The “you” is plural. So that all of you know.

**“the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”** This is an anacoluthon, an unfinished sentence. Jesus does not complete his sentence by words, instead, for emphasis, he completes it by action.

[See Word Study: “Anacoluthon.”]

**“pallet.”** This is referring to a small “bed,” generally made up of some thick blankets, perhaps here with some poles and matting to give it structure. It is the same event and object, but not the same word as “pallet” (κράβαττόν, *krabatton*, #2895) in Mark 2:11 or “small bed” (κλινίδιόν, *klinidion*, #2826) in Luke 5:19, 24 but are all referring to the same thing. All these words can legitimately describe what the paralytic was lying on.

If Jesus asked most Westerners to “pick up your bed, and go home” they could not do it. Our beds are far too big and bulky. However, the beds of the biblical culture were usually thin mattresses stuffed with cotton or wool, and often they were only layers of blankets. Therefore, they were easy to carry and they were also easy to roll up for storage in the house. For this man to take up his bed and walk would be quite similar to a camper rolling up a thick sleeping bag (the old-fashioned thick cotton kind, not the modern thin backpacking sleeping bag) and walking off with it.

The fact that Eastern beds did not take up much space during the day was important because houses in Eastern culture did not have separate bedrooms as Western houses do. At bedtime, the mats (“beds”) were taken from where they had been stored for the day and simply laid out on the floor, and then the family slept together on the floor of the main room of the house. In the morning, the “beds” were rolled up and usually placed in a pile against the wall, although, in a larger house, there may have been another place they were kept.

Many modern translations read “mat” or “pallet” instead of “bed”. This is acceptable but can lead the reader to the false conclusion that the man was not actually lying on his regular bed while he was at the Pool of Bethesda, but rather on a mat he brought to rest on during the day just as we Westerners might take a blanket to a park or to the beach. The mat or pallet was in fact his bed, which is why Jesus told the man to pick up his bed.

Under some circumstances, a bed might be placed on a board or something stiff so that the bed and person could be carried, as we perhaps see in Acts 5:15, but even then the people might have been carried separately from the bed and then the person laid on the bed in a place that Peter might pass by. In the Roman world many of the houses, and certainly the houses of the wealthy, did have separate rooms that were used as bedrooms and many of those rooms had a special type of stiff bed that was raised a little off of the floor, but poor people would not have these.

Mat 9:8

**“given such authority to humans.”** Some of the teachers of the Law could not believe that a man could forgive sins. In a parallel account recorded in Mark, they claim, “He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

[For more on the authority to forgive sin, see commentary on Mark 2:7.]

Mat 9:9

**“a man called Matthew.”** The calling of Matthew (also called Levi) is recorded in Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:14-17; and Luke 5:27-32. The three Gospels that record the calling of Matthew differ in some significant details. That is typical of the Gospels because each of the four Gospels has its own purpose and significance. Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the king, Mark as the servant of God, Luke as a human being, and John as the Son of God (see commentary on Mark 1:1, “the Good News of Jesus Christ”). Before delving into some of the differing details of the three Gospel accounts of this event, we must remember that this exchange between the Pharisees and Jesus Christ was more than just a couple of sentences. The Pharisees were the religious leaders in the Galilee and they were possessive and stubborn men, which is one reason they spoke to Jesus’ disciples and not directly to Jesus, and so the conversation between them and Jesus would have taken some time and many things would have been said—much more than is recorded in a very abbreviated form in Scripture. The back-and-forth between Jesus and the Pharisees gives room for each Gospel to record the event in light of its particular emphasis.

Matthew has the most intense engagement between Jesus and the Pharisees. For one thing, it is the only Gospel that mentions that Jesus quoted the Old Testament, saying, “**I want mercy, and not sacrifice”** (Hos. 6:6). This would have mainly been a rebuke, but also was an instruction to anyone with ears to hear. However, Matthew, Mark, and Luke also have an intended rebuke in Jesus’ statement, “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17). Calling the Pharisees “righteous” was a tongue-in-cheek rebuke because the Pharisees were not actually righteous in the sight of God (even though they thought they were), a point Jesus made on more than one occasion (cf. Matt. 5:20; Matt. 23:15-17). It makes sense that the Gospel of Matthew would have the most intense interaction with the ungodly Pharisees because it was the duty of the king to protect his people.

The Gospel of Luke shows the most interest in the “sinners” that Jesus was with, which is typical of Luke, and emphasizes Jesus’ humanity. Luke points out that Matthew made the feast for Jesus, indicating the high regard that Matthew had for Jesus, and obviously, Matthew’s friends were welcome, they did not “just happen” to be there. Also, it is in Luke that Jesus clearly stated a major part of his purpose for being at the feast: that he came to call sinners “to repentance” (Luke 5:32). That Jesus was there to make an impression that would lead the sinners to repent is not stated in Matthew or Mark, but shows Jesus’ love for the people. Jesus loved the sinners and did not want them to die in their sin, so he was not around them just to “hang out,” he was there to call them to repentance so they could have everlasting life (see commentary on Luke 5:32, “to repentance”).

**“sitting at the tax collector’s booth.”** The tax office was close to the shore of the Sea of Galilee. See commentary on Mark 2:14.

Mat 9:10

**“the house.”** Although Matthew 9:10 says “the” house, and Mark 2:15 says “his” house, Luke 5:29 makes it clear that it is Matthew’s house (“Matthew” is called “Levi” in Mark 2:13-17, and Luke 5:27-30).

Matthew was a tax collector, so it makes sense that his friends were tax collectors and “sinners,” which is why so many people like that were at the dinner. This is a very good model of how to spread the gospel. Matthew became a follower of Jesus, and instead of starting to spread the Gospel by speaking with strangers, started by inviting his friends to a huge dinner and making sure Jesus was there to speak with them.

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 9:11

**“Why is your teacher.”** Matthew 9:11 and Matthew 9:14 are an interesting case study on how evil works to sow division and tear a group apart. Both the Pharisees and the disciples of John had questions about Jesus’ ministry. But the Pharisees were not really seeking an answer, and so they went to Jesus’ disciples and asked them about it. Their real motive in such an action was to discredit Jesus. The watchful Jesus saw the situation developing and stepped in and answered the question, but in a way that challenged the Pharisees to study the Word and rethink their position—which they never did.

In Matthew 9:14 the disciples of John had a question, but they went directly to Jesus and asked it. Jesus answered them too, but also in a way that would have caused John’s disciples to ponder the answer. Evil always works to break apart godly groups, and wise leaders are always on guard against those subtle attacks.

Mat 9:13

**“I want mercy, and not sacrifice.”** See commentary on Hosea 6:6 for more understanding of why Jesus quoted that verse. Also, he quoted it a second time under different circumstances in Matthew 12:7.

**“I did not come to call the righteous.”** See commentary on Mark 2:17.

**“but sinners.”** For more on Jesus calling sinners to repentance, see commentary on Luke 5:32.

Mat 9:14

**“fast often.”** The Mosaic Law only required fasting one day a year; the day of Atonement. Leviticus 16:29 (KJV) says, “And *this* shall be a statute for ever unto you: *that* in the seventh month, on the tenth *day* of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, *whether it be* one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you.” The idiomatic phrase, “afflict your soul,” was known to refer to fasting. Nevertheless, fasting became a regular practice for many people.

The first fasting in the Bible is when Moses went up on Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights and did not eat or drink (Exod. 34:28). Often a fast was just from sunrise to sunset, much like Muslims do today during the month of Ramadan, and after sunset the person could eat (Judg. 20:26; 1 Sam. 14:24; 2 Sam. 1:12; 3:35).

Fasting was done for many different reasons, but most often as a demonstration of humility toward God, and to get His favor. Of course, for some religious people, including the Pharisees, part of the reason for fasting was so that others would see and be impressed (Matt. 6:16; 23:5). We learn from history, and from the example of the Pharisees, that the Pharisees fasted twice a week, Monday and Thursday (Luke 18:12). By the second century there were Christians who were fasting twice a week, but they chose days when the Jews were not fasting (Didache 8:1).

In contrast to fasting, feasting was common also. Feasts were generally held for an important occasion: weddings; the weaning of a child; the arrival or even the approaching departure of guests; sheep shearing time; the weekly Sabbath, which was considered a joyous occasion; the sighting of the new moon, which started the new month; and of course the Feasts in the Law such as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the feasts such as Purim that post-dated the Law.

The life of a Jew who loved God was one that showed great dedication to God, and also showed a great love of life and enjoyment of what God had created.

On a textual note, there is some question as to whether the word “often” was in the original text of Matthew. Some Greek manuscripts include it and some do not have it. The Shem Tov Hebrew text has it, and that along with the Greek manuscript evidence is why the REV includes it.

Mat 9:15

**“wedding guests.”** The literal Greek is “sons of the bridechamber,” which was an idiom for the wedding guests; and in some contexts more specifically for the friends of the bridegroom who were at the wedding.

**“groom.”** In many English versions, the older term “bridegroom” is used, but it just means the groom.

**“and then they will fast.”** People fasted for different reasons, but often for a disaster or difficult situation, and to get God’s help with it, or to procure the favor of God. Jesus’ presence in and of itself brought “the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:19), and the grace and favor of his Father was upon him (Luke 2:40, 52; 4:19; John 1:14). This combined with the short duration of Jesus’ ministry on earth (likely just over a year; not the three years many people believe) in which he ate and drank with sinners, made physical fasting not the right choice. His disciples would fast after he left them.

Mat 9:16

**“no one puts.”** This in Matthew 9:16 is an expansion of what Jesus had just said about fasting in Matthew 9:15. What Jesus was doing was so new and different that the “old system” of doing things would no longer be adequate. Jesus spoke of the “new commandment” he brought (John 13:34), but the truth is that he brought new light in many, many ways. Things like his approach to the Law, “you have heard it said...but I say to you” in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-34, 38-39, 43-44), or his way of dealing with sinners by being close to them, or his way of relating to women, were all new. The old way of doing things that was overseen by the likes of the Pharisees and Sadducees could not be just patched, it needed to be newly made.

Mat 9:17

**“Neither do *people* put.”** This is an expansion of what Jesus taught in Matthew 9:15-16 (see commentary on Matt. 9:16). Old wineskins get stiff and inflexible, and so when the new wine ferments and expands, the old skin cannot expand with it like a new wineskin can, and so it bursts. Occasionally the pressure of fermentation is so great that even sometimes our modern glass bottles burst if wine is incorrectly or prematurely bottled. The understanding and way of doing things that Jesus was bringing to Judaism was “new wine” that could not be put in the “old wineskins” of the religious understanding of the Law and Prophets that was held by the religious leaders of his time. They, and the generations before them, had so thoroughly perverted the true meaning of the Law that they had become “blind guides” (Matt. 15:14). Jesus said that if you put the new wine (the new commandments and the new understanding of the Law that Jesus brought) and put it in the “old wineskins,” they would burst. Indeed, that is exactly what happened. His death and resurrection fulfilled the Law in such a way that the Law, if it was alone and apart from the risen Messiah it pointed to, was considered a veil that blinded the eyes of the heart (2 Cor. 3:15-17).

**“wineskin.”** A “bottle” or container made from animal skin.

[For more on skin-bottles, which were usually made from the skins of goats, see commentary on 1 Sam. 10:3.]

Mat 9:18

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“a leader came and bowed down before him.”** The “leader” is named Jairus, and he was one of the leaders of the synagogue in Capernaum. The record of the healing of Jairus’ daughter and the healing of the woman who was bleeding is in Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:22-43; and Luke 8:41-56. Jairus had a great need, and showed respect to Jesus in asking for his help.

[For more on this event occurring in Capernaum, see commentary on Luke 8:40.]

**“bowed down before.”** The synagogue leader did not think Jesus was God and likely did not even believe he was the Messiah, but rather was paying him homage, as he would to a superior, or to a prophet of God. See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

**“My daughter has just died.”** This is a summary statement of the sum of the events of this record, which occurs in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Technically, Jairus came to Jesus and the daughter was still alive but near death, but died while Jairus was with Jesus, at which point Jairus let Jesus know that, but Matthew did not include all the details and the chronology of the event. Matthew’s Gospel is a summary of events.

**“come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.”** This is remarkable because Jesus had not yet raised anyone from the dead.

Mat 9:20

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 9:21

**“If I can only touch his garment, I will be healed.”** Why would this unnamed woman think that if she just touched Jesus’ garment she would be healed? The very likely answer is that she had absolute trust that the garment of the Messiah was holy and would produce healing, a belief she would have gotten from Malachi 4:2, that the Messiah would have healing in “his wings,” that is, in the extremity of his clothing. For this woman to believe that, she must have concluded from what she knew about Jesus that he was the Messiah and therefore would fulfill the prophecies about him, which in this case he did.

That the evidence in Scripture points to the fact that this woman could learn about Jesus and conclude he was the Messiah sheds light on the hardheartedness and spiritual blindness of many of the people of Jesus’ time. There was plenty of evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, and many people realized he was the Messiah, but many didn’t.

Mat 9:22

**“Jesus, after turning around and seeing her.”** See commentary on Luke 8:47.

**“in that moment.”** The Greek is idiomatic; literally, “in that hour.” However, taking the idiom literally can be confusing and lead one to think that perhaps the woman was not immediately healed. The woman was healed immediately, not just sometime “in that hour.”

Mat 9:23

**“the flute players and the crowd making a commotion.”** The flute players were musicians who would have been there to play for the funeral ceremony, this is why Matthew makes mention of them. Clearly, then, the girl was dead, and this truly was a resurrection performed by Jesus. “Even the poorest people were required to hire at least two flute players and one wailing woman to perform these services (*m. Ketub.* 4:4).”[[101]](#footnote-13720)

[For more information on the commotion see commentary on Mark 5:38.]

Mat 9:24

**“asleep.”** The Greek verb is *katheudō* (#2518 καθεύδω). Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death (see commentary on Acts 7:60).

Mat 9:27

**“Have mercy on us, Son of David.”** The fact that these men called Jesus the “Son of David” indicates that they believed he was the Messiah (see commentary on Matt. 1:1).

Mat 9:28

**“And after he had come into the house…”** The blind men cried out to him as he was walking, but he ignored them until he got inside the house he was going to, leaving them to follow him as best they could, given their blind condition. This would be considered very unchristian behavior today, and be called “unloving,” and other such things. Nevertheless, Jesus did it, and it was to crystallize their trust (“faith”). They did not give up on asking him for healing, an act of trust.

Mat 9:30

**“See to it.”** The Greek verb is *horaō* (#3708 ὁράω), and it means to see with the physical eye, or to see with the mental eye. It is a play on words, because Jesus just gave sight to these two blind men, then told them to “see” (“make sure;” “be careful”) that no one knew about them getting their sight. Both the verb *horaō*, and the verb for “know” are in the imperative mood, and are stern commands, hence the exclamation point at the end of the sentence. Interestingly, in spite of Jesus’ stern command, the men who received their sight spread the news about him. This was likely due to a number of factors. In the honor-shame society of the biblical world, if someone did something great for you, it was socially expected that you would laud the person and thus increase his honor in society. Added to that was their obvious elation about being healed. The two things combined made it impossible for them to hide what had happened, and they freely spoke about it.

Mat 9:32

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 9:34

**“By the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.”** This opinion is generated by pure spiritual arrogance. The Pharisees had no evidence for what they said except their displeasure, and they were wrong.

Mat 9:35

**“the good news of the kingdom.”** The “good news of the kingdom” primarily refers to the coming of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, and the fact that Christ (and John the Baptist) was teaching that it was near (Matt. 4:17). The coming Kingdom of God was the primary subject of Christ’s teaching and Matthew 9:35 is very similar to Matthew 4:23.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

The fact that Jesus performed these specific miracles (healing diseases and sicknesses) and even raised the dead (Matt. 9:25), and preached the good news of the Kingdom of God at the same time is no coincidence. These miracles are glimpses of what the Kingdom of God will be like. It was prophesied that it would be a place where sicknesses and diseases are done away with (Isa. 33:24; Psa. 41:3), and it will be a place where the dead are raised to life (Isa. 25:8; 26:19; Dan. 12:2), where death is defeated (1 Cor. 15:54). So, when Jesus arrives on the scene and performs these miracles, things that have always been God’s heart for humankind (God does not want people to perish; 2 Pet. 3:9), then we know that he is bringing the Kingdom. He is the King.

Mat 9:38

**“ask.”** The Greek is *deomai* (#1189 δέομαι). *Deomai* is a specific request, not a general prayer. It is a petition.[[102]](#footnote-29541)

**Matthew Chapter 10**

Mat 10:1

**“And he called his twelve disciples.”** The choosing of the apostles is in Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:14-19; and Luke 6:13-16.

Mat 10:4

**“the Zealot.”** The Greek is Καναναῖος (‘Cananean’) which transliterates the Aramaic qanʾān (āʾ), meaning ‘zealous one.’[[103]](#footnote-19802) Thus, it is very likely that “Simon was a former adherent of the Jewish party of “the Zealots” (Acts 5:37; Josephus, Ant., 18.1.1 and 6; Wars, 2.8.1).”[[104]](#footnote-17696) This should not be confused with a Canaanite, someone from the land of Canaan which is Χαναναίος (‘Canaanite’). One can see the slight difference in the Greek spelling.

**“Iscariot.”** “‘Iscariot’ is usually interpreted as Hebrew for man of Kerioth, the name of cities in both Judea and Moab, which could make Judas the only non-Galilean of the Twelve. Others take Iscariot as from a word for assassin or from a term meaning false one.”[[105]](#footnote-16246) However, “Iscariot” appears to be what people called Judas even before he betrayed Jesus (Matthew 26:14; Luke 22:3), which means this is not just a title given to him after the betrayal. Therefore, it seems hard-pressed to believe that his own friends would give him the nickname “assassin” or “false one.” Thus, the first interpretation is more plausible.

Mat 10:9

**“gold, nor silver, nor bronze.”** Jesus is referring to money: the gold, silver, and bronze coins available at the time. In Mark 6:8, “bronze” is simply translated “money” for clarity because there is not as much context as there is here in Matthew.

**“belts.”** The “belts” did not have money in them, but the belt around the outer garment allowed the garment to be folded in such a way as to make a pocket in which small items such as coins could be kept.

Mat 10:10

**“traveler’s bag.”** See commentary on Mark 6:8.

**“two tunics.”** The tunic was the long shirt, like a long undershirt, that was against the skin. See commentary on Mark 6:8.

**“nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staff.”** This phrase catches our attention because, although it agrees with the Gospel of Luke (Luke 9:3), it seems to contradict what Jesus told his disciples according to the Gospel of Mark (Mark 6:8-9). A quick reading of Matthew and Luke, makes it seem like in those Gospels Jesus told his disciples to take no staff, while in Mark, Jesus told them to take a staff. Also, in Mark, Jesus told the disciples to “tie on” sandals (Greek text), that is, wear them, but in Matthew, Jesus seemingly says to not take sandals (Luke says nothing about sandals). How do we resolve this problem?

Mark gives the essentials of the record, which make perfect sense in the culture: the disciples were to rely on help from people they met for their food and protection from the elements (hence, no need for money, food, or two tunics, which might be needed if they were going to sleep outdoors). However, they would need sandals if for no other reason than any extended journey that involved walking in unfamiliar territory, and in cities would require sandals. But they would not need two pairs of sandals, and in Matthew, the word “two” before “tunics,” immediately before “sandals” in the list must also refer to sandals, which is also plural, like “tunics.” Of course, “sandals” is always plural, but since the Gospel of Mark says take “sandals” and Matthew says not to, the most obvious way to explain the situation is that Jesus was saying not to take two pairs of sandals—if anything happened to the one pair, they would be helped to get another pair by people who were caring for them.

Like sandals, a staff was a necessity when traveling. It provided protection and support, so it makes perfect sense that Jesus would say to take the staff along, as the Gospel of Mark says. However, Matthew and Luke seem to say not to take a staff. Two ways to explain the apparent contradiction seem to be the most likely. One is that the word “two” in Matthew also governs the word staff, and that Jesus told the apostles not to take two staffs, as if they might break or lose one. Although that is possible, it is not easy to make Luke read that way, and the chances of losing or breaking a staff are slim. Furthermore, if one was lost or broken, a new one could be acquired the same way new sandals could be.

The more likely explanation for the difference Matthew and Luke have with the Gospel of Mark is that the list in Matthew starts with the word “acquire,” (*ktaomai*; #2932 κτάομαι), which the KJV translates as “provide,” and the ESV translates as “acquire.” However, there are many English versions that start Matthew 10:9 with “take” or “take along,” which clouds the issue and makes the apparent contradiction between Matthew and Mark very difficult. Jesus was telling his disciples not to “acquire” things for their journey (which they would then “take” with them, as Mark and Luke say). One of the things that the apostles might want to “acquire” would be a walking stick that was more appropriate for someone who traveled a lot than the walking sticks they already owned. They were fishermen and would not have traveled much, and when they did travel it would have been in familiar places, so it is likely that they did not have a staff that they thought was the best choice for travel in areas where they had never been before.

In summary, Jesus told the apostles not to take with them things that a host family would provide: money, food, and shelter. However, they did need their sandals and walking stick. However, they were to guard against acquiring things they thought they might need, such as a new walking stick. If it turned out on the journey that something was needed, the same people who welcomed them into their houses would no doubt provide it or help them acquire it, and be glad to do so.

Mat 10:11

**“*that area*.”** The REV adds “that area” for clarity. This is somewhat similar to Luke 9:4, but the Greek text of Matthew simply says, “stay there until you leave.”

Mat 10:13

**“let your peace come upon it.”** This is an idiom. If a person was worthy, the guest would bless the house, and that blessing would involve “*shalom*,” translated “peace” but really meaning “total well-being.” If the apostles were well received and well treated, they were to bless the house with *shalom*. Jesus instructed his disciples to let their *shalom* fall on those who graciously took care of them.

**“let your peace return to you.”** This is an important lesson, because most of the people Christians witness to do not believe, and often Christians become self-condemned about this, thinking that they must have done something wrong or are not a good enough witness. But Christ taught us that when people reject the Word of God, the witnesses are to let the peace they have been offering to others return to them.

Mat 10:15

**“more bearable.”** The Greek word translated as “more bearable” is “*anekteron*” (#414, ἀνεκτότερον) and it has the comparative ending “*teron*” (τερον) which means the Greek word is best translated as “more” bearable. Some translations use “more tolerable” here, however, the word “tolerable” typically carries the meaning of tolerating bad behavior, putting up with something, or experiencing things that one does not deserve. Yet, these punishments that the wicked will receive are certainly deserved. Therefore, “bearable” is a more appropriate translation. The punishments that Sodom and Gomorrah will receive will be more bearable, or less severe, than the punishments for the people who rejected the apostles (Matt. 10:15) and Jesus himself (Matt. 11:22).

These verses which are similar to Matthew 10:15 (cf. Matt. 11:22; 11:24; Luke 10:12; 10:14) all support the theology that there are varying degrees of punishment for the unsaved. This means that unbelievers will receive some sort of punishment relative to the amount of their sin, prior to receiving the ultimate punishment for sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23). This is also supported by the verses which speak of all people being judged according to their works (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rom. 2:6). If all unbelievers received the same punishment of only “death,” why do any of their bad works matter? Ultimately, in that scenario, their good and bad works would not really make a difference at all, only if they had trust or if they did not, that is all that would matter. Yet, clearly, our individual works do matter in the judgment (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rom. 2:6), therefore, there must be some levels of reward and punishment.

Also, if the only punishment for sin was death, and an equal death for all sinners, it would be difficult for verses like Matthew 10:15 or Luke 10:12 to have any real meaning. There would be no “more bearable” or “less bearable” punishment because all the punishments would be the same, i.e., death. Thus, although death will be the end result for unrepentant sinners, there will be punishment relative to one’s good and bad works prior to that death. Yet, for those who believe in Jesus Christ, there is forgiveness of sins, and no condemnation (Rom. 8:1), but rather life in the age to come (Rom. 2:7).

[For more on the unsaved experiencing varying degrees of suffering before they are finally annihilated in the Lake of Fire, see commentary on Rom. 2:5.]

Mat 10:16

**“Pay attention.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“innocent as doves.”**Although many older English versions took the dove as “harmless,” most modern versions recognize that “innocent” or “pure” is not only the meaning of the Greek word, but fits with what the people of the culture thought (e.g., CEB, CSB, ESV, NASB, NET, NJB, NIV, NRSV, RSV). Doves were considered by both the Greeks and Jews to be pure and have integrity, and were thought to be chaste and married for life (some doves do mate for life, while others do not). “the dove was used in the Rabbinic literature as a symbol of Israel—patient, submissive, faithful.”[[106]](#footnote-21342) The disciples were to be “pure in their motives and genuine in their behavior.”[[107]](#footnote-13639) The disciples were to be like that, i.e., be pure and have integrity.

Mat 10:18

**“because of me.”** For an explanation of this phrase, see the commentary on Matthew 5:11.

Mat 10:19

**“at that time.”** The Greek is literally, “in that hour,” which is idiomatic for “at that time” or “in that moment.”

Mat 10:20

**“you are not the ones speaking.”** Although Matthew 10:20 says that the disciples would not be speaking, this is not to be taken as some demonic possession or something similar in which a person’s body is taken over and something else is speaking inside them. Instead, in this verse, Jesus is assuring his disciples that they would be given words to say (Matt. 10:19), so, in this sense, they are not the one’s speaking, but in actuality, they are the ones verbally speaking these words given to them by the holy spirit (Luke 12:11-12).

Mat 10:23

**“before the Son of Man comes.”** The Son of Man “coming” in this verse refers to Christ’s Second Coming, when Jesus comes to earth, fights the Battle of Armageddon, conquers the earth, and sets up his kingdom. Many theologians attest to this. E. W. Bullinger says in his marginal note on the verse: “…His coming…would then have been (and will now yet be) the judicial coming of “the Son of Man.”[[108]](#footnote-32083) *The Ryrie Study Bible* correctly states: “These verses are a prediction of persecution in the tribulation days and at the second coming of Christ.”

Davies and Allison say: “On the lips of Jesus, a saying such as Mt. 10:23 would have been a word of encouragement to disciples or missionaries whose future included suffering in the eschatological tribulation: take heart, for salvation is near to hand. The attempts to interpret 10:23 as fulfilled prophecy have been numerous. …Against all these interpretations, there is every reason to urge that Matthew identified the coming of the Son of Man with the coming of the kingdom of God in its fullness. According to the First Gospel, when the Son of Man comes, the angels will be sent forth, every man will be requited according to his deeds and Jesus will sit on his throne. (Matt. 13:41; 16:27; 24:27-44; 25:31). In other words, the coming of the Son of Man will mean the final judgment.”[[109]](#footnote-18997)

The idea of the “coming of the Son of Man” (using the phrase “Son of Man”) is universally used of the Second Coming. There is no use of the phrase other than that in the Bible. Since that is the case, what would be the reason that any theologian would try to say that in this one instance, the phrase somehow takes on a new meaning? There is one and only one reason: the “coming of the Son of Man” did not occur in the apostles’ lifetimes, but is still future. People who say that this verse cannot refer to the Second Coming for the simple reason that it is future are using circular reasoning. The assumption is that Jesus cannot be mistaken for any reason, then using that assumption, they search for an “explanation” for what he could have meant that is different from the clear implication of his words. That is not good theology. Good theology comes from properly reading and interpreting the words of Scripture. In this case, the meaning of the coming of the Son of Man is clear in Scripture, it is his Second Coming.

Could it be that the “you” in the verse has just a general meaning and just means something such as “you believers” instead of you apostles who I am speaking to? In other words, could Jesus just have been making the general statement that evangelism would not stop in Israel before he came? That cannot be correct, because none of Jesus’ audience would have ever thought that. Why would anyone doubt that evangelism in Israel would stop? After all, the Old Testament prophecies indicate that there will be “saints” (“holy ones”) resisting evil right up until the time of the End (Dan. 7:18-28). There would have been no point in Jesus making the general statement that evangelism would continue in Israel—the statement would have been so universal and obvious that it would have been essentially meaningless. In contrast, if the “you” he was speaking to were those specific apostles and disciples in his audience, then what he said would have been very exciting and encouraging.

Although we do not know why God inspired Jesus to say his Second Coming would be before the apostles had evangelized Israel, we know that Jesus said things similar to other prophets like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Paul who, speaking what God told them to, said the Day of the Lord was near. So for Christ to say that the Day of the Lord is near (“you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes”) would not be materially different from what the prophets of both the Old and New Testaments said. The context of Jesus’ statement is what would happen to the disciples during the Tribulation that will precede the End Times. Reading Matthew 10:15-23 is very similar to reading Matthew 24:9 or more exactly, Luke 21:12-17. Jesus forewarned his disciples of the troubles they would have to endure, and then gave them the encouragement that before they finished evangelizing Israel, the Second Coming would occur.

[For more of Jesus making statements about the timing of his Second Coming that did not come to pass as predicted, see commentary on Matt. 16:28. For more on the kingdom that Christ will set up on earth after his Second Coming, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 10:25

**“Beelzebul.”** The Greek is *Beelzeboul* (#954 Βεελζεβούλ), which gets put into English as “Beelzebul.” He is called the “ruler of the demons” in Matthew 12:24. “Beelzeboul” is “lord of the dunghill.” This comes from the Hebrew *zebul* (dung, a dunghill).

[For more on the name Beelzebul and other names of the Slanderer (the Devil), see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Mat 10:27

**“What I tell you in the darkness.”** Jesus Christ told his disciples, and especially his apostles, many things in secret (“in the darkness”) that he did not announce to the world. A major reason he did that was so the apostles would be prepared for what they would be facing after Jesus died, was resurrected, and then ultimately was no longer on earth with them. Jesus knew even at the Last Supper that they did not understand at the time, but that they would understand later (cf. John 13:7).

But another reason Jesus spoke secretly to the apostles was that much of the material could not be understood until after it was experienced. For example, Jesus told the apostles many times that he was going to die, and even at the Last Supper he told them he would be betrayed and was going to “go away,” but none of them understood it until after Jesus was resurrected and appeared to them (Luke 24:45-48). Once Jesus had been crucified, and resurrected, and the gift of holy spirit had been given, then those things were confirmed by many people, and knowledge of them was to be broadcast to others.

**“proclaim on the rooftops.”** The flat rooftop of the average biblical house was a perfect place to broadcast news to the neighborhood. Believers are not to keep the truth to themselves, but are to tell it to others.

Mat 10:28

**“do not be afraid of those who kill the body.”** Matthew 10:28 and Luke 12:4-5 teach the same message. The teaching that we should not fear those who can only kill the body but instead should fear God who can destroy a person’s body and “soul” (life) in Gehenna, the Lake of Fire is a very important one because the natural human tendency is to overly fear those who can kill the body and not fear God nearly enough. The wise person fears God and the Day of Judgment much more than anyone or anything that can only kill the body. Here in Matthew 10:28, Jesus teaches the twelve apostles, who he is about to send out on a missionary journey. In Luke 12:4-5, Jesus teaches this lesson to a huge crowd (Luke 12:1). Isaiah taught the same thing 700 years earlier than Jesus (cf. Isa. 8:13).

**“destroy...soul.”** The Greek word translated “destroy” is *apollumi* (#622 ἀπόλλυμι). *Apollumi* means “to cause or experience destruction.[[110]](#footnote-29459)” The concept of “burning forever in hell” came into Christianity from the Greeks (and Jews like the Pharisees who were influenced by Greek teaching going back to the time of Alexander the Great who conquered Palestine in 332 BC). The Greeks believed in an “immortal soul.” The phrase “immortal soul” is not in the Bible. Once we understand the soul is not eternal, it does not have to “go” to heaven or hell when a person dies. Eternal torment is not the teaching of Scripture. John 3:16, and many other verses, teach the simple truth that each person will either live forever or be destroyed, annihilated. Matthew 10:28 is one of the clear verses that says the soul can die (cf. Ps. 22:29).

[For information on “Gehenna” see commentary on Matt. 5:22. For information on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more information on the soul, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Mat 10:29

**“little sparrows.”** Matthew 10:29-31 and Luke 12:6-7 teach the same message. The Greek word translated “little sparrows” is *strouthion* (#4765 στρουθίον), the diminutive of *strouthos* (στρουθός), sparrow. However, the Greek word is sometimes used of little birds that were not specifically sparrows.

**“assarion**.” The Roman *as* or the Greek *assarion* (#787 ἀσσάριον). It was worth 1/16 of a denarius (or drachma), which was a day’s wage for a day laborer or soldier. If a day laborer makes $10 per hour, or $80 per day, then an assarion would be worth about $5. For a person working eight hours a day, an assarion was worth about a half hour’s work.

**“apart from your Father.”** This phrase means “apart from your Father’s knowledge and care.” The phrase contains the figure of speech ellipsis,[[111]](#footnote-24558) which is constructed in the Greek by the preposition *aneu* (#427 ἄνευ), which means “without” or “apart from,” and then the words for “your father” (*patros humōn*) functioning as the genitive of possession—the object of the father’s possession is elided. Literally, it would read, “apart from of your father,” with the involvement on God’s part omitted for emphasis. We have left the figure of speech in the translation, rather than supply the omitted word.

Many commentators who are zealous to bolster the position of divine sovereignty (that God is in control of everything that happens), have interpreted this verse to mean God has a specific will for the death of even every sparrow (cf. NIV, NET), and also that no sparrow can fall without God’s will and consent (cf. HCSB, CJB). But this is importing meaning into the text because it goes beyond what the text says. The Greek simply reads “without your Father” (“without” is the Greek word *aneu*, #427 ἄνευ), which leaves open exactly how the Father is connected with the sparrow. Without His will (NET)? Without His consent (HCSB)? Without His knowledge (NAB, NLT)? Without His care (TNIV)? The text does not precisely tell us “without what,” which is why there are so many variations between the translations. The Greek text simply leaves the impression that the Father is present and caring in his relation to the bird.

To understand this passage properly we must interpret it in light of clear meaning that is given to us from other scriptures. As Louw and Nida write, “The particular manner or mode of involvement by God must depend upon the broader context and not upon the meaning of ἄνευ.”[[112]](#footnote-18116) In this case, we have a parallel account in Luke 12:6 that helps us understand what Jesus meant. In the account in Luke, Jesus does fill out the meaning for us, saying, “not one of them [sparrows] is forgotten in the sight of God.” The Greek word translated “forgotten” is *epilanthanomai* (#1950 ἐπιλανθάνομαι), which can have the meaning of “neglect,” “overlook,” or “care nothing about.”[[113]](#footnote-19392) More evidence that this verse is about care and concern rather than “God’s will” is supplied by the next verse in Matthew, which declares that, “the hairs of your head have been counted,” i.e. God knows how many there are. The verse about our hair is not about the will of God, as if it were somehow God’s will every time a hair of our head fell out, but rather it is about God’s love and concern for us.

Matthew 10:29 is not speaking of divine sovereignty, but rather divine benevolence and care. From reading Matthew in the greater context of the parallel account, then, we see that this passage teaches that God knows and cares even about sparrows. He has not forgotten about the sparrow, and its fall is not something overlooked or uncared for.

What a comfort this is, that God would have such care even for sparrows, and emphasizes how much He must care for us! What a greater comfort this biblical teaching is than the idea that no sparrow falls without God’s specific will and consent. If not even one sparrow can die without the will and consent of God, how are we to understand a cat torturing and killing a sparrow? Is that the will of a loving God? And if God wills that, does He really care if we are hurting? On the other hand, if the fallen state of the world is due to Adam and Eve’s free will decision to sin, and the world is now under the control of Satan (1 John 5:19), and God is fighting for us in all situations (Rom. 8:28 REV, NIV), then it is a comfort to know that even though God cannot simply stop pain and problems, He knows and cares about what is going on and is willing to bless and help as He can, without overstepping things such as people’s free will decisions.

We conclude along with Robertson, “There is comfort in this thought for us all. Our father who knows about the sparrows knows and cares about us.”[[114]](#footnote-13851)

Mat 10:30

**“have been counted.”** This verse shows how important we all are to God. The average head has a lot of hairs. Blondes average 150,000 hairs, redheads average 90,000, and people with black or brown hair average 110,000 hairs.[[115]](#footnote-21260) We don’t know how many hairs we have, but God does. People are very important to God.

Mat 10:31

**“you are of more value than many little sparrows.”** See commentary on Luke 12:7.

Mat 10:32

**“will acknowledge.”** The overarching context is hypocrisy and being afraid of people to the end that a person will not say or do what is in their heart to do. People need to love God to the extent that they will openly confess allegiance with Christ and not fear the consequences of it. The Greek verb translated “acknowledge” is in the future tense and the context is that Jesus is speaking to his disciples of the coming persecution in which people who testify of Jesus will be dragged before the authorities and interrogated and beaten (cf. Matt. 10:16-20). While Jesus is speaking specifically of the difficult times that lay ahead for the disciples, the same principle rings true for us today. Today, people who acknowledge Christ as Lord are sometimes tortured, imprisoned, and even killed. Although there would surely be great temptation to simply deny the Lord to be set free, Jesus warns them, and us, to continue to acknowledge him as Lord in those difficult times, and if we do, he will acknowledge us before the Father.

Mat 10:34

**“I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”** This is a powerful statement that is widely misunderstood or ignored in Christendom. We often hear people say that Christ came to bring peace on earth, but according to Matthew 10:34 he did not come to bring peace, but a sword. Some of the meaning of Christ’s statement is right in the context of Matthew 10:34 and some of it comes from the whole scope of Scripture. For example, Jesus said that even family members will fight against one another (Matt. 10:34-37), and even Jesus’ own family thought he was insane and tried to restrain him (Mark 3:21). More meaning comes from the scope of Scripture. For example, the world is in a fallen state with the Devil having much control over the earth and what happens on it (Gen. 3:16-19; Luke 4:6; 1 John 5:19; see commentary on Luke 4:6). Also, we learn that when Jesus Christ comes back to rule the earth he will indeed bring a sword. The Bible makes it very clear that he will kill his enemies and evil people when he returns (Isa. 11:4; 63:1-6).

Mat 10:35

**“and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”** Matthew 10:34-36 is quite similar to Luke 12:49-53.

In the biblical culture in which extended families were usually tight and depended on each other, these words of Jesus were impactful and attention-grabbing (see REV commentary on Luke 12:53).

Mat 10:36

**“and a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.”** In this context, the word “household” refers, as it usually does, to one’s extended household, including uncles, aunts, cousins, and in-laws. In fact, Jesus specifically mentions the in-laws in the context. Division over Jesus splits both nuclear families and extended families.

Micah 7:5 sets the context, which is that things will become so full of animosity and hatred that people cannot seem to trust anyone and must be careful who they talk to. The main idea is the same in Matthew and Micah, but the verbiage is slightly different. Matthew does not quote the Septuagint here.

Mat 10:37

**“loves.”** The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). See commentary on John 21:15.

Mat 10:39

**“life” (2x).** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and *psuchē* has a large number of meanings, often “soul” or “life.” Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“because of me.”** For an explanation of this phrase, see the commentary on Matthew 5:11.

Mat 10:41

**“a righteous person*.*”** The Greek word *dikaios* (#1342 δίκαιος) is an adjective, and in this case is a substantive, an adjective used as a noun, “a righteous” referring to a “righteous person.” Using the substantive instead of just supplying the noun and saying “righteous person,” places the emphasis on “righteous.” If we want the reward of the righteous, we must receive “the righteous.”

**“reward.”** The Greek is *misthos* (#3408 μισθός), and it refers to a payment made for work done; wages. As “wages” or “payment,” it can refer to either a reward (cf. Matt. 5:12; 10:41; Luke 6:35; 1 Cor. 3:14) or a punishment (2 Pet. 2:13), depending on the context and what kind of payment is due. In the future Millennial Kingdom, when Jesus Christ rules as king on the earth, people will be repaid for what they have done (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil”). Some people might think they have done very little to support God’s work, but if anyone has helped accomplish God’s work on earth, he will be amply rewarded.

Mat 10:42

**“reward.”** See commentary on Matthew 10:41.

**Matthew Chapter 11**

Mat 11:3

**“should we expect someone different?”** John the Baptist sent his disciples to Christ with the question, “Are you the Coming One, or should we expect someone different?” (Matt. 11:3; Luke 7:19). The question is problematic because John was the one who identified Christ with the words: “Look! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” and “And I myself have seen *it*, and have testified, that this is the Son of God” (John 1:29, 34). Had John developed doubts that Jesus was the Messiah? Considering that a number of people close to Jesus, including his mother Mary and Peter, misunderstood him, that is possible, but we think not as likely as the other two possibilities stated below.

Another reason for John’s question is given by Joseph Good in his book. Good writes:

As the ancient Jewish scholars and Rabbis began to study the scriptural information about the Messiah, they encountered a serious problem: many of the passages seemed to contradict one another. Often the Messiah is seen as a conquering king…Other passages speak of a suffering servant. From this paradoxical description of the Messiah came a first-century Common Era (AD) rabbinical teaching of two Messiahs.[[116]](#footnote-13323)

Good goes on to say that the ancients called the conquering Messiah “Messiah Ben David,” and called the suffering Messiah “Messiah Ben Joseph.” The Talmud applied Zechariah 12:10, which says, “they will look to me because *of him* whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son,” to Messiah Ben Joseph. However, Edersheim writes that even on that point the Jewish rabbis were divided, some saying the mourning is caused by the death of the Messiah Ben Joseph, while others said it was due to evil concupiscence.[[117]](#footnote-27843)

Good goes on to conclude:

This anticipation of two Messiahs by the Jewish people of the first century is the background for the question posed by Yochanan the Immerser (John the Baptist) to Yeshua [Jesus] as to whether He was the Messiah (indicating one, singular), or if they were to expect another. His question was specifically whether *Yeshua* would fulfill all of the prophecies concerning Messiah, or whether the Rabbis, who said there would be two Messiahs, were right. *Yeshua*’s answer is a paraphrase of various passages that Rabbis identified as referring partially to Messiah Ben Joseph and partially to Messiah Ben David. Therefore, Yeshua was expressing, in dramatic language that was clear to His listeners, that He would fulfill all of the messianic prophecies. Rather than send two Messiahs with two different roles, G-d would send one Messiah in two separate appearances or comings.[[118]](#footnote-13960)

It is also possible that John was not confused about who Jesus was, but his disciples had doubts, and John, fairly certain that he was about to die, wanted his disciples to hear for themselves who Jesus was, so they would follow him when John was no longer alive.

**“someone different.”** The Greek word “different” is *heteros* (#2087 ἕτερος), in this case, referring to someone of a different quality. Another in number, another of the same kind, would have been the Greek word *allos*. *The Emphasized Bible* by Rotherham and *The New Testament* by Williams are versions that also use the word “different.” Was this gentle and loving man the Coming One, or was there another, different, conquering Messiah Ben David, who they should be looking for? Interestingly, the question that John’s disciples ask Jesus that is recorded in Luke 7:19 is not *heteros*, but *allos*. So there the emphasis is not on “another of a different kind or quality,” but just “another,” i.e., a second one.

Mat 11:7

**“A reed swaying in the wind.”** The area around the Jordan River where John was baptizing had very dense vegetation, including lots of reeds that grew close to the water. No one ever went to see them. Jesus was speaking to the people about John, whom the people had gone out to see. Was he “a reed swaying in the wind,” in other words, a man of weak character, easily swayed by circumstances and the opinions of others? Or was he a man of soft clothing, in other words, rich and politically connected? Or was he a prophet? Jesus testified that he was more than a prophet, but the very one Isaiah had referred to as a voice in the wilderness.

Mat 11:8

**“*Of course not!*”** This expression was added for clarity. Jesus is using a rhetorical question that expects the answer “Of course not.” However, this rhetoric does not come across quite as clearly in English. Thus, the REV has added this negation for clarity.

**“soft *clothing*.”** In the ancient world in general there were three classes of people: the wealthy; the working middle class, and the destitute, who barely survived. The wealthy were separated from the rest of society by where they lived, walls, bodyguards, and social norms, so the genuinely poor rarely interacted with them. If they were out in public some people might go to view them.

**“Look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 11:9

**“*you saw* much more than a prophet.”** The literal rendering of the Greek text is, “Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet.” However, this could be understood to mean, “Yes, I tell you, *you went out to see a prophet* and *you went out to see* much more than a prophet,” because this is the only real action of Matthew 11:9, so to complete the ellipsis, this thought might be what the reader would think to provide. However, they did just go out to see a prophet, they did not go out to see more than a prophet, yet, they ended up seeing more than just a normal prophet. They saw arguably the greatest prophet (Matt. 11:11), or at the very least the prophet with the greatest message. John the Baptist had the privilege of proclaiming that the Messiah, the King, was about to arrive (Matt. 11:10). Therefore, the people saw something even greater than what they were expecting. Thus, it is fitting to add in “*you saw*” to the literal reading: “Yes, I tell you, and *you saw* much more than a prophet.”

Mat 11:10

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“I am sending my messenger.”** This is quoted from Malachi 3:1.

**“who will prepare the road.”** See commentary on Mark 1:3.

Mat 11:11

**“least *important* person.”** The Greek is *mikros* (#3398 μικρός). It can refer to being a limited size, measure, or quantity, or it can refer to being of little import and thus means insignificant or unimportant. In this verse, it is an adjective, and so the supplied noun “person” is understood. The grammarians argue about whether *mikros* is used in a comparative sense (“the unimportant person”) or a superlative sense (the least important person).[[119]](#footnote-27802) However, “least” seems to make sense in this context. The Kingdom of Heaven has not come yet, but will come when Christ sets it up on earth after he comes and fights the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19). At that time the dead people who are judged to be righteous are raised and get to live with Christ in his kingdom (Ezek. 37; Rev. 20:4-6). Thus, the “least” person in the Kingdom of Heaven is still in the Kingdom of Heaven, and has passed from death to everlasting life. No wonder the “least” in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John! Also, that explains the next verse, in which Jesus speaks of how to attain the Kingdom of Heaven. No one can ignore the commands of God and expect to get in. Christ said at many times, and in many different ways, that getting into the Kingdom took work and focus. The way in was narrow and difficult (Matt. 7:13). God’s commands had to be obeyed (Matt. 19:16-19). A person had to take up his cross and follow Christ (Luke 9:23-26). In Matthew 11:12 Jesus taught the same message, that it took a violent effort, but the Kingdom of Heaven could indeed be seized as a prize. Surely the Kingdom of Heaven and everlasting life are available for those who really want it, and anyone there is greater than John, who was still in his fleshly body.

Some theologians teach that the one who is “least” is Jesus himself, because Jesus was younger than John by six months. However, that interpretation seems quite forced, because there is no reason in the context or culture that Jesus would point to the fact that although he was younger than John he would be greater. The Messiah was always assumed in all the prophecies and Scripture to be the greatest of all the prophets and indeed, the greatest person to ever live.

Mat 11:12

**“advancing.”** Matthew 11:12 has been an enigma for generations of Bible scholars for a couple reasons: the vocabulary in the Greek New Testament is unclear due to multiple possible definitions of some of the Greek words, and also the verb *baizetai* (“suffers” or “has been forcefully advancing”) can be either passive voice or middle voice. Because of that, the verse has been translated in two different ways, represented by the two versions below.

**ASV** “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force.”

**NIV** “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.”

There are two basic possible interpretations:

1. The passive voice of *baizetai* (i.e., “suffereth”) would indicate that the Kingdom of Heaven is being attacked. The context shows that John was in jail and Jesus was being persecuted. Furthermore, “violent” (the Greek word is usually used in a negative sense) men are trying to “take” it, i.e., trying to overcome it and stop it.[[120]](#footnote-10858)
2. The middle voice of *baizetai* would indicate that the Kingdom is “forcefully” (instead of violently) “advancing itself,” i.e., it is moving forward, and those men who are forceful and determined are the ones who will seize it. The context shows that the Gospel message is being preached and people have to make a decision about it.[[121]](#footnote-31983)

The more likely interpretation of the verse is as we have in the REV, also represented in the NIV. The first interpretation, that the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence is less likely due to the qualifying phrase, “from the time of John the Baptist until now.” The Kingdom had always suffered violence, it had always been attacked. This is clear from the time when Cain killed his brother on down through the centuries, so it does not seem proper to say that it has suffered violence from the time of John. In contrast, with the appearance of John and Jesus, the kingdom was forcefully advancing. Both John and Jesus were preaching that “the Kingdom is near.” John was ministering in the power and spirit of Elijah, even as Gabriel had said to Zechariah (Luke 1:17), and Jesus was ministering more powerfully than any prophet before him. There is a third possibility that seems less likely, and also hard to represent fully in English. Since the Greek can be legitimately translated both ways, it is possible that both interpretations are valid. In that case, this verse would be an example of the figure of speech amphibologia, literally, “a throwing in both directions.”[[122]](#footnote-11322) However, in the REV we have gone with the translation we consider more likely.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

**“are seizing it as a prize.”** The Greek is *harpazō* (#726 ἁρπάζω), and it means “to make off with someone’s property by attacking or seizing, steal, carry off, drag away, to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control, snatch/take away.”[[123]](#footnote-24361) It is commonly used with seizing or dragging off someone else’s property. Thus in this case the clear implication of the word is that forceful men grab hold of the kingdom as a prize for themselves, not just that they “seize it.” Lenski writes: “…the kingdom itself, with all its gifts, treasures, and blessings put power and courage into them “to snatch,” let us say “to grab” it all. Williams translates the last half of the verse: …those who take it by storm are seizing it as a precious prize.” This verse helps us to understand the effort it takes to walk in the blessings of the Kingdom. We must each make up our minds to “grab” the kingdom blessings, and that usually takes both desire and effort.

Mat 11:14

**“Elijah.”** For information on John the Baptist being Elijah, see commentary on Matthew 17:10.

Mat 11:15

**“Anyone who has ears had better listen!”** The word “listen” is *akouō* (#191 ἀκούω, pronounced “ah-'koo-oh”), and it can mean “hear” (the opposite of deaf; i.e., hearing the sounds or words), or it can refer to listening and understanding what you hear (the English word “hear” is used the same way). In this verse, it is third person, present tense, active voice, imperative mood, and is thus a command, not a suggestion.

The NET translation is quite literal and very good: “The one who has ears had better listen!” The NET translators explain their translation with the following note: “The translation, ‘had better listen!’ captures the force of the third person imperative [which is the conjugation of the Greek text] more effectively than the traditional, ‘let him hear,’ which sounds more like a permissive than an imperative to the modern English reader.” A. Nyland (*The Source NT*) is a little more casual, but catches the sense very well: “If you have ears, you had better listen!” Stern (*Complete Jewish Bible*) translates: “If you have ears, then hear!” Phillips translates: “The man who has ears to hear must use them!” (*NT in Modern English*).

The Interpreter’s Bible correctly notes that the way Jesus spoke the phrase was “urgent” and “sharp kindness.” Jesus sharply but kindly reminded his audience that God created them to hear and obey, and they better get about doing it. Lenski adds: “In ‘he that has ears’ lies the implication of willful guilt when those ears that were made to hear (and understand) are not used for this purpose.”[[124]](#footnote-29788)

Some Greek manuscripts have “the one who has ears to hear,” instead of “the one who has ears.” However, the verb “to hear” was almost certainly added so that this verse matches other verses that do include it, such as Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35. If it were original, there seems to be no reason it would have been omitted from early and important texts.[[125]](#footnote-23964)

This phrase, or a very similar one, occurs here and in Matthew 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35. It is important to ask, “Why is this phrase here” each time it occurs. In this case, Jesus was teaching about John the Baptist, and in Matthew 11:14 he made the point that John was Elijah. Malachi 4:5 made it clear that “Elijah” would come before the Messiah, and before the Day of the Lord. The fact that Jesus (the Messiah) seemed to come before Elijah confused many, even the disciples (Matt. 17:10; Mark 9:11). In Matthew 11:14 Jesus points out that “Elijah” was John, which would have not only answered their questions, but would have awakened the people to the days in which they were living—the days of the Messiah. No wonder Jesus said, “Anyone who has ears better listen!”

[For more on John the Baptist being Elijah, see commentary on Matt. 17:10.]

Mat 11:18

**“neither eating nor drinking.”** The context, and the fuller explanation in Luke 7:33-34, shows that John lived an ascetic lifestyle and did not eat all the food that others did, and did not drink wine. Jesus, on the other hand, ate like others and drank wine, such as at the wedding in Cana. But neither behavior satisfied the religious Jews, who criticized them both.

[For more information on eating and drinking, and the contrasting ministries of John and Jesus, see commentary on Luke 7:33.]

Mat 11:19

**“See.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“A gluttonous man and a drunkard.”** The Greek word translated as “drunkard” is *oinopotēs* (#3630 οἰνοπότης), a word built from “wine” and drinking. The usual way to drink and get drunk in biblical times was to drink wine, of which there was an abundance. That is why verses like Ephesians 5:18 say “And do not get drunk on wine….” (cf. 1 Sam. 1:14; Isa. 28:1; 49:26; Jer. 23:9; Dan. 5:23; Joel 1:5, 3:3; Rev. 17:2). However, there was beer in the biblical world, so *oinopotēs* was also used for just being drunk. It is worth noting that historically, there were no distilled alcohol drinks like whiskey or bourbon in the biblical world—distilling and the means of distilling had not been invented yet.

**“But wisdom is vindicated by her actions.”** When people do wise things and they work out well, then the “wisdom” that they applied is shown to be true wisdom. Many things that are “wise” from a godly point of view are “foolishness” to the world (1 Cor. 1:18-25), but actually, the “wisdom” of this world is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 3:19). Believers need to be confident that when they obey God, no matter how foolish it seems to the world and no matter how loud the unbelievers mock, in the end, the true wisdom will be shown to be the right way, and the “worldly wisdom” will be shown to be foolish.

In the context of Matthew 11:19, the primary examples of people who were wise in a godly way are John the Baptist and Jesus, and their works, though foolish in the eyes of the world, will prove to be wise and right in the end, and the same is true for all believers who follow God’s guidance. Sometimes the true wisdom of following God is not revealed until much later or even until the Day of Judgment. The “wise” action of Jesus in following God’s guidance and going to the cross was not revealed until his resurrection and actually will not be fully revealed until all the righteous people whose salvation was paid for by Jesus’ blood are raised from the dead also. Christians must trust God and be patient to let the wisdom of what they do be revealed, and that may take some time.

This statement in Matthew 11:19 harmonizes with Luke 7:35, which says basically the same thing but uses slightly different wording. Luke 7:35 says, “wisdom is vindicated by all her children” (see commentary on Luke 7:35). The “children” of a mother follow in the ways of the mother and do the works the mother and father instruct (cf. Prov. 1:8). It helps to understand what Christ was saying when we know that the word “wisdom” is feminine in both Greek and Hebrew, and is represented by a woman in Proverbs (cf. Prov. 9:1-5).

[See commentary on Proverbs 1:20 for more discussion on personification.]

Mat 11:21

**“How terrible.”** The Greek word is *ouai* (#3759 οὐαί, pronounced ooh-'eye). *Ouai* can be an interjection or a noun, and depending on the context, it can be an expression of grief because of extreme hardship or distress due to a calamity that has happened (Rev. 18:10, 16, 19); or an expression of grief because of a calamity or divine retribution that is coming in the future (1 Cor. 9:16; Rev. 9:12); or it can be a call for, or warning about, a coming calamity or divine retribution (Matt. 11:21; Mark 14:21; Luke 6:24-26). A triple “woe” like in Revelation 8:13 is a warning about horrible and unavoidable calamity coming in the future. In this context, *ouai* is primarily a warning about divine retribution that is coming to Chorazin and Bethsaida (here the city names are put by metonymy for the people who live in those cities) because they failed to repent at the teaching and rebuke of Jesus Christ. God is our creator, and He created us for His purposes, and expects something from us. When we ignore and defy Him, there are very serious consequences. Today both Chorazin and Bethsaida are just rock ruins, and in fact, there is some disagreement among archaeologists as to which ruin north-east of the Sea of Galilee is Bethsaida.

Mat 11:22

**“more bearable.”** See the commentary on Matthew 10:15.

**“Tyre and Sidon on the Day of Judgment.”** Tyre and Sidon are cities in Phoenicia, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. They were known for their wickedness and were denounced by Old Testament prophets (e.g., Isa. 23; Ezek. 26; Amos 1:9-10).

Mat 11:23

**“will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will go down to the grave.”** It is possible, but not certain, that Jesus was alluding to Isaiah 14:13, 15, and Satan’s desire to be exalted to heaven but relegated to Sheol. Just as Satan was close to God and privileged, but rebelled and will be destroyed, Capernaum had been Jesus’ headquarters in Galilee and should have responded to him and his ministry, but did not, so it was destined for destruction. That destruction has occurred, and today Capernaum is just a ruins and an archaeological site. God can withhold the judgment of a person until the resurrection and Judgment Day, but the judgment on a non-human, such as a city, has to occur in historical time.

Mat 11:24

**“more bearable.”** See the commentary on Matthew 10:15.

**“the land of Sodom.”** Jesus uses the phrase “the land of Sodom” to include Gomorrah and the other nearby cities of the plain (Gen. 19:24-25). The whole area was wicked before Yahweh and He destroyed it by fire. The destruction of those wicked people became a type and warning of what will happen to unsaved sinners on Judgment Day: “he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, which made them an example of what is about to happen to ungodly people” (2 Peter 2:6).

Mat 11:25

**“Jesus continued *to pray*, saying.”** This verse is paralleled in Luke 10:21. The original text has the phrase, “answered and said” more than 100 times in the Bible, and it can sometimes be confusing because it is often used when no one asked a question. The phrase is an idiom, but it has a literal overtone behind it. The person who “answered and said” may not have been answering a direct question from someone, but they were answering and addressing the situation that was presenting itself before them. For example, in this case, Jesus was answering (continuing *to pray* aloud) the question, “Why do people who are supposedly wise not know the great spiritual truths that people of much lower status in society and who have much less education seem to know and understand?”

Mat 11:27

**“All things.”** Although the text does not say so, we learn from the content of what Jesus is saying that he has stopped his prayer and has started speaking to his disciples.

**“really knows...really know.”** The Greek word is *epiginōskō* (#1921 ἐπιγινώσκω), an intensified form of *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω). At that time in Jesus’ ministry, no one really understood the Son except the Father, and no one really knew and understood God but the Son and those people to whom the Son revealed Him, such as Jesus’ close disciples. All one has to do is look at the misguided doctrine and behavior of the Pharisees and Sadducees to know they did not “really know” God. They knew things about Him, but they did not “really” know Him. That is still true today. Many people know some things about God, but do not “really know” Him.

**“anyone to whom the Son decides to reveal *him*.”** This verse is not saying that Jesus picks and chooses who gets to know about God, including some and excluding others apart from that person’s desires. God wants everyone to know Him, and calls them fools if they do not (Jer. 4:22). Jesus Christ came to make known the Father (John 1:18), and expended himself trying to get people to understand both him and his Father. Jesus went so far as to say that people could see the Father by seeing him (John 14:9). God also makes it clear that He wants everyone to fully know the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). Nevertheless, many people do not know God. They do not know Him because they do not want to know Him, something they express by both their words and actions. John 3:20 says that people who practice evil will not come to the light. Also, we must keep in mind that when someone does not love God or want God in his life, God honors that. Similarly, when someone loves God, that is honored also, and Jesus says he will show himself to that kind of person (John 14:21).

**“decides.”** The Greek is *boulomai* (#1014 βούλομαι), and it means, to deliberately desire, will, or purpose something. To plan. Although it can be used of desire or want, it is somewhat different than *thelō*, which more refers to “want” or “desire.” Thus, *boulomai* includes “the thought of ‘purpose, intention, not mere will, but will with premeditation.’”[[126]](#footnote-32088) This verse is very similar to Luke 10:22, but Luke uses *ginōskō* instead of *epiginōskō* for “know.” Jesus knew the people and he knew who was honestly seeking to know God and who did not but was hypocritical.

Mat 11:29

**“take my yoke.”** In this phrase, the word “yoke” refers to what Jesus is asking people to do: the sum total of his teachings, and he said it was gentle (not “easy”) and light. The word “yoke” is the figure of speech, hypocatastasis, a comparison by implication (see commentary on Rev. 20:2).

In the biblical culture, the literal yoke that was used to harness animals together for work was essential for survival: it was used so animals could plow, thresh grain, and pull loads such as carts. The yoke was not something animals liked to wear, because the loads they pulled were often heavy and difficult. Furthermore, many yokes rubbed sores on the animal’s necks because they were quickly and crudely made.

People also used the word “yoke” figuratively and applied it to things that were heavy and unpleasant. The hard work that Solomon made his subjects do was called a “yoke” by his subjects (1 Kings 12:4). Enemies put a “yoke” on the people of Israel, placing various kinds of burdens on them (Deut. 28:48; Isa. 10:27; 47:6; Jer. 27:11). The word “yoke” was also used of being a slave because it was usually burdensome (1 Tim. 6:1). It was foretold that when the Messiah came he would shatter the yoke that burdens people (Isa. 9:4).

The word “yoke” was also used for submission to a system of beliefs, and the expression, “the yoke of the Law” was common in rabbinic literature. “In Jewish literature, a ‘yoke’ represents the sum total of obligations which, according to the teaching of the rabbis, a person must take upon himself. This definition accounts for such terms as ‘yoke of the Torah,’ ‘yoke of the commandments,’ ‘yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, etc.”[[127]](#footnote-26013) In saying, “the yoke of the Law,” the rabbis were not so much emphasizing the “weight” of the Law, or the difficulty of keeping it (although that could easily be part of the meaning, depending on the context), but rather the fact of being submitted to the system of beliefs that constituted the Law. The Law of Moses was considered a “yoke” because of the restraints it put on people and the amount of effort it took to keep it and obey its precepts.

Although the Law was a “yoke” upon people, whether they found it difficult or a blessing depended upon the attitude of the people. Romans 7:12 says the Law is holy, righteous, and good. The apostle Peter used “yoke” to represent the teachings of the Law in Acts 15:10: “Now then, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we could carry?” Peter did not mean to say the Law was in any way ungodly—he did not feel that way. However, even though he believed the Law was from God and was a good thing, he still recognized that it was a system that restrained and controlled people and no one, not even the Jews to whom God gave the Law, could obey it without sin.

As the Early Church continued, the figure “yoke” was even used for the teachings about grace in the New Testament. The Church Father Clement of Rome referred to Christians as those who come under the yoke of grace. Even the teachings about grace include restrictions and responsibilities that Christians need to heed.

Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” The verbs “take” and “learn” are in the imperative mood, which in this context is an imperative of exhortation but has the overtone of a command. Jesus’ statement was a strong exhortation, made with love. Christ’s “yoke” is still a yoke. Jesus did not say, “I free you from religious bondage; go do whatever you want!” Jesus wants us under his yoke, his system of grace and love. It is gentle and light, but it is still a yoke, and we must have the desire and self-control to live under the yoke of Christ.

The yoke Jesus asks us to take is different than a yoke of religious bondage. The people in Jesus’ time had been burdened by the yoke of the religious leaders—their system of religious requirements. In fact, something that does not show up well in English is that in Matt. 11:28 (ESV), when Jesus says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden...,” the verb “are heavy laden” (one word in the Greek text), is in the passive voice. This means that the burdens had been placed upon the people (although it is possible, but less likely, that a burden had been placed on them because they picked them up themselves). Little has changed since the time of Christ. Many religious systems are full of man-made regulations that are a great burden, and there is as much need now as there ever was to “learn of me,” learn the truth about Christ and what he teaches, and then take his yoke.

**“souls.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the person himself. The person will find rest within himself and be at peace

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Mat 11:30

**“comfortable.”** The Greek word is the adjective *chrēstos* (#5543 χρηστός), and it means “kind” (the noun form is *chrēstotēs* (#5544 χρηστότης), which in Galatians 5:22 is the fruit of the spirit, “kindness”). Christ’s yoke is “kind” or “comfortable” (*chrēstotēs*, not “easy” as many translations have), because there is nothing harsh, sharp, or galling about it. You can put on Christ’s yoke without worrying about getting painful blisters, splinters, etc.

**“light.”** The load that Jesus asks us to carry is “light,” not heavy, but it is still a “load” we must make up our minds to carry. But sometimes the loads of life are not light at all, but very heavy, even for the most faithful believers, so how can it be that Jesus says his load is “light”? The load that Jesus asks us to carry is always light. It includes things like trust and obedience, and it lightens the heart and rests the soul. The confusion that many people have over this verse is they think that any burden we have in our lives is part of the yoke of Christ, but that is not true.

A person who believes God controls everything that happens in this world has trouble understanding the words of Jesus. If God is in control of the world and everything that happens is His will, then the burdens we carry are all due to the will of God and are all part of the yoke of Christ. But those burdens are often very heavy, so why did Jesus say his yoke was “light?” The truth is that God is not in control of everything that happens in our lives or in the world around us. The world is a battleground, where the forces of Good fight the forces of Evil. The Adversary is the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4) and “the whole world lies under *the control of* the Wicked One.” (1 John 5:19). Satanic forces and evil people can make life very hard to bear. Also, the earth is a fallen world. Hunger, poverty, deterioration, and aging, are a part of the curse on the world. Added to that, we humans have freedom of will and make stupid decisions that cause problems for ourselves and others. None of these things are part of the yoke of Christ, even though we have to bear them and they make life difficult.

Jesus said his yoke was gentle and the load was light, and that is true of the yoke of Christ. As for the yoke that is put upon us by the Fallen World, thankfully, Isaiah foretold that when the Messiah came in his kingdom, which is still future, he would shatter the yoke that burdens people (Isa. 9:4). That is a wonderful Hope to look forward to.

**Matthew Chapter 12**

Mat 12:1

**“Jesus went through the grainfields.”** This record occurs here in Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28, and Luke 6:1-5. There were six incidents in the ministry of Jesus in which he showed that taking care of people was not considered “work” by God and thus was more important than keeping rules about the Sabbath that were made by humans. The six incidents were picking grain on the Sabbath and five healings (see commentary on Matt. 12:9).

Mat 12:2

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.”** To the Pharisees, plucking grain on the Sabbath was breaking the Mosaic Law. See commentary on Luke 6:2.

Mat 12:3

**“you.”** This “you” is plural in the text. “Have all of you never read….”

Mat 12:4

**“ate.”** The “ate” is plural. David and the men with him all ate the Bread of the Presence (1 Sam. 21:1-6). A more literal, but more difficult rendering in English would be, “he [David] went into the house of God and they ate the Bread of the Presence.” This is a case where a literal translation from the Greek makes the English difficult.

**“the Bread of the Presence.”** The Bread of the Presence was large cakes of bread that were in the Tabernacle and Temple (see commentary on Exod. 25:30).

Mat 12:7

**“I want mercy and not sacrifice.”** See commentary on Hosea 6:6 for more understanding as to why Jesus quoted that verse. Also, he quoted it once before under different circumstances in Matthew 9:13.

Mat 12:8

**“For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”** Jesus is the Lord of people, so he is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28; see commentary on Mark 2:28)

Mat 12:9

**“and went into their synagogue.”** The record of healing the man with the shriveled hand is in three Gospels (Matt. 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11).

There were six incidents in the ministry of Jesus in which he showed that taking care of people was not considered “work” by God and thus was more important than keeping rules about the Sabbath that were made by humans. The six incidents were picking grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5), and five healings. The five healings are (1) healing a man with a withered hand (Matt. 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11); (2) healing a woman who was bent over (Luke 13:10-17); (3) healing a man with edema (Luke 14:1-6); (4) healing a crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-18); and (5) healing a man who was born blind (John 9:1-14).

Jesus knew that healing people on the Sabbath would greatly upset the religious leaders, but to him, God’s work was more important. There are times in life when things come up that are God’s will but break the “rules” of society, and it takes great courage, and often great sacrifice, to do God’s will in those situations. Sometimes when Jesus healed on the Sabbath it seemed to be a case when Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath and he healed a person who also happened to be there that day, which is what happened with the man whose hand was withered (cf. Matt. 12:9-14). But in the case of the crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-18), it was obvious to everyone that Jesus purposely chose the Sabbath to heal the crippled man, and that was a direct assault against the traditions of the Jews. The Jews responded by seeking to kill him, which they eventually accomplished. Throughout history, the work of God has been accomplished by men and women who were willing to make great sacrifices to obey God—sacrifices that sometimes cost them their lives. The names would number in the thousands, including such stars as the apostles, Joan of Arc, William Tyndale, and on and on. God exhorts us to give our bodies as living sacrifices to do His work (Rom. 12:1-2).

Mat 12:10

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“And in order to accuse Jesus.”** The evil nature of these religious leaders is exposed in the fact that they did not care at all about the man with the shriveled hand who in that “hands-on” culture would have been terribly handicapped. They simply wanted to get rid of Jesus.

**“they asked him.”** The literal is “they asked him, saying,” which is exactly the Aramaic idiom, but we would say, “they asked him,” which reads more smoothly in this context.

Mat 12:15

**“Great crowds.”** There is good evidence that the word “crowds” was in the original text, although it is omitted in Alexandrian texts, which is why it is missing in some modern English versions. However, some modern English versions have it.

Mat 12:16

**“warned.”** The Greek word translated “warned” is *epitimaō* (#2008 ἐπιτιμάω). Usually, *epitimaō* means to express strong disapproval of someone: rebuke, reprove, censure; or to speak seriously, and thus warn in order to prevent an action or bring one to an end. It can also mean “punish.”[[128]](#footnote-19209) *Epitimaō* is also used in a technical sense in the NT (see commentary on Mark 1:25). Jesus “warned” his disciples, no doubt including some of what might happen if they ignored what he said.

Mat 12:17

**“so that what was spoken.”** The passage, “so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet was fulfilled” does not just refer to Jesus telling the people not to make him known. Many of the people already did not know who he was and furthermore, there was no way the “great crowd” that followed Jesus was not going to tell others about the healing they had both personally experienced and/or seen when Jesus healed others (Matt. 12:15). The phrase “so that what was spoken...was fulfilled” refers to all the things Jesus did in the context—all the healings and then also telling people not to make him known. To Jesus, what he did was not about him or personal fame, it was about glorifying God and being the perfect servant, as Isaiah points out.

Mat 12:18

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“my servant.”** Matthew 12:18-21 are quoted from Isaiah 42:1-4 and are the first four verses of the first “Servant Song” in Isaiah (called a “song” because Isaiah wrote in Hebrew poetry). The “Servant Songs” are sections of Isaiah that are about the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and present him as the Servant of God. The four “Servant Songs” are: Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12. The last Servant Song is familiar to us because of Isaiah 53, but few people realize the song starts in chapter 52, and unfortunately is broken up by the chapter break of Isaiah 53. The chapter breaks were added to the Old Testament in the thirteenth century AD, some 2,000 years after Isaiah wrote, and the song would have been much easier to see and understand had it not been interrupted by the chapter break.

The fact that Matthew 12:17 says that Jesus fulfilled the Servant Song shows conclusively that Jesus is the “servant” of the Servant Songs in Isaiah. The disciples understood this also because in Acts 4:27 they prayed to God and referred to Jesus as “your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.” This is likely an allusion to Isaiah 42:1, which speaks of Jesus as the Servant of God and that he was given (thus “anointed with”) the holy spirit by God.

The Servant Songs are sections of Isaiah that are specifically about the Messiah, and would have enabled Jesus to more clearly understand his mission and what he would have to endure to accomplish it.

The Servant Songs and the way Isaiah is quoted in the New Testament provide more good evidence that Jesus Christ was not God, but the Son of God, a servant of God (see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son”).

**“my soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. We can tell that in this verse “my soul” is equivalent to “me” (including my thoughts, emotions, and feelings) because the “my” is God, and He is not a body powered by soul.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Mat 12:19

“**and no one will hear his voice in the streets.”** The reason no one would hear his voice is because he would not be making a noise. Although it might be possible to cry out in a modern city and no one hear because they had their windows closed and there was background noise, that would not be the case in the biblical world. The streets were narrow and there was no window glass and no radios, etc., to make background noise, so everything said out loud in the streets could be heard by the people who lived there.

Mat 12:20

**“He will not break *off* a bent reed.”** In this verse, the “bent (or broken) reed” and the “smoldering wick” are the figure of speech hypocatastasis for afflicted and weak people. In fact, the verse is a litotes (“meiosis”),[[129]](#footnote-11581) because it is stating in the negative something that is really positive. It is not just that Jesus will not break a reed that is bruised, but he will heal the reed and cause it to stand upright. It is not just that Jesus will not put out a smoldering wick, he will trim that wick and make it burn brightly. Jesus will not oppress the oppressed. A smoldering wick is a “smoking flax”—the wicks of the oil lamps (sometimes mistranslated as “candles”) that were used at the time were often made of flax or linen. For example, the remains of a 1500-year-old linen wick was discovered at the town of Shivta in the Negev in 2018, the wick being kept from disintegrating by the dry conditions of the Negev. The Mishna, tractate *Shabbat*, mentions the materials that kosher wicks can be made from.

[For an explanation of hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

[See Word Study: “Tapeinosis/Meiosis.”]

**“leads justice to victory.”** This is the figure of speech personification. “Justice” is portrayed as a person, and today justice is currently being thwarted and ignored. If we were to translate the verse without the personification, we might say something like: “until the Messiah’s victory brings justice.”

Mat 12:23

**“Son of David.”** A messianic title (see commentary on Matt. 1:1).

Mat 12:24

**“Beelzebul.”** The Greek is *Beelzeboul* (#954 Βεελζεβούλ), which gets put into English as “Beelzebul.” “Beelzeboul” is “lord of the dunghill.” This comes from the Hebrew *zebul* (dung, a dunghill).

[For more on the name Beelzebul and other names of the Slanderer (the Devil), see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Mat 12:26

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see commentary on Mark 1:13.

[For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“How then….”** This is the figure of speech erotesis (rhetorical question).[[130]](#footnote-30722)

Mat 12:27

**“Beelzebul.”** See commentary on Matthew 12:24.

**“sons.”** Here “sons” refers to disciples, not literal children. The Greek word is *huios* (#5207 υἱός), and means “son,” but the key to understanding what the verse is saying is recognizing that “son” was used in many ways in Semitic languages, just as it is used in several ways in English. In this case, the “sons” are the students, or disciples, of the Pharisees, in the same way that in the Old Testament, the disciples of the prophets were called “the sons of the prophets” (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1, etc.).

Other meanings of the word “son” include: someone who was a person’s immediate child (John 9:19); a grandchild or descendant, such as a “son of David” (Matt. 1:20); a male heir that is adopted or taken into the family (Exod. 2:10); and a younger person for whom you have taken on a fatherly role or the role of a mentor/teacher and have special affection for (2 Chron. 29:11; 1 Pet. 5:13). The word “son” also refers to a person who is closely related or associated, especially in a group; thus all mankind is referred to as the “sons of men,” and Jesus referred to himself as “the son of man” which confused the religious leaders, because it could have been a simple way of saying “a man,” but was also a messianic title due to Daniel 7:13. “Son” also was used to refer to a person who has the character, and even follows in the footsteps, of another (Acts 13:10 “son of the Devil”). Also, a person who has a certain specific characteristic is called a “son” of that characteristic (e.g., “sons of disobedience” are disobedient people, Eph. 2:2).

Just as someone’s disciples were called “sons,” a person who was a father figure, mentor, and guide, was called a “father.” Thus, Joseph said he had become a “father” to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8). In the book of Judges, first Micah of Ephraim, and then people of the tribe of Dan, asked a Levite to be a “father” to them, that is, be their spiritual guide (Judg. 17:10; 18:19). The prophet Elisha referred to the elder prophet Elijah as his “father” (2 Kings 2:12), and the servants of the Syrian commander, Naaman, referred to him as “father” because he was a mentor and guide (2 Kings 5:13). The king of Israel referred to the prophet Elisha as his “father,” his spiritual mentor and guide (2 Kings 6:21). Job was wealthy, and he said he had been a “father” to the poor (Job 29:16).

[For more on “father” see commentary on Gen. 4:20.]

Since the disciples of a Rabbi were called his “sons,” and the Rabbi was called their “father,” in the Jewish culture of biblical times if a Rabbi died or left the area, his disciples were then referred to as “orphans,” and this terminology shows up a couple times in the New Testament (John 14:18; 1 Thess. 2:17. See commentary on John 14:18, “orphans”).

In this verse, the “sons” of the Pharisees were the disciples of the Pharisees. This same use of “sons” or “children” can be found in Revelation 2:23, where the “children” of Jezebel were those people who were following in her footsteps and acting like she did.

**“cast them out.”** See commentary on Luke 11:19.

**“Therefore they will be your judges.”** This is not the most straightforward statement by Jesus but the general idea can be understood. The first problem is that the five English words, “they will be your judges,” are in a different order in the Greek manuscripts. There are four different orders of these four Greek words. This is likely due to the unexpected way Jesus said this statement and therefore, scribes might seek to make his statement clearer with a different word order. One would expect Jesus to say that the Pharisees are actually judging their own “sons” by casting judgment on Jesus. Instead, Jesus says that they (their “sons”) will be your judges.

So, what does Jesus mean by this statement? Taking the context as the driving factor, Jesus is saying that the Pharisees’ logic falls back onto themselves. They end up judging and condemning themselves. If they want to accuse Jesus of this, then they are accusing their own people of this too, because Jesus is performing the same act as their disciples. “The proposal being made as to how Jesus does it could not be extended to other exorcists without considerable embarrassment. To seek to blacken Jesus’ name in this way is to cast doubt on all other Jewish exorcists.”[[131]](#footnote-16499)

Mat 12:28

**“spirit of God.”** This is the gift of holy spirit that God put upon believers in the Old Testament so they could do the works of God. It is not a “person,” but the very nature of God; holy and spirit. It is referred to as the finger of God in Luke 11:20 (see commentary on Luke 11:20).[[132]](#footnote-17894)

Mat 12:29

**“ties up.”** The Greek word translated “ties up” is the common word *deō* (#1210 δέω), which means to bind or tie up. However, here it has a special meaning. The word was used in magic and spells for binding someone via a spell. The word was used “to describe the ‘binding’ power of curses.”[[133]](#footnote-16064) The context is the casting out of demons (v. 28), so the “binding” in this verse refers to binding a demon and making it powerless by the power of God.

Mat 12:30

**“He who is not with me is against me.”** This verse does away with the idea that people can somehow “sit on the fence” when it comes to God and the things of God. There are many people who fancy themselves “not religious,” who would say that they are not for Jesus but neither are they against him. Actually, that is an impossibility. We are God’s creations, and as such we have a moral obligation to serve God. Furthermore, the Adversary is constantly attacking God, and one of the ways he does it is to get people to not commit to any religious belief. However, not being committed to a religious belief is being committed to the idea that there is nothing that deserves to be committed to. Thus these “uncommitted” people are committed to something, just not God. Furthermore, they are a part of the general “background noise” of the many people who are not committed to God, which helps encourage other people that being “uncommitted” is okay. In one of his sermons, Rabbi Shalom Lewis of Atlanta said, “Brutal acts of commission and yawning acts of omission both strengthen the hand of the devil.” Each person either scatters or gathers, there is no middle ground. This maxim is stated the opposite way in Mark 9:40, and for more information on it, see commentary on Mark 9:40.

Mat 12:31

**“people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but the blasphemy of the Spirit will not be forgiven.”** These words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 12:31-32 (cf. Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10) are very direct: “every” sin and blasphemy will be forgiven except one, a sin he referred to as “blasphemy” or to “speak against,” the Holy Spirit. The definition of “blasphemy” includes slander, speaking against God, or verbal abuse, and it is clear from comparing the above two verses that Christ is defining blasphemy as “speaking against” something.

Jesus said there is one form of blasphemy against God that will never be forgiven, and he was referring to a specific blasphemy, not just speaking against God in general. Many people have at some time been angry at God due to the horrific circumstances of this fallen world, and many have spoken very harshly about God and/or to Him. In fact, it is safe to say that most people have even cursed at God, and yet when they ask for forgiveness, He forgives them. The same is true of other kinds of sin. Many people sin horribly against God but are later forgiven. But there is a blasphemy that will not be forgiven.

What we learn from the scope of Scripture is that the blasphemy that cannot be forgiven is a person saying, and truly meaning in the depths of their heart, that Satan is the true God. The Bible reveals that the Devil can have “children,” that is, people who have a unique relationship with him that makes them different from other sinners whose sins can be forgiven. People who are children of the Devil have sinned in such a way that they are no longer redeemable, that is, they cannot be forgiven, and it is not possible for them to be saved. The world is full of sinful people, and some of those sinners do very horrible things. Nevertheless, in the spiritual world, there is a difference between people who sin and can be forgiven and people who cannot be forgiven because in their heart of hearts they have taken the Devil as their god and have become his “children” and are true enemies of righteousness.

The Bible has much evidence of the “unforgivable sin,” which leads to the everlasting death of the individual who commits it.

**1 John 5:16 (KJV):** If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is* not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

This verse reveals the same basic truth Jesus spoke about: there are sins that are “not unto death,” and there is a sin that is “unto death.” The Word of God directs us not to pray for those who have committed the sin unto death because they cannot be forgiven.

Scripture shows a link between the unforgivable sin and those referred to as “children of the Devil.” When speaking to some of the religious leaders, Jesus said, “You are of *your* father the Devil” (John 8:44 NASB). These leaders were in a different category than “regular” sinners like the prostitutes and tax collectors, whom Jesus never referred to as “children of the Devil.” Jesus always reached out to sinners like prostitutes, tax collectors, and even the thief on the cross. He actively tried to win them to salvation and to living a life of righteousness. In contrast, there is no evidence Jesus attempted to evangelize those he referred to as being fathered by the Devil. Instead, he told his disciples, “Leave them alone! They are blind guides” (Matt. 15:14). Jesus’ teaching does show us that a person can be “religious” and be a child of the Devil, but upon examination, it can be seen that the person’s so-called religion is hurtful, oppressive, and contradicts the heart of God.

The apostle Paul also encountered a child of the Devil. Confronting the false prophet Bar-jesus, he said by revelation: “You are a child of the Devil and an enemy of everything right” (Acts 13:9-10). Paul confronted many stubborn, sinful, hard-hearted people on his journeys, but this was the only man he called a child of the Devil. The fact that the text tells us that Paul was filled with the holy spirit when he spoke alerts us to the fact that this was not just his opinion, but came from the Lord. Those people who commit the unforgivable sin become children of the Devil.

Interestingly, there is a lot of folklore about people who “sell their soul to the Devil.” The folklore usually goes something like this: a person wants something really badly, like money, power, fame, or love. So the Devil comes to him and says, “I will give you what you want at a very reasonable price—your eternal soul.” The person, blinded by desire, makes the deal with the Devil and then at the end of his life has to go to “hell,” with no chance of “heaven.” Most folklore has some basis of truth in it, and this folklore is no different. Throughout history, many people have sensed that, in contrast to the majority of sinners who are simply caught up in their sin, some people are truly evil to the core and are somehow connected to evil spiritual forces, and many of those people are indeed “children” of the Devil, just as Christ said.

Some people so strongly lust for what they want that in their heart they make Satan, or one of his many fronts or idols, their “true” god and provider, and thus become his “children.” These self-centered people turn to Satan in order to quickly gain their desires, and in so doing turn away from the true God. The Bible does not describe exactly what a person does to become a child of the Devil, but it gives us some important information. Because Christ categorized it as a form of blasphemy, we know it is something that is said, either audibly or by speaking to oneself, but it cannot simply be saying, “I hate God” or “I love the Devil,” or something such as that. It has to be fully believed in the heart as well as in the mind. From what we see in Scripture, it occurs when someone completely turns away from God, and confesses and believes in their heart that Satan, or one of his many forms—such as money, power, fame, or love—is the true “god” by being their sustainer, provider, or the “lord” of their life.

The Bible makes it clear that committing the unforgivable sin is a decision of the heart, not just something people say or act out without being heart-committed to it. The world is full of many kinds of egregious sinners—murderers, rapists, and much more—who later repent and get saved. That includes many people who dabble in the black arts, magic, spells, divination, and such. We know from Acts 19 when Paul was in Ephesus that many of the people who had been involved in magic got saved (Acts 19:18-20). Although some people are frightened that because of the sins they have committed they might not be able to be saved, the scriptural evidence is that if a person wants to be saved, or is concerned about not being saved, then they have not committed the unforgivable sin. The people in the Bible who had committed the unforgivable sin, such as Cain, the religious leaders Jesus was talking to in John 8:44, or Elymas the sorcerer, had no desire to humble themselves to God and get saved. In contrast, Simon the sorcerer got saved despite his background in magic arts because he had never made a heart commitment to Satan (Acts 8:13).

In the context of the unforgivable sin, it is important that Christians understand “god” in its more basic meaning of sustainer, provider, something that is worshiped or idealized, and something considered of supreme value. To blaspheme God does not mean one has to believe that the Devil is actually the Christian God and Father. Nor does it mean a person has to know that the Devil is a fallen angel who opposes the true creator God. To commit the unforgivable sin a person only has to truly take the Devil or one of his fronts as his own true god and provider. For example, it is unlikely that the Pharisees who were children of the Devil had taken “the Devil” per se as their god, but rather that they so highly valued their prestige, power, and position that they had in their hearts made that their god, and in doing so completely turned away from the true God and turned to the Devil via one of his fronts.

The unforgivable sin can be committed by believing and saying in your heart that Satan or one of the forms he hides behind and supports is the true sustainer, provider, or object of supreme value in one’s life. No doubt that was what Satan was asking Jesus to do when he offered him all the power of the world if Jesus would worship him (Luke 4:6). The Devil was not asking Jesus to think that God did not exist or that Satan somehow was, in fact, God, but rather that Satan would be Jesus’ true sustainer and provider, the true god of his life. The Devil wanted Jesus to become a child of his, which would have been the ultimate coup, but to do so Jesus would have had to “worship” the Devil, not just in form, but in the depths of his heart.

It is not specifically stated in Scripture what happens to a person spiritually, mentally, and physically when he becomes a child of the Devil such that he is unable to repent and be saved. We have no way of knowing what actually happens, but one possibility is that when a person commits the unforgivable sin, a demon enters them and gains access to, or perhaps even takes control of, the portion of the brain that controls freedom of choice, and the demon continually blocks the person’s ability to repent.

The Bible has a lot to say about the people who have committed the unforgivable sin and become God’s enemies, and it can be found throughout the Scripture. Cain committed the unforgivable sin and was a child of the Devil, see commentary on Genesis 4:8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15; 1 John 3:12. The sons of Eli the High Priest were also sons of the Devil (1 Sam. 2:12).

Some people who have greatly sinned or been very angry with God are afraid they have committed the unforgivable sin, so it is worth repeating that if a person desires to repent and follow Jesus then they have not committed that sin. In the Bible, the children of the Devil are enemies of God and they reflect the Devil’s nature. They are envious, murderers, liars, and show no genuine godly concern for humankind (Gen. 4:8-9; 1 John 3:12). They lead people away from God and into idolatry or false systems of worship (Deut. 13:13); they rape, murder, and instigate wars (Judg. 19:22-28; 20:11-14); they blaspheme God and the things of God (1 Sam. 2:12-17); they lie (1 Kings 21:10, 13), and they resent godly leadership and work to weaken it (1 Sam. 10:27; 2 Sam. 20:1); they sow division (1 Sam. 30:22; 2 Chron. 13:7). They do the works of the Devil (John 8:44) and try to pervert the ways of God (Acts 13:10), and they work to make it hard for people to obey God (Matt. 15:3-9; Luke 11:46). Children of the Devil will never repent, so believers should follow Christ’s guidance and leave them alone. In contrast, if a person wants to repent and follow Jesus, they are not a child of the Devil.

[For more on “sons of Belial, see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12. For more on Elymas the sorcerer being a child of the Devil, see commentary on Acts 13:10. For religious leaders at the time of Christ who were sons of the Devil, see commentary on John 8:44. Also see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil,” under “Belial” and “Father.”]

**“blasphemy...blasphemy”** The Greek noun *blasphēmia* (#988 βλασφημία), and the verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) are transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” “Blasphemy” in English has a different meaning than *blasphēmeō* and *blasphēmia* do in Greek. In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. It is insulting God or a god, insulting something considered sacred (like defacing a cross or statue of Jesus), or falsely claiming to be God or a god in some way. However, in Greek, *blasphēmia* and *blasphēmeō* did not have to refer to God or a god, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another, slandering or insulting them. The primary meaning of them as they were used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. In the honor/shame society of the biblical world, that was even more heinous an act than we would think of it today because honor and reputation were at the very core of societal status and were the basis of all social interaction.

So, in this context, translating *blasphēmia* as “blasphemy” works perfectly, because it is being used in reference to God.  
  
[For more on *blasphēmia* and *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Mat 12:32

**“the Holy Spirit”** Literally, “the Spirit, the Holy *one*.” A name of God.

[For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“it will not be forgiven him.”** See commentary on Matthew 12:31.

Mat 12:33

**“Either make the tree good, and its fruit good.”** The key to understanding this verse is realizing that Jesus is referring back to the evil and hypocritical judgment of the Pharisees, who said that when Jesus was delivering people by casting out demons, he was doing it by the prince of demons (Matt. 12:24). Jesus was telling the Pharisees that they could not rightly come to the conclusion that Jesus was evil when the result of his work was good. If they said the tree (i.e., Jesus) was evil, then his fruit would have to be evil too. That the “tree” in this context is Jesus is affirmed by Lenski, who wrote: “The tree is Jesus himself, and *poiein* refers to mental action (much like John 5:18; 8:53; 10:33) in good Greek fashion: ‘In your thinking and judging you will have to make the tree and its fruit the same, either excellent or worthless; for it is certainly beyond question that a tree is known by the fruit it bears.’”[[134]](#footnote-20359) The point that Jesus was making is that if the religious leaders acknowledged that Jesus’ fruit was good, then they should acknowledge that he was good. The context of the section is the unjust judgment that the religious leaders were making against Christ: note what the Pharisees were saying (Matt. 12:24ff), and Christ’s reference to what is coming out of the mouth and idle words (Matt. 12:34-37).

It is worth noting that what Christ taught about the tree and its fruit is somewhat similar here in Matthew 12 and earlier in Matthew 7. Here in Matthew 12, the context is the unjust judgment of the religious leaders. Earlier, in Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus was teaching about how to recognize false prophets. To do well in life, people have to make judgments about others. In biblical times false prophets could lead people astray and cause great harm. So in Matthew 7, Jesus taught the people, “Beware of false prophets,” and then he taught them how to recognize people and make a correct judgment about them. He said, “you will recognize them by their fruit” (Matt. 7:20). Then Jesus gave an example of making a good judgment based on fruit, not words. People would come to him saying “Lord, Lord” with their mouths (Matt. 7:21-22), but they were actually lawless people. Jesus recognized their fruit and said to them, “Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matt. 7:23).

Mat 12:34

**“You offspring of vipers!”** Jesus called the religious leaders a generation of vipers (Matt. 12:34; 23:33). John did too (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7).

**“What overflows from the heart.”** This is why the wise person guards their heart, because out of it are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). The Bible says in many different places that what comes out of the mouth originates in the heart (see commentary on Matt. 15:18).

Mat 12:36

**“careless word.”** The Greek word the REV translates “careless” in Matthew 12:36 is *argos* (#692 ἀργός). It is a word that pertains to being unproductive and is therefore worthless, and in the context of speaking is basically a worthless word spoken carelessly.[[135]](#footnote-21384) Some translations read “worthless” (NET), but in this context “careless” seems to be better, although we would understand what Jesus was saying even better if we understood “careless” to mean “without care,” i.e., that the person could not “care less” and thus did not care what they said and who it hurt.

The Devil’s people have no fear of God or of the Day of Judgment, so they constantly spew worthless, hurtful, ungodly language. Because unsaved people make up the majority of the people on the planet, they create an atmosphere in which people are not taught to pay attention to what they say, and so they say (or text or email) many ungodly and hurtful things. Christians beware! There is a Day of Judgment coming, and how we have used our tongue will be part of what is judged. Jesus was not kidding when he said people will be judged for what they say. Does any Christian really want to lose rewards in the coming Kingdom of Christ just so that right in the moment of emotion they can say what they feel no matter what it is or who it hurts? We Christians need to obey God and control what we say to people (Eph. 4:29). How we feel is not more important than how God commands us to behave.

[For more on the future Kingdom of Christ, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the future judgment of Christians, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Mat 12:38

**“Teacher.”** A respectful address spoken in hypocrisy

Mat 12:39

**“sign of Jonah the prophet.”** Here in Matthew 12:39-40, the “sign” of Jonah was that he was dead in the fish for three days and three nights, just like Jesus would be dead for three days and nights in the grave. This verse shows us how obscure a “sign” can be. We like to think that a “sign” is something that can clearly be understood. Today, sign makers spend many hours thinking about how to make their signs visible and easily understood so people know what is coming in the future. A “deer crossing” sign, for example, shows an image of a deer crossing the road so people of any language still understand the sign. But God has some signs that are not clear at all. Jonah disobeyed God and as a result, ended up dead in a large fish (or perhaps a whale) for three days and three nights. Who knew that Jonah was a “sign” of the Messiah? When we look for patterns of the Messiah in the Old Testament, we have to be prepared to look prayerfully and patiently and use the New Testament to help identify and confirm them. They may not be clear.

Jesus also talked about the sign of Jonah in Luke 11:29-30. However, the “sign” of Jonah in Luke is different than the sign of Jonah in Matthew. In Luke, Jesus was teaching at a totally different time and place to a different audience. Here in Matthew, Jesus was in Capernaum, his hometown, and he was speaking to the Pharisees and experts in the Law, and he was answering their question about a sign that would show his authority to say the things he was saying. In contrast, in Luke, the evidence is that Jesus was in Perea, east of the Jordan River, and Jesus was teaching the multitudes, whom he was encouraging to repent and live a godly life (Luke 11:32). In Luke, Jesus pointed out that the unbelieving Ninevites repented when they heard Jonah, and since someone greater than Jonah was among them, they should repent.

In Luke, the Bible says that Jonah was a “sign” to the people of Nineveh, but they did not know anything about Jonah being dead in a fish (and they likely would not have believed it if he had told them). Nineveh was over 400 miles (650 km) from the Mediterranean Sea where Jonah had been swallowed by the great fish, and it likely took Jonah three months or so to reach Nineveh after the fish vomited Jonah out on the Phoenician shore. The “sign” of Jonah to the Ninevites was that a prophet of God came alone and unarmed into the capital city of an enemy country and boldly proclaimed the truth to them—that they would be destroyed if they did not repent—at the possible cost of his life. In fact, it is likely that Jonah’s life was spared only because the people of Nineveh believed him. Like Jonah, Jesus came and boldly preached the Gospel, but the Jews killed him.

Mat 12:40

**“For just as Jonah was.”** Jonah was dead inside the big fish (or whale) for three days and three nights, and so is a perfect “type” of the Messiah. The common Christian teaching is that Jonah was alive inside the fish, but that is not what the Bible says. It does say that Jonah prayed from inside the fish, but that prayer is never recorded and would have been a very short prayer. The prayer that is recorded in Jonah 2 is a praise-prayer that he prayed after he was out of the fish. We can tell that just by reading it. For one thing, it is spoken in the past tense.

When we examine Jonah’s prayer it begins: “I cried out of my distress unto Yahweh, and he answered me” (Jon. 2:2). This is not a prayer, this is the memory of a prayer. A prayer of distress would be, “Yahweh, help me!” It certainly would not be prayed in the past tense. Furthermore, the reason Jonah knew that God “answered me” was that he was already out of the whale when he said it. This praise-prayer in Jonah 2:2-10 is placed as if it were spoken while in the whale’s belly, and surely it contains things that Jonah thought while still alive in the whale, but in its form and entirety, it was spoken after he was out of the whale and alive, as we can see from the prayer itself.

The last half of Jonah 2:2 echoes the first: “Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.” Here again, we can see that Jonah has been answered by God and is alive again—he came out of Sheol, his state of being dead, the grave. Jonah 2:3 continues the praise-prayer in the past tense. It was not what Jonah was experiencing, it was what he had experienced. In Jonah 2:4 Jonah recalls some of his final thoughts before he died, and they are very comforting. He thought he was going to die, and said, “I am cast out of your sight.” But he knew that he would be in the resurrection and so he also said, “yet I will look again upon your holy Temple.” Jonah knew what we all should know: our sins and shortcomings will not keep us from being saved. We are saved by faith, and even in disobedience, Jonah had faith in God and assurance of his eventual salvation.

In Jonah 2:5 he continues his praise-prayer, recounting how deeply he had been in trouble. In Jonah 2:6-7, Jonah praises God, saying, “You brought up my life from the pit,” a way of saying that God got him up from the dead. In Jonah 2:7, Jonah remembered Yahweh, and the help Yahweh could give, and he said, “When my soul was fainting away within me, I remembered Yahweh and my prayer came up to you, into your holy Temple.” Jonah was remembering praying in his dying moments and says that his prayer reached God inside the Temple. In Jonah 2:8, Jonah says, “Those who pay regard to worthless idols forsake their own mercy.” In saying that he was saying that prayer to Yahweh works, while people who pray to “worthless idols” don’t get answers and so they forsake their own mercy, i.e., the help that they could have had. Again, this is clearly not a prayer from inside the fish. This is a reflection that Jonah spoke after he was raised from the dead. In Jonah 2:9 he says he will be thankful and obedient; he will pay what he has vowed, which as a prophet of God was to obey God no matter what He asked. Jonah’s reflection ends with “salvation is of Yahweh,” and surely he was thinking of both his temporal salvation from death and his ultimate salvation from everlasting death.

That Jonah was dead in the fish for three days and three nights fits with Jonah being a type of Christ as well as the rest of the book of Jonah. That Jonah was dead and then raised from the dead was the great “sign of the prophet Jonah” mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 12:38-41. How could Jonah have foreshadowed the Messiah if he did not die in the fish, but Jesus Christ did die on the Cross? How can a living man be a “sign” for a dead man? The great “sign” of Jonah was that he was dead for three days and nights in the fish and then was raised from the dead, just as Jesus was dead for three days and three nights in the “heart of the earth,” the tomb, and then was raised from the dead. There are some well-respected Christian commentators who show from Scripture that Jonah was dead. A very good example is J. Vernon McGee, author of the book, *Jonah: Dead or Alive?*

**“three days and three nights.”** Jesus was in the “heart of the earth,” the grave, for three days and three nights, from Wednesday just before sunset to Saturday evening just before sunset. Tradition teaches that Jesus died on Friday and was up Sunday morning, but that would not fulfill the words of Christ. Jesus was crucified on Wednesday morning, died Wednesday afternoon, and was placed “in the heart of the earth,” i.e., the grave right at sunset when the new day began. Some commentators say that it is wrong to take Jesus’ words about “three days and three nights” too literally, but we assert that Jesus used words very precisely in his teachings, and the only reason to say that what Jesus said here in Matthew 12:40 should not be taken literally is to support the tradition of a Friday crucifixion—a tradition that should be abandoned. Tradition acts as if Jesus said he would be “three days” in the grave, treating a “day” as any part of a day. But that is not what Jesus said! He specifically said he would be “three days and three nights” in the grave.

Before we get into the specifics of the tradition and the truth, we need to remember that the Jewish day started at sunset, not midnight. Thus the Jewish day is a “night and day,” not, as we normally say in English, “day and night.” In that light, it is noteworthy that Jesus said “three days and three nights,” because historically he was placed in the grave during the day, just before sunset, basically right at sunset, then night fell quickly afterward. The traditional teaching about Jesus dying on Friday does not fulfill the prophecy of Jesus Christ, and there are other problems as well, which we will see below.

It is often stated that Jesus was in the grave for “three days,” and that biblically any part of a day could be called a “day.” Thus, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday made three days. While it is true that biblically, and also according to the Rabbis, any part of a day could be called a “day,” Jesus did not say he would be in the heart of the earth “three days.” Jesus specifically said he would be “three days and three nights” in the heart of the earth. That is hugely significant because there are many times in Scripture that the term “three days” is used to indicate any part of the three days, even if they are not complete days, but again, Jesus did not say “three days” (examples include: Gen. 42:17; Exod. 10:22; 15:22; Num. 10:33; Josh. 1:11; 2:16, 22; Judg. 19:4; 2 Sam. 24:13; 2 Kings 20:5, 8; 1 Chron. 21:12; 2 Chron. 20:25; Hos. 6:2; Jon. 3:3; Matt. 15:32; Luke 2:46; Acts 9:9).

In stark contrast to the over 50 times that the phrase “three days,” referring to any part of those days, occurs in Scripture, the phrase “three days and three nights” only occurs three times in the Bible (1 Sam. 30:12; Jon. 1:17; and Matt. 12:40). The first time “three days and three nights” occurs in Scripture it refers to the Egyptian slave of an Amalekite. He got sick and was left behind while the Amalekite army continued on, and he did not have any food or water for “three days and three nights” (1 Sam. 30:11-12). It is clear from the context that the Bible is not simply saying that he did not have any food or water for just under 36 hours, which would have been the time Jesus was in the grave according to Christian tradition. Rather, the Bible is telling us that he was close to death, and only “revived” when given food and water because he had literally been three days and nights without food and water. Interestingly enough, in the common idiom of the day, the Egyptian said he had been left three days before (1 Sam. 30:13); it is the Divine Author who gives us the full story and tells us that he had been “three days and three nights” without food or water.

Jonah 1:17, speaking of the time that Jonah was in the belly of the sea creature (neither the Hebrew nor the Greek language allows us to tell whether it was a fish or whale), says Jonah was there for “three days and three nights.” A couple of things are very important to know to properly understand the Jonah record. For one thing, it was common at that time to sail close enough to land to keep it in sight. The boats and navigation equipment were not well prepared for voyages across the Mediterranean, so most boats kept land in sight. Also, due to the Mediterranean climate in that part of the world, sea travel was generally very reliable during the “calm season,” and then people did not travel by boat during the stormy season (cf. Acts 27:9 for the stormy season). So when a huge storm came up, the sailors correctly discerned that it had a spiritual cause and that someone had angered a god (Jon. 1:6-7). However, when Jonah said that to stop the storm he would have to be thrown into the ocean, the sailors did not want to be responsible for his death and tried hard to row to land, which they could have seen in the distance (Jon. 1:13). They would have tried hard for hours, but eventually gave up, likely as darkness was coming on, and so they threw Jonah into the sea, which calmed down right away (Jon. 1:15). That would mean that Jonah was thrown into the sea and then swallowed by the fish at about the same time of day that Jesus’ body was placed in the grave.

Given all the times in the Bible that the phrase “three days” refers to any part of a day, there is no good reason the Bible would have used the phrase “three days and three nights” in Jonah 1:17 unless that actually was the amount of time Jonah was in the fish. Furthermore, the book of Jonah was written some 750 years before Jesus Christ, and no one at the time the book of Jonah was written, and in fact, no one at the time of Christ, knew that Jonah was a sign of the Messiah until Jesus himself said so. Only God, the Divine Author of the book of Jonah, knew the connection between Jonah and Jesus and knew Jesus would be in the grave for three days and three nights, and so created the connection between Jonah and Jesus. Jesus openly established the connection between himself and Jonah when he quoted Jonah 1:17 and said he would be “three days and three nights” in the heart of the earth.

A major principle in biblical interpretation is that the Bible should be taken literally unless there is a compelling reason not to do so. But in this case not only is there no compelling reason not to take the three days and three nights literally, instead, there are reasons it should be taken literally.

The major reason tradition says Jesus was crucified on Friday is the Bible says he was crucified the day before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31). However, John 19:31 says that Sabbath was a “high day,” a special Sabbath. It was not Saturday, the regular Sabbath. The Passover Lamb was always killed before a Sabbath because sunset after the Passover Lamb was killed started the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was always a Sabbath (Exod. 12:16; Lev. 23:6-7). Nisan 15, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was always a Sabbath, no matter on which day of the week it occurred (Exod. 12:16-17; Lev. 23:6-8). So just because Jesus was crucified the day before a Sabbath does not mean he was crucified on Friday, and we will see below he was not.

The truth of the situation is that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday, was buried just before sunset on Wednesday night, and got up Saturday evening just before sunset. Then when the women came to the tomb on Sunday morning they were told that he had already risen from the dead and was not there. To fulfill the prophecy Jesus gave, he had to be in the grave three days and three nights. Wednesday just before sunset to Thursday just before sunset is one full day and one full night. Thursday before sunset to Friday before sunset makes two full days and nights, and Friday before sunset to Saturday before sunset makes three full days and nights. So Jesus got up just before sunset Saturday night, three days and three nights after he was buried. Then, when Mary came to the tomb on Sunday morning while it was still dark, the tomb was open and Jesus was gone (John 20:1-2). Most people assume that Jesus had just gotten up a few minutes before the women arrived, but the Bible never says that. The Bible never says exactly when Jesus got up except by telling us that he would fulfill the sign of Jonah and be in the heart of the earth for three days and nights, a period that ended just before sunset on Saturday, the seventeenth of Nisan. On Sunday morning when Mary, Peter, John, and the other women arrived at the tomb, he was already up.

One of the keys to understanding the record of Jesus’ crucifixion is realizing that Jesus died on the cross on Golgotha as our true Passover Lamb at the same time the regular Passover Lamb was being slain in the Temple. Leviticus 23:5-7 and Exodus 12:6-16 set forth the regulations of Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. According to the Hebrew text, the Passover Lamb was slain on the fourteenth of Nisan “between the evenings,” a phrase that has been interpreted to mean the time when it can be clearly seen the sun is starting to fall in the sky, thus about 3 p.m. The lamb is cooked before sunset, and the Passover meal is eaten after sunset, which, according to Jewish reckoning of time started the next day, the fifteenth of Nisan. The fifteenth of Nisan was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which according to the Mosaic Law was always a special Sabbath. Thus, the sunset after the Passover Lamb was killed began a Sabbath—the special Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The day the Passover Lamb was killed was known as “the preparation” or “the preparation day,” because preparations were being made for the special Sabbath that began at sunset. The Bible is clear that Jesus Christ was the true Passover Lamb who died for our sins (1 Cor. 5:7), and all four Gospels testify that Jesus was killed on “the preparation day” (cf. Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31, 42), so Jesus died on the cross at the same time the Passover Lamb was slain in the Temple. Then, the day after the “preparation” day is the first day of Unleavened Bread and always a Sabbath, and John 19:31 correctly differentiates that Sabbath from the regular weekly Saturday Sabbath by saying the Sabbath after Jesus died was “the High Day” (REV); “a special day” (HCSB), and thus not the weekly Sabbath.

To take all of the above information and find out what day Jesus was crucified and buried we have to fit together some basic facts. First, he had to be in the grave three days and three nights. Second, he was already up on Sunday morning when the women came to properly bury him. Third, just before sunset, he was placed in the grave by Joseph of Arimathea, who closed the grave by rolling the stone over the door (Mark 15:46), so since he was three days and three nights in the grave he would have to get resurrected and out of the grave just before a sunset. Fourth, Luke tells us the women got and prepared the spices before a Sabbath Day, while Mark says they bought the spices after the Sabbath day.

The evidence about the women buying and preparing spices has been ignored by traditional Christianity, but it is very solid evidence for a Wednesday crucifixion of Christ. The Bible says that women, at least Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses, but likely other women as well, saw Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus without spices, which is why they bought and prepared spices and brought them Sunday morning to the grave. But Joseph buried Jesus so close to sundown—so close to the special Sabbath, that the women would not have had time before the Sabbath started to go and buy spices and then prepare them (Matt. 27:60-61; Mark 15:46-47; Luke 23:53-55). Furthermore, they could not have bought and prepared the spices on the Sabbath, and it is highly doubtful that they could have bought the spices in the dark after the Saturday Sabbath was over, and thus both bought and prepared them at night so they were ready Sunday morning with the spices. But there is a textual problem that is created by a Friday crucifixion and Saturday Sabbath. The Gospel of Luke says that the women bought and prepared the spices before the Sabbath and then rested on the Sabbath (Luke 23:56). But the Sabbath was beginning when Joseph buried Jesus (Luke 23:54). So the women did not have time to buy and prepare the spices before the Sabbath, like Luke says. But there is a greater problem. While Luke says the women bought and prepared the spices before the Sabbath and then rested on the Sabbath, the Gospel of Mark says the women bought and prepared the spices after the Sabbath (Mark 16:1). In the traditional chronology, there is no way to solve that contradiction. But if there was a Wednesday crucifixion, then Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus at sunset on Wednesday, and the women saw it but did not have time to buy the spices then, because of the Thursday special Sabbath. So they bought and prepared the spices on Friday, after the special Sabbath but before the weekly Sabbath, but could not take them to the tomb because of the Roman guard, so they took the spices to the tomb on Sunday morning.

A Wednesday crucifixion makes all the biblical data fit without contradiction. Jesus is in the ground for three days and three nights, and the women bought and prepared spices after the “Sabbath” (the special Sabbath) and also before the “Sabbath” (the weekly Sabbath). Using these facts and working backward in time from Sunday morning, we can see that Jesus got up Saturday evening just before sunset, and thus had to be crucified and buried on Wednesday. Thus, Wednesday was the “preparation” when the Passover Lamb and Jesus were slain. Thursday was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and a Special Sabbath. Friday was a regular workday so the women could buy and prepare the spices. Saturday was the regular weekly Sabbath, and Saturday at sunset fulfilled the “three days and three nights” prophecy, so Jesus got up from the dead at that time. So, Sunday morning when the women came, Jesus was not in the tomb because he had already been raised.

We can now construct the chronology and make Jesus’ prophecy of being in the grave for three days and three nights work perfectly with him being the real Passover Lamb.

* **Wednesday, Nisan 14**: Passover Day. Jesus is crucified about 9 a.m. (Mark 15:25).
* **Wednesday, Nisan 14**: Darkness comes over the land from 12 noon to 3 p.m. (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44)
* **Wednesday, Nisan 14**: Jesus dies on the cross around 3 p.m. at the same time the Passover Lamb was being slain in the Temple (Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46).
* **Wednesday, Nisan 14**: Joseph of Arimathea goes to Pilate and gets permission to take the body of Jesus (Matt. 27:58; Mark 15:43-45; Luke 23:52; John 19:38). Shortly before sunset he wrapped Jesus’ body in a clean linen cloth, put it in the tomb, rolled the stone over the door of the tomb, and went away (Matt. 27:59-60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53).
* **Wednesday, Nisan 14**: The women were watching Joseph and saw that he had laid Jesus’ body in the tomb without preparing it with spices according to the common custom (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55).
* **Wednesday, Nisan 14 (Or Thursday, Nisan 15):** It was now either extremely late on Nisan 14, immediately before sunset and the start of the special Sabbath, or the sun had just set and Nisan 15 and the special Sabbath had started. Nicodemus, who was late for some reason to meet with Joseph of Arimathea and help bury Jesus, came with his servants carrying 75 pounds of spices and gave Jesus a burial that was according to Jewish custom (John 19:39-40). When Nicodemus arrived, Joseph and the women had left and the stone tomb door was rolled shut, so the women did not see Nicodemus properly bury Jesus’ body. Nicodemus would have had servants with him to help him carry the spices and also as a guard because 75 pounds of spices would have been extremely valuable. Those servants would have helped Nicodemus open the tomb, rewrap Jesus’ body but this time with spices, and reclose the tomb. The Bible does not say if the sun had set and the special Sabbath had started when Nicodemus arrived, but it likely had because Joseph and the women left just as the Sabbath was starting (Luke 23:54).
* **Thursday, Nisan 15:** Special Sabbath and day of rest. Sunset on Passover (Nisan 14 began the fifteenth of Nisan and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was a Special Sabbath (Exod. 12:16-17; Lev. 23:6-8; Num. 28:19-25).
* **Friday, Nisan 16:** The women, not knowing that Nicodemus had come and buried Jesus with spices, go and buy spices and prepare them to properly bury Jesus. It is after the Sabbath like Scripture says; that is, it was after the Special Sabbath that was on Thursday (Mark 16:1). It was also before the Sabbath like Scripture says, that is, it was before the regular weekly Sabbath on Saturday (Luke 23:56). But the women cannot take the spices to the tomb on Friday because the tomb was sealed and guarded by the Roman guard (Matt. 27:63-66).
* **Saturday, Nisan 17:** The women rest on Saturday the weekly Sabbath (Luke 23:56).
* **Saturday, Nisan 17:** Jesus gets up from the grave just before sunset on Saturday after being in the grave for “three days and three nights,” just like he said (Matt. 12:40).
* **Sunday, Nisan 18:** The women come to the tomb early Sunday morning, the first day of the week (Mark 16:2), bringing the spices. When they get to the tomb they find out Jesus has already risen from the dead.

There is another fact about the three days and nights that is worth mentioning. As the Passover Lamb, Jesus was killed on Nisan 14 and buried the same day before Sunset. He got up three days and nights later, before sunset on Nisan 17. That is the same day Noah’s ark landed. Genesis 8:4 says the ark “came to rest” on the seventeenth day of the seventh month. Before the Exodus, Nisan was the seventh month and Tishri was the first month. At the Exodus, God changed the calendar by six months and Nisan became the first month and Tishri became the seventh (Exod. 12:2). So Noah’s ark landed and humanity was safe on Nisan 17. Similarly, when God raised Jesus from the dead on Nisan 17, humanity was safe. Christ was the firstfruits, and the living proof that God was going to raise the dead and save humanity. And just as there was a period of time after the ark landed when Noah had to stay on the ark before the earth was fit for human life, there is a period of time between the resurrection and when Jesus conquers the earth at Armageddon and makes it a wonderful place for humanity again. This fact about Noah’s Flood is not well-known because tradition teaches that Jesus died as the Passover Lamb on Friday the fourteenth of Nisan and was raised on Sunday morning, which would have been the sixteenth of Nisan. According to tradition, the seventeenth of Nisan would occur on the Monday after Jesus was raised, and nothing significant happened on the Monday after the Passover. If traditional dates are followed, the great typological parallel between Noah’s ark and Jesus’ resurrection is lost.

[For more information on the events from Jesus’ arrest to his death, see commentary on John 18:13 and 19:14. For more information on Nicodemus and that he came after Joseph of Arimathea left the tomb, see commentary on John 19:40.]

**“great fish.”** It is impossible to know from the Hebrew and Greek whether “whale” or “fish” is correct. For more on the exact identity of this sea creature, see commentary on Jonah 1:17.

**“in the heart of the earth.”** This phrase means in the grave, or as the Hebrew text would say, in Sheol (#07585 שְׁאוֹל; the state of being dead). It is a unique phrase, and it is obvious that Jesus was being purposely unclear because he was speaking to his opponents, the experts in the Law, and the Pharisees. When Jesus spoke with those religious leaders it was common for him to speak in veiled terms, and he did so in this case too. Jesus was very careful when he was around them not to state too plainly that he was the Messiah. He did all the things the Messiah was to do, and hinted to them he was the Messiah, but when they asked him to tell them plainly if he was the Messiah he only said that he had told them and that his works testified to who he was (John 10:24). One reason for that was that the testimony of one man about himself is not a legally binding testimony (he would wait until others testified to that truth), and another reason is likely that he knew they would try to kill him for saying it and he needed to fulfill his ministry. Only at his trial, when the time was clearly right and when the High Priest put him under oath before God to tell whether or not he was the Messiah did Jesus clearly say, “Yes” (Matt. 26:63-64). The result was predictable: they condemned him to die.

It is not hard to see the meaning of Jesus’ phrase “in the heart of the earth,” from the context and scope of Scripture. He said he would be “just as Jonah was,” and Jonah was dead (it is common to think Jonah was alive in the whale, but he only lived long enough to pray a quick prayer). Furthermore, it is clear from the scope of Scripture that Jesus was dead and in the grave for three days and nights. The Bible plainly teaches that he was dead. He died on the cross, and he was dead until God raised him from the dead. He was not alive anywhere; he was dead. Because the common teaching in Christianity is that dead people are not really dead, but alive somewhere (such as heaven, hell, or purgatory), and that similarly, Jesus was not really dead, his soul was alive somewhere doing something, there is a lot of Christian speculation about where Jesus was. There is no need to speculate. Jesus was dead and his body was in the tomb.

The phrase “in the heart of the earth” is unique, but not so much so that we cannot discern what it means. Ephesians 4:9 says Jesus went into the lower parts of the earth. This is a simple phrase meaning into the grave. We know that because that is where Joseph of Arimathea put him: in a tomb. We can see that the “lower parts of the earth” means being dead in the grave from its use in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament: Psalm 63:9; Ezekiel 32:18, 24 (cf. Young’s Literal Translation). Many other clear scriptures testify that Jesus was dead while he was in the heart of the earth.

[For more information on the fact that dead people are dead see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Mat 12:41

**“men of Nineveh.”** The Greek word translated “men” is *anēr* (#435 ἀνήρ, pronounced 'an-air), meaning men; males. This verse is a window into the biblical culture. It would never have been considered in the biblical world that women would sit as judges, hence the men will rise up in judgment.

**“behold”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“*someone* greater.”** The adjective “greater,” *pleiōn* (#4119 πλειῶν) is being used as a substantive.[[136]](#footnote-26994) As such, it implies a greater something, which is in this case a person, so “someone” is an appropriate noun to use to complete the sense. This is another time when Jesus revealed that he was the Messiah to those who had ears to hear. He was not simply saying he was a greater person or a greater prophet than Jonah.

Mat 12:42

***“*queen of the south.”** This is who the Old Testament refers to as the “Queen of Sheba,” here called the “queen of the south” because Sheba was south of Israel (1 Kings 10:1-2; 2 Chron. 9:1).

**“will be raised up in the Judgment with this generation.”** This is one of the clearer verses showing that dead people are dead in the ground awaiting the resurrection and Judgment Day. The Bible does not teach that people die and immediately go to heaven or “hell.” Instead, it teaches that people are dead in the ground and awaiting the resurrection. The Queen of Sheba, who lived almost 3,000 years ago, at the time of Solomon, is still dead in the ground and awaiting her resurrection, at which time she will be judged.

[For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on the dead being dead, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**“and will condemn it.”** This statement of Jesus, along with his reason, that she came from the ends of the earth to hear Solomon, implies that she will be in the Resurrection of the Righteous and have everlasting life. It is valuable to understand what Jesus meant when he said that the Queen of the South will condemn this generation. Jesus did not mean that she would be a judge on Judgment Day. What Jesus meant was that the thoughts and actions of the Queen of Sheba revealed the humility in her heart and her desire for knowledge and truth, and thus on Judgment Day, her example will show up in stark contrast to how many of the people of Jesus’ generation heard what Jesus taught but were unwilling to step out and obey it. Believers need to realize how important it is that they obey God and tell others about Him (cf. Jer. 6:27).

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“*someone* greater.”** See commentary on Matthew 12:41.

Mat 12:43

**“a resting place.”** The Greek is *anapausis* (#372 ἀνάπαυσις), and it can either mean “rest” or “a resting place.” Here, the better translation is “a resting place,” that is a place to settle in and use as a base for causing trouble and harm. See commentary on Luke 11:24.

Mat 12:46

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“his mother and his brothers stood outside.”** This record is in Matthew 12:46; Mark 3:21, 31-35; and Luke 8:19-21 (see commentary on Mark 3:21).

Mat 12:47

**Brackets.** This verse is omitted in many of the early and diverse manuscripts, including some manuscripts from the Majority Text, so it is omitted in some of the modern versions, such as CJB, ESV, RSV, and NJB. We put it in brackets to mark the fact that it is doubtful.

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“your mother.”** There is no mention of Joseph; he had apparently died. See commentary on John 19:27.

Mat 12:49

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**Matthew Chapter 13**

Mat 13:1

**“the lake.”** The “sea” of Galilee is actually quite a small lake, only 7 miles (11.2 km) across and 12 miles (19.3 km) long, and the entire lake can be seen from the escarpments on both the east and west sides. The Greek word *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα), lake, sea, or ocean, does not really refer to the size of the body of water, and thus has to be translated into English as “lake,” “sea,” or “ocean” by knowing the body of water that is being referred to (see commentary on Matt. 4:18).

Mat 13:2

**“*such* a large crowd gathered.”** Jesus taught the crowd in parables, and those included the parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:3-9), the parable of the good and bad seed (Matt. 13:24-30), the parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32), and the parable of the leaven (yeast) that the woman put in the dough (Matt. 13:33).

However, he left the crowd (Matt. 13:36) and taught other parables to his disciples, and these included the parable of the treasure in the field (Matt. 13:44), the parable of the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45-56) and the parable of the net that gathered fish (Matt. 13:47-50). It is worth noting that the parables about obtaining the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price involved risk and sacrifice, and he had not emphasized that to the crowds. Risk and sacrifice are important things for disciples to know and understand about obtaining the Kingdom, but they are not generally attractive to people who have not yet shown a genuine interest, and in fact, talking to people about commitment before they are genuinely interested may cause them to turn away from further hearing. Even disciples may turn away when they realize the depth of commitment that Jesus is asking for from his disciples. That was certainly the effect Jesus’ teaching about commitment had in John 6:66 when many disciples turned away once Jesus explained the amount of commitment involved in being a disciple (John 6:53-57).

The crowds came primarily because Jesus was doing healings and miracles; they had not yet made the decision to be disciples. Once they made that decision, Jesus taught them deeper truths about the kingdom, as we see here in Matthew 13.

Mat 13:3

**“parables.”** Matthew 13:3 is the first use of “parable” in the New Testament. A *parable* is a story that illustrates one or more points, principles, or instructive lessons that the speaker wants to make. Parables typically use familiar situations from everyday life or use things that are well-known or commonly believed. A parable differs from a fable. Parables use human characters and situations that are known and understood while fables generally use non-human characters such as plants, animals, and inanimate objects. Jotham made his point in a fable when he said, “The trees once went out to anoint a king over them” (Judg. 9:8; cf. Judg. 9:7-20). Parables also differ from allegories. In an allegory, each major part of the allegory has a counterpart in real life; there is no single important point like there is in many parables. However, many parables have aspects of an allegory in that they have more than one important point that has a counterpoint in real life.

Rhetoricians have argued for years about parables and whether they use similes or metaphors, or whether they make one point or can make several. The reason for the lack of rhetorical clarity with parables is almost certainly that in centuries past no one analyzed parables—or cared to analyze them—the way that rhetoricians and grammarians try to do now. The people like Jesus Christ who used parables used them to make a point or points, and sometimes the parable was only a sentence long, and sometimes it was a whole story; sometimes the speaker used similes, sometimes metaphors, and sometimes the figure hypocatastasis; sometimes many points were significant but often there was only one major point. The student of the Bible will find much more value in learning the meaning of each parable—the point or points it makes and why, when, and to whom it was spoken—than in trying to figure out if the parable really is a “parable” based on man-made rhetorical definitions.

Often a speaker will use a parable because the point that he or she is trying to make is immediately understood and quite easily remembered by the audience. But Jesus Christ used parables in a unique way: he used them in such a way that the spiritually mature usually understood what he meant, but people with no spiritual understanding—the curiosity seekers, the doubters, the proud—did not understand what he meant. This caused some consternation among his disciples. They wanted the audience to understand Jesus, so they asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” Jesus explained that part of the reason he spoke in parables was that it revealed the heart and character of the people in his audience (see commentary on Matt. 13:13).

We are now some 2,000 years after Christ and his parables are doing what they did in Christ’s day; confusing the spiritually immature, and blessing the spiritually mature.

[For more on the figures of comparison; simile, metaphor, and hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“The Sower.”** The Parable of the Sower and its explanation is in Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Mark 4:3-9, 14-20; and Luke 8:5-8, 11-15.

The parable Jesus tells in verses 3-8 is almost universally referred to as “The Parable of the Sower” because that is what Jesus called it (Matt. 13:18). However, it could just as well be called “The Parable of the Soils,” because the parable is not primarily about God who sows the seed; nor is it about the seed itself, which is the Word of God (Mark 4:14; Luke 8:11). The parables have different names in different Bibles and commentaries because they are not named in the Bible itself: different scholars named the parables according to their best understanding of the subject of the parable.

In the Parable of the Sower, the people would have likely thought that the “sower” was God, but Jesus could have been referring to himself as he did in the parable of the weeds of the field (Matt. 13:27). Actually, however, in the Parable of the Sower, the “sower” is not specifically named because it is anyone who speaks the Word to lead people to salvation. The seed in this parable is the word of God (Mark 4:14; Luke 8:11), specifically the “message about the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19) which Jesus and others were preaching and teaching, and if a person believed the message and obeyed God they would be saved. Today, after the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), we are in the Administration of Grace and people who believe in the death, resurrection, and Lordship of Jesus are saved (Rom. 10:9).

The focus of the Parable of the Sower is not the seed, but the people who hear the Word of God and the kind of soil they are. The important but unstated lesson in the Parable of the Sower is that each person determines the kind of “soil” they are: like the path (v. 4); like rocky places (v. 5); like thorny ground (v. 7), or good soil (v. 8). It is misreading this parable and misunderstanding life to read the parable and say, “we are what we are,” and we are stuck that way. Christ did not teach about the types of soils so we can discover what kind of soil we are but cannot change that. He taught about them as a warning, so people who need to change can change.

It is a powerful lesson that the first parable in the New Testament is Jesus speaking about people being different kinds of soil. Jesus was always trying to get people to focus on God and thus be saved and also have great rewards in his coming kingdom. He knew that in the huge crowd, he was addressing all kinds of people were there: “path people,” “rocky soil people,” “among-the-weeds people,” and “good soil people,” and the goal of his parable was to wake people up to the kind of soil they were being and get them to change and be good soil. No wonder he ended his parable with, “Anyone who has ears had better listen!” Today, some 2,000 years after Jesus taught the parable, it should still be having the same effect Jesus meant it to have: waking each person up to the necessity of being a “good-soil” person.

Jesus’ explanation reveals the lesson.

* The person who is the path: If a person is hard-hearted (like the soil on the path is hard), then they will not understand the Word, and/or not care about it. However, that should be obvious to them, even if they have to hear it from others. The challenge that the “path-person” has is to soften their heart and do things that cause them to grow in the Word so that their heart will receive it. If they do not care enough to do these things, the Devil will eventually snatch away the Word from their heart and mind and it will cease to matter to them at all. But be warned: no one has to remain hard soil.
* The person who is rocky soil: This is the person who receives the Word with joy but has no depth of understanding, so they abandon the Word when there is trouble or persecution. The key to understanding this “soil” (this kind of person) is realizing that when a person has no depth of knowledge or understanding, they know it. We all know when we do not know or understand something, and when it comes to the things of God, that is unacceptable. After hearing the Word of Christ, each person has the responsibility to do what it takes to grow in the Word, both by quitting activities that are ungodly or detrimental and by doing things that contribute to a complete and godly walk with the Lord. No one has to remain shallow, rocky soil.
* The person who is soil with thorns: This is the person who likes the Word of God, but never gets rid of their worldly attachments. They want to be rich, or want “to have fun” or want to be involved in worldly interests (Mark 4:19), and/or they are overly concerned about worldly things. The key to this “soil” (this person), is that anyone who hangs on to worldly desires realizes that fact. No one loves money, fame, sports, sex, alcohol, drugs, video games, etc., without realizing it. A man or woman knows if he or she has watched 20 hours of sports, soap operas, or game shows, on TV in the week but has not read the Bible at all. Everyone can make the free will choice to put away the things of the world and spend more time and energy with the things of God. No one has to remain thorny soil.
* The person who is good soil: This is the person who hears the Word and understands it and brings forth fruit. The mistake that people can make when reading about this soil is assuming that the “soil” (person) was always that way—somehow inherently godly and God-knowing. Nothing could be further from the truth. Christ is talking about soil in a kind of overview of a person’s life. The person who is good soil started out as everyone else started: ignorant of the deep things of God and with worldly loves and attachments. But they put aside the things of the world and focused on the things of God and grew in the Word. Eventually, their life produced great fruit. Everyone can be good soil if they want to badly enough.

[For more on the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on rewards in the future, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

**“Pay attention!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. Ordinarily, it would have been good to translate this as “Listen,” but since the parable ends with a command to “listen” (v. 9), it would have seemed an undue emphasis to double up on that word, thus the translation here, “pay attention.” See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 13:4

**“and the birds came and devoured them.”** To best understand the Parable of the Sower it is helpful to understand that in biblical times, birds were usually considered evil or harmful. The ancient Hebrews lived close to nature and took note of the beauty, songs, and behavior of birds, and taught many lessons from them. Also, they enjoyed bird songs (Song 2:12), and some of them were eaten as food (Matt. 10:29; Luke 12:6). Nonetheless, from a practical standpoint, most often birds were considered harmful or associated with evil. In this case, the “birds” in Matthew 13:4 represent the Devil and his demons and the demonic influence they exert in the world. Thus, in Jesus’ explanation of the parable, the birds are “the Wicked One” (Matt. 13:19), “the Adversary” (Mark 4:15); and “the Devil” (Luke 8:12).

Part of the reason that birds were much more harmful in biblical times than they are today has to do with the way farming was done back then. Today, tractors dig trenches in the dirt, put the seeds in the trench, and then cover the trench back up so that the seeds are protected from birds. But in biblical times the October rains—the former rains—softened the hard ground, then the farmer loosened the soil with his scratch plow, and then the seeds were scattered on the top of the ground, as we see in the Parable of the Sower. The seeds on the ground were exposed and so they were easily eaten by the birds, so the birds were dangerous and evil, and furthermore, they were very hard to get rid of. Some varieties of birds also ate the fruit that people were trying to grow.

The result of this harmful interaction between birds and people was that often in the Bible birds are associated with evil. In Genesis 15:11, birds try to eat Abraham’s sacrifice. In Ecclesiastes 10:20, birds tell your secrets to people and can cause trouble. In Genesis 40:17-19, birds are an evil omen in the dream of Pharaoh’s chief baker, and after he was executed they ate the flesh of his dead body. In Deuteronomy 28:26, birds will eat the dead body of those who disobey God (birds eating people’s dead bodies so that they would not be buried was a common curse in the ancient Middle East, cf. 1 Sam. 17:44, 46; 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4; 21:24; Ps. 79:2; Jer. 7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20; Ezek. 39:17; Rev. 19:21). Birds especially tend to peck out people’s eyes (cf. Prov. 30:17). The people who were listening to Jesus tell the parable knew that the birds that ate the seed scattered by the sower were harmful, and literally took food out of the mouth of God’s people.

[For more on the former and latter rains in the Bible, see commentary on James 5:7. For more on plowing and sowing in the Bible, see commentary on Eccl. 11:1.]

Mat 13:5

**“because the soil was not deep.”** The Greek is more literally, “because they had no depth of soil,” but that is awkward in English (cf. CEB, NAB, NET).

Mat 13:9

**“Anyone who has ears had better listen!”** See commentary on Matthew 11:15. This is the same Greek phrase. Jesus has just taught the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:3-8), which shows that each person has the responsibility before God to do something godly with his life and bring forth fruit. Unfortunately, as the parable shows, many people will never do what it takes to bring forth fruit, but that does not absolve us from the responsibility to do so. Each person should heed the words of Jesus and strongly endeavor to bring forth fruit.

Mat 13:10

**“Why do you speak to them in parables?”** This question is asked and answered in Matthew 13:10-17; Mark 4:10-12; and Luke 8:9-10. Matthew has the most complete answer.

Mat 13:11

**“sacred secrets”.** We translate the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Ephesians 3:9.]

**“the Kingdom of Heaven.”** The “Kingdom of Heaven” is the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth.

[For more information on the coming Kingdom of Christ, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 13:12

**“For whoever has.”** Jesus taught this principle of having and not having five different times. See commentary on Matthew 25:29.

Mat 13:13

**“nor do they understand.”** Jesus spoke in parables to reveal the hearts of the people who were hearing him speak. Why did some people listen to Jesus but not understand? They did not bother to find out what the teachings meant. Humble, godly people found out what the parables meant while pious, arrogant people did not make the effort to find out. In their arrogance, they covered their ears and closed their hearts, as Matthew’s record portrays (Matt. 13:14-15). This truth is given via the idiom of permission by saying that God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts (John 12:38-40). Matthew 13:13-15 cannot be understood without understanding the Semitic idiom that many scholars call “the idiom of permission” (for more on the idiom of permission, see commentary on Rom. 9:18; for a good example of the idiom of permission see Exod. 4:21 and see commentary on Exod. 4:21).

Why did the Lord speak to the crowds with parables? To this question, Christ could have responded that he takes his own advice, by not throwing his pearls in front of pigs (Matt. 7:6). Furthermore, God says, “Do not speak into the ears of a fool, for he will have contempt for the prudence of your words.” (Prov. 23:9). Parables are designed so that the hearers must think, seek, and even ask to understand. By speaking to the crowds in this way, the Lord separates those who have a will to listen and learn from those who foolishly reject his teachings without giving them any thought.

All three synoptic Gospels record the parable of the Sower in the context of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (Matt. 13:10-18; Mark 4:2-12; Luke 8:9-11). John does not relate the Sower parable but speaks of the prophecy of Isaiah (John 12:35-42). It is interesting that the Parable of the Sower is in this context, for that parable deals with how one’s heart is prepared to receive the Good News. In the Parable of the Sower, there is no indication that God decides what kind of soil one’s heart is. Rather, it is the person who decides by their thoughts and actions what kind of soil they are. This is where the quotation from Isaiah comes in. Jesus says in Matthew the prophecy “is fulfilled” (Mat. 13:14, present indicative), in that some of those listening had dull hearts and could barely hear, and also that they chose to close their eyes and ears lest they see, hear, understand, and turn. The Greek word for “lest,” *mēpote* (#3379 μήποτε), is an indicator of negative purpose, showing the sinful people purposely intended to not see, hear, or understand. Those Jews hardened their hearts against God, and in general evil people do not want to know God (cf. Job. 21:14; 22:17; Isa. 30:11; Mic. 2:6).

John begins the record by pointing out that even though Jesus had done so many signs before these people, they still did not believe in him (John 12:37). This “resulted in” another word of Isaiah being fulfilled regarding Israel’s unbelief: “who has believed our report?” (John 12:38). The “with the result that” in John 12:38 comes from the Greek preposition *hina* which in that verse introduced a result clause (see Word Study: “Hina”). John says it was “for this reason,” “on account of this,” (Greek: *dia touto*) that these people could not believe (John 12:39). That is to say, *because* they rejected Jesus and refused to believe, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and would return *to God*, and I would heal them.” (John 12:40).

God is portrayed as doing the blinding and hardening in the passage in John. Yet we know from Matthew these people hardened their own hearts first by choosing not to believe. John tells us that it was because of this unbelief they were blinded. How are we to understand this blinding? It is not as though God actively hardens the hearts of those who close their eyes to the truth. Rather, he has allowed them to be blinded by setting in place a spiritual principle that while one is rejecting Jesus they are left in a state of spiritual blindness. It is the idiom of permission. Scripture teaches that in actuality, the Devil is the one who blinds these people: “in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, to keep them from seeing *and shining forth* the light of the good news of the glory of Christ,” (2 Cor. 4:4); it is only when they turn to the Lord that the veil is taken away (2 Cor. 3:14-16). Unbelievers have dull hearts and ears that can barely hear, but whether they will turn to the Lord or decide to close their eyes is their free choice. If they turn to him, the veil is lifted off their hearts and they can see. But if they choose to reject Christ and close their eyes then those people remain under Satan’s dominion of spiritual blindness. This is why Christ told these people, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtakes you… While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you become sons of light” (John 12:35-36).

Once someone rejects the light they are “overtaken” by darkness and they remain in that state until they turn to the Lord and are healed. Only in the sense of the idiom of permission can it be said that God blinds people and hardens their hearts. Thus we can get to the proper understanding of passages like Matthew 13:13-15 only if we consider the whole of Scripture and understand the language and idioms that it uses. We must put the records together to understand the full picture, that people first choose to harden their own hearts and as a result, they are left in a state of spiritual blindness.

When this record occurs in Mark 4:12 and Luke 8:10 it comes in the form of two purpose-result clauses (see Word Study: “Hina”), thus sandwiching the truth revealed in Matthew and John together into one perspective. Taken together and in the scope of Scripture, they show that Jesus taught in parables “so that” the people may see but not perceive, and hear but not understand (cf. Mark 4:12). The “so that” indicates the purpose and the result of the speaking in parables, which was to teach the humble and godly but reveal the arrogant heart of the ungodly.

Mat 13:15

This quote of Isaiah 6:9-10 follows the Greek Septuagint, which differs from the Hebrew text.

Mat 13:18

For an explanation of the parable of the Sower, see commentary on Matthew 13:3.

Mat 13:19

**“Wicked One.”** The Greek is *ponēros* (#4190 πονηρός), “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’”[[137]](#footnote-22502) *Ponēros* is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun).

[For more on substantives, see the commentary on Matt. 5:37.]

The Devil (the “Slanderer”) is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time, he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness.

[For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Mat 13:22

**“and he becomes unfruitful.”** The Greek verb “becomes” does not have a gender, so it can be translated as “he,” “she,” or “it,” and the versions are divided between “he” (ASV, DBY, DRA, KJV, NKJV) and “it” (CEB, CJB, CSB, ESV, NET, NRSV). The REV translated the verb as a “he” because that best fits the context. In Matthew 13:19, the soil of the path was a “he,” a person, and the word was snatched from his heart. Then, in Matthew 13:20-21 the rocky soil was a “he,” who had no root in himself. Then, in Matthew 13:23 the good soil was a “he” who brought forth fruit, with some people bringing forth a hundredfold increase, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold. In the light of the other three soils being people, it does not seem correct that in Matthew 13:22 the teaching about the seed being sown on weedy soil would suddenly shift and be the only “it” in the context. It is the person who was the soil and it was the person who became unfruitful, just as with the “path soil” and “rocky soil” people.

Mat 13:23

**“the seed.”** The Greek text does not have the word “seed,” but it is the understood object since it is what was “sown.”

Mat 13:24

**“a man.”** In his explanation, Jesus said that he was the man (Matt. 13:37: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man”).

Mat 13:25

**“but while the men were sleeping.”** There is nothing wrong with sleeping after a hard day’s work. This statement in the parable is not meant to denigrate the farmer or his men in any way but rather to reveal the sneaky and evil ways of the Devil. He is sneaky and an opportunist, and he regularly takes advantage of opportunities to disrupt God’s plans and disrupt and hurt God’s people. He does not come “in the daylight” and do his dirty work, he comes at night. He works in the dark. Having darnel sown into the crop of wheat would cause problems and lots of extra work for the farmer when harvest time came.

**“weeds.”** The Greek word is *zizanion* (#2215 ζιζάνιον) and it refers to the plant [*Lolium temulentum*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lolium_temulentum), or the Bearded Darnel. There are other varieties of *Lolium*, but they do not closely resemble wheat, and therefore are almost certainly not the plant referred to in the parable. The Bearded Darnel looks so much like wheat that it cannot be distinguished from it except by an expert until the grain starts to form. The darnel grain is much smaller than wheat and dark brown. The seeds of the darnel were believed to be poisonous to men and animals (although not fowl). It has now been asserted by some botanists that it is not the seed of the darnel that is poisonous, but rather that it is easily susceptible to getting a mold that is poisonous.[[138]](#footnote-17367) Nevertheless, the ancients, and even the modern Arabs, do not make any such distinction and consider the seeds to be poisonous. The symptoms of eating the darnel include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, convulsions, and sometimes even death. The roots of the darnel are quite extensive, and when it appears in a wheat field, they become entangled with the roots of the wheat so that if anyone tried to pull up the darnel they would most certainly pull up the wheat also.

Also, the parable epitomizes “by their fruit you will know them,” because it is when the grain starts to appear that the darnel can be easily seen.

Mat 13:27

**“Then where did the weeds come from?”** The Greek is idiomatic: “Then where has darnel?” Different versions have brought the idiomatic Greek into English in slightly different ways.

Mat 13:31

**“mustard seed.”** See commentary on Matthew 13:32.

**“sowed.”** The Greek word can mean “scattered,” and in the biblical world, seed was often scattered on the top of the ground.

Mat 13:32

**“smaller...becomes a tree.”** The mustard seed is a very tiny seed but grows into a very tall plant, which Jesus hyperbolically calls a “tree.” Although there has historically been some disagreement about it, today scholars identify the “mustard” in the parable as the common black mustard (*brassica nigra*). In the parable, the man purposely grew this mustard in his garden, just as people still do today, and mustard was valued as a spice and for the oil it produced. Although these annual plants commonly grew to only 3 to 4 feet tall, much larger plants are regularly observed, some growing to 10 to 15 feet tall with a central stem as large as a man’s forearm, and especially in the fall as the lack of rain hardens the plant they are well able to support a bird’s nest.[[139]](#footnote-27941)

The context of Jesus’ statement about the size of the mustard seed is the man sowing seed in his garden, which is confirmed by the word “garden plants” (*lachanon*; #3001 λάχανον; a potable herb; a vegetable). This verse is not a botanical reference to the size of every seed known to man, but rather a comparison of the mustard seed to the other seeds a gardener would typically sow in his garden in the biblical world at the time of Christ. It is absurd, and a misuse and misunderstanding of how the Word of God is written, to try to prove an error in the Word of God by finding a seed smaller than a mustard seed. Harold and Alma Moldenke correctly point out, “Such statements as that concerning the size of the mustard seed must always be judged in the light of the knowledge of the time of the people involved.”[[140]](#footnote-20348) Furthermore, but less likely, Jesus may also have been using a natural hyperbole (exaggeration), a common figure of speech used in discourse, the same way many Westerners will say, “I am starving” when they are just hungry, or “I’m freezing” when they are just cold. The point of Jesus’ parable was that just as the mustard seed starts out very small but becomes very big, so too the Kingdom of Heaven seems to have a small start, but will one day fill the earth. When Jesus said the seed “becomes a tree,” we must remember that the word “tree” is flexible and can refer to both large and small trees, and many of the trees in the Middle East are quite small. Thus a mustard plant that grew to 10 or 15 feet (2 or 3 meters) could rightly be said to “become a tree.”

Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6 refer to “trust like a mustard seed.” The mustard seed is small, but it has complete trust that it can grow into the large garden herb. See commentary on Matthew 17:20.

**“the birds of the sky.”** The word translated as “sky” is the standard Greek word that refers to heaven, so the verse can be translated as “the birds of heaven.” In this context, the word “heaven” meant the sky, the atmosphere, or the air. The “birds of heaven are not “spiritual birds,” they are normal birds that fly in the sky.

Mat 13:33

**“leaven.”** “Leaven” was something that made dough rise, “leaven” is typically yeast. Although leaven is often portrayed as an evil thing such as sin, in this parable it is a good thing, the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not uncommon for things in the Bible to be either bad or good depending on the context. For example, Satan is called a lion (1 Pet. 5:8), but so is Jesus (Rev. 5:5).

**“that a woman took and hid.”** No woman “hides” yeast in bread dough; they put it in so that the dough will rise. In this parable, God is compared to a woman hiding yeast in bread, and the wording reveals the purpose and activity of God. God conceals the Kingdom as people get saved and join it, and as the yeast spreads throughout the loaf, Kingdom people, saved people, spread throughout the world, mainly being ignored by the worldly people.

**“50 pounds.”** The Greek measure is three *satons*, and “saton” was the Greek name for the Hebrew term “seah” (Sarah used three seahs of flour for her divine guests in Gen. 18:6). A saton is a little over 16 pounds (7 kg) of dry measure (or just over 13 liters). So this was over 47 lbs (21 kg) of flour total, which would feed more than 100 people. No ordinary housewife would cook that much meal, so the parable points to the Kingdom of God and His provision for all the people who would be saved and enter the Kingdom.

Mat 13:34

**“Jesus spoke...to the crowds.”** See commentary on Matthew 13:2.

Mat 13:35

**“I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.”** Not only does Jesus speak in parables, fulfilling this prophecy in Psalm 78:2, but this verse also teaches us that Jesus taught new teachings in parables, especially concerning the Kingdom of God. There were teachings hidden from the foundation of the world that God gave to Jesus to reveal to humanity. This is the idea of progressive revelation. Namely, that throughout history, God has revealed himself more and more.

**“from the foundation of the world**.” This portion of the quote from Psalm 78:2 does not match the Hebrew Old Testament or the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. The Hebrew in Psalm 78:2 is literally translated, “from the olden days,” and the Greek in Psalm 78:2 LXX is “from the beginning.” Yet, here in Matthew 13:35 it is, “from the foundation of the world.” In cases like this, it is unclear if the author is using a different Hebrew version, a different Greek version, or simply recalling the verse from memory and capturing the essence of the meaning. Regardless, the meaning of “from the foundation of the world,” and, “from the beginning,” are very similar, so the meaning has not been lost.

Mat 13:38

**“the Wicked One.”** See commentary on Matthew 13:19.

Mat 13:39

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “the Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Mat 13:40

**“burned up.”** The Greek is *katakaiō* (#2618 κατακαίω) and means to burn up, or to consume. It cannot be overstated that the weeds “burn up,” they do not burn forever. Similarly, the people who are unsaved will be burned up in Gehenna, they will not burn forever.

**“the end of the age.”** The Jews taught that we are in the present evil age, but there was a wonderful Messianic Age coming in the future. Although some versions read “world” instead of “age,” that is misleading. The world will not come to an end, but this evil age will. See commentary on Galatians 1:4.

Mat 13:41

**“The Son of Man will send out his angels.”** Matthew 13:41-43 describes what happens after the Battle of Armageddon: Jesus sends out his angels and gathers the people of the earth who have survived the Great Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon and separates them into two groups: the godly (“sheep”) and the ungodly (“goats”). Then he judges them and the sheep are allowed to enter his kingdom while the goats are thrown into the Lake of Fire. This judgment is described in more detail in Matthew 25:31-46.

[For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment, see commentaries on Matt. 25:31; 25:32; and 25:33. For more about Jesus’ future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“those who are guilty of lawlessness.”** The Greek text is more literally, those who “are doing lawlessness,” but that does not read well in English. Some versions have “those who practice lawlessness,” but that does not read well in English either. The phrase, “those who are guilty of lawlessness” catches the sense well (cf. CSB).

Mat 13:42

**“the furnace of fire.”** Here in Matthew 13:42, Jesus refers to the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14-15) as a “furnace.” The Greek word translated “furnace” was used of furnaces that smelted metal (cf. Rev. 1:15) or potters kilns for hardening clay. The people thrown into the Lake of Fire will eventually burn up (Matt. 13:40).

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“weeping and gnashing of teeth**.**”** The mention of weeping and gnashing of teeth occurs seven times in the Bible (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). All of these occurrences are in the Gospels. There is only one future Messianic Kingdom, and it fills the whole earth. The unsaved are not part of that Kingdom but are thrown into the Lake of Fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Rev. 20:13-15).

[For a more complete explanation of the weeping and gnashing of teeth, see commentary on Matt. 8:12.]

Mat 13:43

**“Anyone who has ears had better listen!”** See commentary on Matthew 11:15. This is the same Greek phrase. Jesus has just finished teaching that wicked people will be burned up in Gehenna, while godly people will live and shine in the Kingdom of God. This is not mere threats. There will be a Judgment and unsaved people will be annihilated in Gehenna while saved people will live forever. Everyone better listen and pay attention.

[For more on annihilation in Gehenna, the Lake of Fire, see commentary on Rev. 20:10.]

Mat 13:45

**“fine pearls.”** Matthew 13:45-46 contains a short but powerful parable about the value of attaining everlasting life and living in the Messianic Kingdom, which Jesus often referred to as “the Kingdom of Heaven.” As clear as the parable about the pearl of great price seems to us, it was much clearer to people who lived before the 1900s. The early 1900s saw the collapse of the pearl industry and the decline in the value of pearls as a status symbol because it was then that the Japanese invented a way to grow cultured pearls. Worse, not too long after that, plastics and resins were also used to produce very realistic pearl look-alikes. Then finally, the invention of the scuba diving system made gathering real pearls much easier and safer. The result of all this was that pearls, which for millennia had been a mark of high culture, social standing, and financial wealth, were suddenly seemingly being worn by anyone who wanted to. This caused them to be less of a status symbol and less desirable to wear. As the attraction of pearls wore off, they were worn by fewer and fewer people, even being ignored by those who could afford the “real” ones. So while there are natural pearls of great value still around, the desire to own and wear them, and the status they project, are not what they were in years past.

However, the value of pearls in the biblical period is why Jesus chose a pearl to compare the value of the Kingdom of Heaven to, instead of something else. In the biblical world, the pearl was incredibly expensive, in fact, it was the apex gem in the culture. The Roman historian, Pliny the Elder (AD 23-August 24, AD 79), said this about pearls: “The topmost rank of all things of price is held by pearls.”

Oysters that produce pearls are found all over the world, in both saltwater and fresh, and yet the round, white pearls that have been so prized in history are amazingly rare. Although the translation “pearls” is disputed, Job 28:18 (ESV) certainly shows the value of pearls when it is trying to show the value of wisdom: “the price of wisdom is above pearls.” When pointing out that women should not dress extravagantly, 1 Timothy 2:9 says women should not dress with gold and pearls (not that women should not wear gold and pearls, but they should not flaunt them as if worldly wealth was the important thing in life).

Part of the mystique of pearls in the first century was that, even by the time of the early church, people were not sure where they came from. Expensive pearls that came into the Roman world from the Persian Gulf (still today perhaps the most reliable source of natural pearls) and from India had traveled far, and anyone who deals in vulnerable and expensive items knows that creating an air of mystery and guarding your sources can create value in the item and also protect your source of supply. “Pliny claimed that pearls rose to the sea’s surface and swallowed dew to achieve their luster and beauty, while other authors suggested that lightning hitting an oyster produced the gem.”[[141]](#footnote-15738)

Although some pearls were discovered in shallow water, most pearls in the ancient world were brought up from deeper water. In the Persian Gulf region, a fruitful source of pearls in biblical times, they were often at a depth of about 40 meters (about 45 yards). To get down to the oyster beds, divers held a weight on a rope to make a quick descent to the beds. The weight was pulled back up to the ship by the rope, while the diver swam back up, having put the oysters he had gathered into a sack he had with him. Until the invention of scuba gear, this diving-with-a-weight method of pearling was the common way of pearling, with only slight improvements over the years, such as hand and foot protection from the sharp oysters, and face masks to enable better vision and protect the eyes. It was a dangerous way to make a living and a major reason that natural pearls continued to be so expensive until our modern times.

When we understand the rarity of a round, white, pearl in the biblical world, and understand the mystique that surrounded them as well as the monetary and social value they had, we are in a position to see why Jesus compared gaining the Kingdom of Heaven to finding and buying a pearl of great value. The pearl of great price was valuable, but nothing is more valuable than salvation and everlasting life. And just as no merchant in the ancient world would hesitate to sell everything else he owned to gain a very valuable pearl, no person should hesitate to make every effort to be saved and be assured of everlasting life.

[For more about the wonderful Kingdom of Heaven on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.]

Mat 13:46

**“pearl.”** Pearls were very expensive in the ancient world, and very highly valued.

[For more on pearls, see commentaries on Rev. 18:12 and Matt. 13:45.]

**“great value.”** The Greek word is *polutimos* (#4186 πολύτιμος), and it means to be of great value, or very expensive. To say the pearl was of “great price” is not as accurate a translation today because many things are priced way above, and sometimes way below, their actual value. This pearl was of great value, but the only way we know the price was high was that the man had to sell all he owned to buy it.

Mat 13:47

**“net that was let down.”** The Greek word translated “net” is *sagēnē* (#4522 σαγήνη), and it refers to a dragnet or seine. The Greek word translated “let down” is *ballō* (#906 βάλλω), and it is usually translated as “cast” or “throw,” but when the context warrants it, as a transitive verb it can also be used as “of putting or placing someone or something somewhere: *put* (money into a treasury box), *put* (a sword into its scabbard), *place* (someone into a pool).”[[142]](#footnote-25469)

In this context, the net is a dragnet, and dragnets were let down into the water from a boat or usually a couple of boats. The dragnet was placed parallel to the shore and then dragged by people to the shore, who gathered the fish, keeping the good and throwing the bad away.

[For more information on fishing in Jesus’ time, see commentary on Mark 1:17.]

**“lake.”** He was teaching from a boat on the “Sea of Galilee,” which is actually a lake, so the context dictates that *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα) be translated as “lake.”

**“and gathered *fish* of every kind.”** The Kingdom of Heaven is the kingdom with heavenly qualities that is ruled by Christ when he comes from heaven, conquers the earth, and rules over it (Ps. 2:8; 72:8-11; Dan. 2:35; 7:14; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10). When Christ comes to earth and conquers it, there will be people of every sort left on earth, and the “good” will be allowed into the Kingdom, and the “evil” will be thrown away, into the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:31-46; cf. commentary on Matt. 25:32).

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 13:48

**“when it was filled.”** Here we see God’s timing in bringing His Kingdom to pass on earth and a detail in the parable that is different from fishing in real life. In the parable, the net was not drawn up until it was filled, whereas in real life the net is drawn up but there is no way of knowing until it gets into very shallow water if there are many fish in it or not. However, when it comes to bringing the Kingdom of Heaven into fulfillment here on earth, God will wait until He knows the saved have reached whatever full number He had in mind.

**“gathered the good *fish* into containers.”** The parable of the net and the fish uses imagery that was well-known to Jesus’ Galilean audience, especially since he taught it close to the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 13:1). The nets of the fishermen were just as Jesus described: they brought in various kinds of fish, and the “good” (valuable) fish were kept while the “bad” (worthless) fish were thrown away. The “containers” in the parable of the net are the equivalent of the “storehouse” in the parable of the good and bad seed (Matt. 13:30).

**“but the bad they threw away.”** The world would have us believe that every human is equally valuable, but that is not the testimony of the Word of God. Every person has the opportunity to be valuable by recognizing and obeying God, but those who ignore God or reject God or deny God have denied their Creator and thus prove themselves unfit to be in His everlasting Kingdom. God created people to love and serve Him and love and serve each other, and those who will not do that will be “thrown away,” they will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and annihilated.

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Mat 13:49

**“The angels will come out and separate the wicked from the midst of the righteous.”** The separation of the righteous from the wicked that Jesus is referring to here is the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). That Judgment occurs at the end of this “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) and at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more information on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 13:50

**“weeping and gnashing of teeth**.**”** The mention of weeping and gnashing of teeth occurs seven times in the Bible (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). All of these occurrences are in the Gospels. There is only one future Messianic Kingdom, and it fills the whole earth. The unsaved are not part of that Kingdom but are thrown into the Lake of Fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Rev. 20:13-15). People in the Lake of Fire will suffer in proportion to their sin before they burn up and are annihilated.

[For a more complete explanation of the weeping and gnashing of teeth, see commentary on Matt. 8:12. For more information on suffering in the Lake of Fire in proportion to one’s sin, see commentary on Rom. 2:5. For more information on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Mat 13:52

**“has been trained.”** The Greek word *mathēteuō* (#3100 μαθητεύω) means to be a disciple, to be one who is trained, and the fact that it is an aorist participle means that the disciple has graduated and finished his training and reached a level of expertise. It is related to the noun *mathētēs* (#3101 μαθητής, pronounced ma-thay-'tase) “disciple.”

**“new and old.”** The person who has been well trained about the Kingdom of Heaven has wisdom and knowledge and applies it well. Some of it is old knowledge that has been around for many generations, and some of it is new knowledge that has recently been revealed. In English we would usually say, “old and new,” but their idiom is “new and old.”

Mat 13:54

**“And after coming to his hometown.”** This record is also in Mark 6:1-6.

Mat 13:55

**“builder’s son.”** The “builder” is Joseph, the father of Jesus, and Jesus himself is called a builder in Mark 6:3). The Greek word translated “builder” is *tektōn* (#5045 τέκτων). The Greek word *tektōn* can refer to a carpenter, builder, or craftsman of most any kind. For example, the Septuagint uses *tektōn* to describe a metalsmith (1 Sam. 13:19; Isa. 44:12), a worker in bronze or cast metal (1 Kings 7:14; Isa. 40:19), a craftsman who makes idols, which would usually be from wood, metal, or stone (Hos. 8:6), and a worker in wood (Isa. 40:20; 41:7; 44:13).

Although *tektōn* could refer to different types of craftsmen, the word “carpenter” was chosen by the ancient translators and that tradition continues today in most Bibles (cf. Tyndale’s Bible of 1534; Bishops’ Bible of 1595; Geneva Bible of 1599 and the King James Version of 1611, which all say “carpenter”). However, there are several reasons those older translators likely chose “carpenter” over “builder.” One reason is that the Greek they knew was the ancient Greek of Homer and Plato, and Greece had lots of trees so a *tektōn* in ancient Greek literature often built with wood. Another reason is that England and Europe, where those older translations of the Bible were made, were covered with trees and so wood was the common material people built with. A third reason that “carpenter” would have been chosen as a translation of *tektōn* was that those ancient translators had never been to Israel. If they had, they would have realized that the sturdy wood used in building was fairly scarce in Israel, which is why when Solomon built the Temple, he had cedar wood brought down to Israel from Lebanon. The primary building material in Israel was stone, which has been a blessing to archaeologists because many of those stone buildings survive today to one extent or another even though they are thousands of years old. As “builders,” Joseph and his sons (who would have grown up in their father’s trade), would have been skilled in building with all kinds of materials, primarily with stone, but also with mud brick, clay tile, wood, and to some extent metal, such as might be used for door hinges.

Once we understand that Joseph and his sons were builders, a few things about Jesus become clearer. One is that in the Roman society that controlled Israel and among the Jews who tried to fit in with Rome, being a builder was generally considered to be a lower-class job, not one that had a lot of prestige associated with it. Thus, when the people of Nazareth said of Jesus, “Isn’t this the builder’s son?” (Matt. 13:55), and “Isn’t this the builder…?” (Mark 6:3), those were not compliments, but rather were derogatory remarks as if they had said, “Is this not the son of that common laborer Joseph?” So from Jesus’ job, we know he did not grow up being highly respected and well-treated by others but instead grew up being treated like the common laborer he was. Being humble about who he was and what he did was part of Jesus’ daily life, and no doubt Joseph coached Jesus through challenging situations as they worked together through the years. Also, that Joseph was a builder and did not have a prestigious job also helps explain why he could not afford a lamb as a birth sacrifice after Jesus was born, but Mary had to offer birds instead (see commentary on Luke 2:24).

Another thing we learn about Jesus from the fact he was a builder is that he would have worked with other people almost every day. While a carpenter may well end up doing a lot of work alone, a builder in that society before any power tools almost always had to work with others, and the “others” that one worked with in the building trades were often crude and tough people. So Jesus’ daily work taught him how to deal with difficult people, something that would serve him well in his ministry.

Still another thing we learn about Jesus is that he would have had the strong and muscular body that comes with cutting, lifting, and setting stone every day. Much of the building in the Galilee was done with the native basalt stone. That means that the paintings that show Jesus as a pale-skinned, somewhat emaciated human being are simply off the mark. Jesus would be tanned and look like he worked out every day—because he did.

One more thing we can see from knowing that Jesus was a builder is that it gives good evidence that what the New Testament says about him is true. After all, if some author was going to invent a story about the Messiah who would one day rule the world, we would think that the author would give Jesus a prestigious career. Perhaps he would write that Jesus was a scribe or something like an independently wealthy farmer, but why invent a story that Jesus was a laborer? The Bible says Jesus was a builder because he was. Then at the proper time he left that trade, was anointed with holy spirit, and began his ministry as the Savior of the world.

**“And *aren’t* his brothers, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas?”** Women had no way of effective birth control and likely would not have wanted it if it was available. Mary herself had at least seven children. Her sons were Jesus, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, and she had at least two girls who were the “sisters” (plural) of those boys as well (cf. Mark 6:3). It was important to have large families for many reasons. Children supported their parents in their old age and lots of children died young, so a small number of children meant that there may be no one to take care of elderly parents if the children died. Also, there was no police force at that time, and people were responsible for figuring out how to protect themselves and their property, and the best way to do that was to have a large family with lots of sons, uncles, and cousins. Psalm 127:5 says a man with a lot of children is blessed, and they will defend him when he needs it.

Mat 13:57

**“A prophet is honored everywhere except.”** The literal Greek is a double negative (actually a triple-negative), “not without...except,” which was much more easily understood in Greek than in English because the Greek language uses double negatives for different reasons. The double negative was changed in English for clarity (cf. CEB; NLT).

Mat 13:58

**“because of their unbelief.”** There would have been no point in doing miracles in front of an unbelieving crowd. Miracles win people and bring them to a point of belief in some circumstances, but much of the time unbelievers stay unbelievers no matter what miracles and wonders are done around them, as the ministry of Jesus around Israel attested. God does not do miracles to entertain or just put on a show, they are to genuinely help people both physically and in their understanding and belief in God. If people have hard hearts there is no point in doing miracles and other mighty works. Jesus taught not to cast one’s pearls to pigs, and he followed his own teaching. Believers must learn an important lesson from Jesus. It is not that he loved the people here less than in other places, but he recognized that what he did was pointless, so he moved on, and his disciples must learn to walk in wisdom and follow his example.

**Matthew Chapter 14**

Mat 14:3

**“put him in prison.”** According to the records we have from Josephus, Herod Antipas put John in prison at Machaerus, his palace-fortress east of the Dead Sea. Machaerus was originally built about 90 BC by the Hasmonean king, Alexander Jannaeus (104 BC-78 BC). It is located about 15 miles (24 km) south and east of the point at which the Jordan River enters the Dead Sea. In 57 BC it was destroyed by Pompey’s general Gabinius, but rebuilt by Herod the Great in 30 BC. Machaerus was the easternmost palace-fortress of Herod, and he strongly fortified it, in part due to its proximity to Arabia.

When Herod the Great died, the palace-fortress Machaerus was passed to his son, Herod Antipas, who ruled from 4 BC until AD 39, and who imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist at Machaerus. Because Herod the Great built his palace in the center of the fortified area, we know the location where Salome was when she danced before Herod Antipas and his guests and asked for the head of John the Baptist. Machaerus passed from Herod Antipas to Herod Agrippa I, and when he died in AD 44, it came under Roman control. Jewish rebels took control after AD 66 during the First Jewish Revolt, but the Romans began a siege of the fortress in AD 72. They built a wall of circumvallation around the fortress, and an embankment and ramp for the Roman siege engines, but the Jewish rebels surrendered before the Romans began their attack. The rebels were allowed to leave and the Romans tore the palace-fortress down, leaving only the foundations, which are still there today.

Some scholars think John was in prison for two years at Machaerus, but that is because they think Jesus had a three-year ministry. There is good evidence that Jesus’ ministry lasted only shortly over a year, from before Passover in AD 27 to Passover in AD 28, and therefore the imprisonment of John would have been considerably less than a year. It seems that John was put in prison not too long after he baptized Jesus because Jesus had not yet gone into Galilee and started his teaching nor had called out his disciples to follow him, who were later to be the apostles (Mark 1:14-16). However, John was imprisoned after Passover of AD 27 (compare John 2:13ff with John 3:22-24). John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod Antipas at his birthday celebration, but unfortunately, we do not know when Herod’s birthday was. However, it was before the feeding of the 5,000 (Matt. 14:13ff; Mark 6:32ff; Luke 9:10ff; John 6:1ff), and thus before the Feast of Tabernacles, which occurred in our September/October (John 7:1ff). Actually, it was likely some months before Tabernacles, likely sometime in the summer months. Thus, if John was imprisoned in our April or May of AD 27, and beheaded by October that same year at the latest, the most he would have been in prison is 6 months, but it was likely a much shorter time.

Mat 14:5

**“people.”** The Greek is “multitude” or “crowd,” but there was no gathering of people where John was imprisoned; this refers to all the people in Herod’s territory who supported John.

Mat 14:6

**“the daughter of Herodias.”** Her name was Salome (see commentary on Mark 6:22).

Mat 14:13

**“he withdrew from there in a boat by himself to a solitary place.”** The feeding of the 5,000 is in all four Gospels (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:1-13. The feeding of the 4,000 is in Matt. 15:29-39; Mark 8:1-10).

Matthew 14:13 tells us that Jesus went away from the crowds to spend time alone with his disciples because he had just gotten the news about the death of his cousin, the great prophet John the Baptist. That is true, but it is only part of the reason Jesus wanted some time alone with his disciples. The Gospel of Mark omits the part about Jesus being told about John’s death, although that might be assumed in the record, but Mark adds another reason Jesus wanted to get away with his disciples. Jesus had sent out the Twelve to go to the cities of Israel and heal the sick, cast out demons, and proclaim the Good News about the Kingdom of God (Mark 6:7-12). When the disciples gathered back to Jesus, he wanted to make sure they had some rest time, because they were not even getting enough time to eat (Mark 6:30-32).

Once again we can learn an important lesson from Jesus Christ: self-care is important. Many people are not good at taking care of themselves, and that is to their hurt. We only have one body, and if we want to do well in life and be mentally, physically, and emotionally whole and healed, we have to take care of it. We have to rest, eat well, get exercise, and think godly thoughts. But the Devil and the world are very good at talking us out of those things. Christians need to learn that saying “Yes” to one thing is saying “No” to another, and we must have the discipline to say “No,” even to things we want to do, if we have not yet said “Yes” to the things we need to do for ourselves. Many good and fun things are not good if they keep us from godly self-care.

Mat 14:14

**“a large crowd.”** The multitudes in Matthew 14:13 had gathered into a crowd and met him on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Mat 14:20

**“twelve baskets full.”** See commentary on Matthew 15:37.

Mat 14:21

**“not including women and children.”** If we add the women and children, it is very possible the crowd that ate was 10,000 or more.

Mat 14:22

The record in Matthew 14:22-33 (Mark 6:45-51; John 6:15-21) is a good example of how different Gospels treat the records of Christ’s life, because all four Gospels record Jesus feeding the 5,000, so what happens after that could be similar. We must keep in mind that although there is a “total picture” of what Jesus did, each Gospel portrays that in a different way to reveal and emphasize different things. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John record Jesus walking on the water, but Luke says nothing about it at all. Only Matthew records that Peter walked on the water. This no doubt helped people recognize the primacy of Peter in relation to the rest of the apostles, and also showed that Peter’s personal doubt was created by fear and taking his eyes off Jesus, a valuable lesson. By leaving the Peter event off, Mark is better able to emphasize the hardness of the disciples’ hearts and that they had not gained insight from the multiplying of the loaves, something that would have been overshadowed by the Peter incident. Thus Mark emphasizes that we are all supposed to learn from the examples of Jesus—what Jesus did and what is recorded about him is not just for us to know, but for us to learn from in our own walks. The Gospel of John does not focus on Jesus’ interaction with the apostles at all, but keeps its focus on what Jesus said and did, thus elevating him as the Son of God.

**“immediately he made.”** See commentary on Mark 6:45.

Mat 14:24

**“a long way from the land.”** The Greek is literally, “many stadia away from the land,” and a “stadia” was about 607 feet or 185 meters. Since the text simply says “many stadia,” the translation “a long way” represents the distance well enough without introducing the stadia measurement into the text.

Mat 14:25

**“fourth watch of the night.”** Here in Matthew 14:25 we see the night had four watches. At the time of Christ, both the Jews and Romans divided the night into four watches, each being three hours long: 6-9 p.m., 9 p.m. -12 a.m., 12-3 a.m., and 3-6 a.m. So the fourth watch of the night started at our 3 a.m. (see commentary on Mark 6:48 and 13:35). So this is sometime between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. Since the apostles had started sometime before sunset (Mark 6:47) and it was now at least 3 a.m., so the apostles had been rowing for at least six hours to go about five or six miles.

**“the lake.”** The “sea” of Galilee is actually quite a small lake, only 7 miles (11.2 km) across and 12 miles (19.3 km) long, and the entire lake can be seen from the escarpments on both the east and west sides. The Greek word *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα), lake, sea, or ocean, does not really refer to the size of the body of water, and thus has to be translated into the English “lake,” “sea,” or “ocean” by knowing the body of water that is being referred to (see commentary on Matt. 4:18).

Mat 14:26

**“ghost”** is from the Greek *phantasma*, which means “an appearance.” Something that would appear and be of the spiritual world. Ghost is not exactly a perfect translation, since “ghost” means the spirit of a dead person, while “*phantasma*” might be any sort of spiritual appearance. Nevertheless, the disciples yelling, “It is an appearance!” just does not seem to do the verse justice.

Mat 14:30

**“saw.”** The Greek is *blepō* (#991 βλέπω), and it means to see, but its semantic range includes, “to notice, to pay attention to.” Peter was so focused on the Lord that even though he and the others had been fighting the wind, he did not pay attention to it. However, once he was away from the boat and out on the water, his attention once again turned to the strength of the wind and he “saw” it clearly.

Mat 14:33

**“bowed down before him.”** See commentary on Matthew 2:2, “homage.”

Mat 14:34

**“Gennesaret.”** This is where Jesus and the disciples landed, and it is confirmed in Mark 6:53. The records of Matthew, Mark, and John must be understood in light of the storm, which was coming from the northwest, so that the apostles on the boat were rowing right into it. Jesus apparently told them to go “toward” (*pros* = toward) Bethsaida (Mark 6:45), and the Gospel of John says that the apostles were sailing “to” (*eis* = to, into) Capernaum (John 6:17). Thus, Capernaum is likely where Jesus told the apostles to go. Bethsaida was almost a suburb of Capernaum, which was a major city, and the site of a tax office and Roman troops, so for travel purposes, the names Bethsaida and Capernaum were basically synonymous. However, when Jesus got on the boat, that is not where they eventually went. Both Matthew and Mark make it clear that the boat landed at Gennesaret, which was a fertile plain just south and west of Capernaum. At the time of Christ, it was densely populated and had a small city by the same name on it. According to Josephus, date palms, figs, walnuts, olives, and grapes were all grown there. No doubt Jesus planned to go to Capernaum shortly, but landed at Gennesaret and healed people there, then made the short walk to Capernaum, where he was when the people found him (John 6:24).

**Matthew Chapter 15**

Mat 15:1

***“*Then Pharisees and experts in the law.”** This teaching about clean and unclean is more detailed in Mark 7:1-23.

Mat 15:3

**“even you yourselves.”** The *kai* (#2532 καί) before the emphatic *humeis* (#5210 ὑμεῖς) is not ‘also’ and does not place the Pharisees alongside of Jesus’ disciples [as if they too had sinned]; it signifies ‘even you yourselves,’ the very ones who are truly guilty of transgression, while they pretend to find transgression in others.”[[143]](#footnote-32161)

Mat 15:4

**“Whoever speaks evil of his father or mother.”** This is quite close to Mark 7:10 and catches the sense of the Hebrew text quite closely. Children are not to speak evil of their parents or treat them with contempt (see commentary on Exod. 21:17).

Mat 15:9

**“Moreover.”** This comes from Isaiah 29:13 in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.[[144]](#footnote-20089)

“**they worship me in vain.”** The worship of the religious leaders was “vain,” i.e., pointless, worthless, and ineffective. It does not show true allegiance to God because it is not what God commanded and, in some cases, contradicts what God commanded (or contradicts the heart of what God commanded). The Greek word translated as “worship” is *sebomai* (#4576 σέβομαι (σέβω)), which means “to express in gestures, rites, or ceremonies one’s allegiance or devotion to deity.”[[145]](#footnote-21682) *Sebomai* is not the usual word translated as “worship,” which is *proskuneō* (#4352 προσκυνέω), which is a compound word built from the preposition *pros*, “to, toward,” and the verb *kuneō*, “to kiss,” and generally refers to the custom of bowing down before or prostrating oneself before a person of higher rank or authority. Nevertheless, *sebomai* is translated as “worship” here because what the religious leaders were doing we would normally think of as an act of worship.

**“doctrines.”** The Greek word is *didaskalia* (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it were a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse, “doctrine” fits better than “teaching.”

[For more on *didaskalia* see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13.]

Mat 15:13

**“Every plant.”** Jesus is using the figure of speech hypocatastasis, comparing the Pharisees to “plants.” In the Bible, people are compared to plants (especially trees, see commentary on Luke 3:9), animals, and all kinds of things.

[For more on the figures of speech of comparison, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

Mat 15:17

**“sewer.”** The Greek word is *aphedrōn* (#856 ἀφεδρών), and it refers to a place where human waste goes: toilet, latrine, privy, sewer. By the time of Christ, many of the larger cities even in Israel had some kind of public toilets and sewer systems. Often there were seats over a kind of sluice that was periodically flushed by water. Also, some cities had very developed sewer systems. Caesarea Maritima and Scythopolis are two prime examples. For example, Caesarea, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, had a sewer system that was flushed by the tide.

Mat 15:18

**“come from the heart.”** The “heart” is the source of life. Mark 7:20-23 has a list of things that come out of the heart that is more inclusive than this list in Matthew. The Bible says in many different places that what comes out of the mouth generally originates in the heart (cf. Matt. 12:34; Luke 6:45). Although the biblical use of “heart” refers to the center of a person’s life and may include the interworking of the heart, brain, and other organs as well, modern medicine is now showing more and more each year that the actual physical heart not only has a leading role in directing the physical/chemical/emotional activities of the body but has been shown to even have stored memories. Proverbs 4:23 tells us that above all else, we are to guard our heart because from it come the issues of life.

[For more on the heart, see commentary on Prov. 4:23.]

Mat 15:19

**“insults.”** The Greek noun is *blasphēmia* (#988 βλασφημία, pronounced blas-fay-'me-ah) and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmia*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Mat 15:20

**“does not defile a person.”** The Mosaic Law stated that eating certain foods made a person “unclean” in the eyes of God (Lev. 11:4-24), but Jesus changed the Levitical law on food and made it all “clean” (cf. Mark. 7:19).

Mat 15:22

**“And Look!”** This record of the Canaanite woman is also in Mark 7:24-30. The Greek word translated “look” is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Son of David.”** “Son of David” is a messianic title. It is unknown how this Canaanite woman came to know that Jesus was the Messiah, but she did. God reveals the truth to people who are humble and hungry (see commentary on Matt. 1:1).

Mat 15:23

**“as she follows us.”** The Greek reads, “from behind us,” which most versions translate “after us.” However, to cry out “after” someone can mean that you are chasing after, or “chasing,” the person (like “He is after me,” means “He is chasing me”), but that is not its meaning here. She was not chasing them. She knew they heard her and that she was being ignored. So she was walking behind them trying to get them to change their minds and help her, give her mercy. We tried to better capture the sense of the scene with “as she follows us.” Jesus was coming into the region of Tyre and Sidon, on the Phoenician coast, and was apparently walking down the road with the apostles following him. This woman followed the group, crying out as she went, “Have mercy on me!”

Mat 15:24

**“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** At first glance, Jesus’ statement concerning the healing of the Syrophoenician woman’s daughter seems hard, cold, and difficult to understand, but we must understand it in the context of his earthly mission and what God sent him to do.

The Greek word translated “sent” is the common Greek word *apostellō* (#649 ἀποστέλλω), from which we get the English word “apostle,” meaning, “one who is sent.” *Apostellō* often simply means “to send away, dismiss, allow one to depart.” However, it often has the meaning “to dispatch someone for the achievement of some objective,” and that is the meaning it has here in Matthew 15:24.[[146]](#footnote-19252) That is why R. C. H. Lenski translated the word as “commissioned,” that Jesus was only commissioned to go to the lost sheep of Israel.[[147]](#footnote-18251) Jesus was commissioned by God to go to the lost sheep of Israel; that was the specific mission God sent him on, and although that mission involved being the sin-offering for the sins of the world (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21), in his earthly ministry he was specifically to go to Israel and call it back to God.

We see evidence of Jesus’ specific mission to Israel in the fact that, earlier, when he sent his disciples out to evangelize, he told them to go only to Israelite towns. He said, “Do not go on *any* road of the Gentiles, and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans, but go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6). It is not that Jesus did not care about the Gentiles, but rather that at that time in history his specific ministry was to the Jews. That had to do with the Jews being God’s chosen people and the covenant that God made with Israel (Exod. 24:3-8). God loves the world (John 3:16) but He redeemed the world through Jesus Christ, who was a Jew and was specifically sent to the Jews first. Later he would command his disciples to evangelize the whole world (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8).

Although Jesus’ specific mission while he was on earth was to Israel and set the stage for the fulfillment of prophecies such as Isaiah 61:3, he also fulfilled the prophecies such as the ones in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 that he was to be a light to the Gentiles. We see that in the fact that Jesus did occasionally minister to Gentiles or in Gentile areas. For example, he healed people from Syria, which was a Gentile area (Matt. 4:24), a Roman soldier’s servant (Matt. 8:5-13), men afflicted by demons (Matt. 8:28-34); and a Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42). Also, after going to the region of Tyre and Sidon where he healed the woman’s demon-possessed daughter, he went into the Decapolis, a Gentile area, and healed a man who was deaf and dumb (Mark 7:31-37) and many others as well (Matt. 15:30), and he also fed the 4,000 in the same area (Matt. 15:29-39, Mark 8:1-9). But although Jesus did heal Gentiles as we see here in Matthew 15:21-28, he said what is recorded here in Matthew 15:24 to teach and remind his followers that his earthly ministry was to Israel.

However, Jesus certainly knew that his ministry would one day lead to his conquest of the whole earth and reigning over the whole earth as king, so, for example, in John 10:16 he spoke of the future when all believers would be one flock with one “shepherd” (king: the word “shepherd” was often used idiomatically for “king,” see commentary on Jer. 2:8). That is why he told his followers that he had other sheep (Gentiles) that were not of “this fold” (Israel) and that he must bring them to himself also (John 10:16), and why, after his resurrection, he told his disciples to tell the whole world about him.

Mat 15:25

**“bowed down before.”** See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

Mat 15:26

**Matthew 15:26, 27.** (Cf. Mark 7:27-28)

**“good.”** Read below.

**“pet dogs.”** The Greek uses *kunarion* (#2952 κυνάριον), which is the diminutive of “dog.” The NET text note reads, “The diminutive form originally referred to puppies or little dogs, then to house pets.” There are some contexts in which the word simply means “dogs,” but not likely here. This verse is a wonderful example of how one reading the Bible must pay attention to the cultural background involved. Although Jesus was Jewish and most of the time in the Gospels the standards of Jewish culture apply, in this verse the standards of Greek culture apply. It sometimes happened in the Greek and Roman world (although not in the Jewish world except among those who had given up being Kosher and were more apt to follow Roman customs) that “little dogs,” or “house dogs” were kept, and like our house dogs today, sometimes ate under (or beside) the table.[[148]](#footnote-22611) The word can also refer to “puppies,”[[149]](#footnote-21863) but that would probably not be the case here, since the woman was a Syrophoenician and would have been familiar with the Greek custom of having a little house dog that would eat by the table. The reference to the “little dog” is made only in the account of the Syrophoenician woman. There is no other use of *kunarion* in the Septuagint (Greek OT) or the Greek NT.

That Jesus would say “pet dogs” is amazing grace. He did not, even by implication, call her a “dog,” which in Greek culture had overtones of shamelessness or audacity in women.[[150]](#footnote-13314) Instead, by using the word “little dog,” or “housedog,” he only made a glancing reference that she did not deserve any help (but really, who does?). He opened a door of grace for her, and she walked through it. Also, he said it was not “good,” *kalos* (#2570 καλός), for the children’s bread to be thrown to the pet dogs. He did not use the word “lawful,” *exestin* (ἔξεστιν #1832). Rather, it was not “good” or “proper,” or “a fine thing to do.”

Mat 15:27

**“yet even...”** The woman is not opposing Jesus in any way. She is merely pointing out that the little dogs do get crumbs when the family eats. Also see commentary on Matthew 15:26.

Mat 15:28

**“in that moment.”** See commentary on Matthew 9:22.

Mat 15:29

**“And Jesus departed from there.”** The record of the feeding of the 4,000 is in Matthew 15:29-39 and Mark 8:1-9. Mark 7:31 tells us that when Jesus left the area of Tyre and Sidon he traveled to the area of the Decapolis, which was mostly northeast, east, and southeast of the Sea of Galilee and a Gentile area. So Jesus healed and blessed the Gentiles as he fulfilled the prophecy of being a light to the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6; 49:6).

Mat 15:31

**“glorified the God of Israel.”** This is a very good indication that many in the crowd were Gentiles, not Israelites. Jesus had been ministering in the region of Tyre and Sidon, Gentile areas, and had done a miraculous healing there of a demonized girl. Right after leaving there, the text says that “great multitudes” came to him, and it makes sense that many of those multitudes were Gentiles, and that was why they “glorified the God of Israel.” Matthew 15:31 is one of only two places in the New Testament where that phrase is used. “The God of Israel” was a common phrase in the Old Testament, and spoken by Zechariah at the birth of his son, John the Baptist (Luke 1:68), but it is not used anywhere else in the New Testament except for those two places. When the crowds were Jews, they “glorified God” (cf. Matt. 9:8; Mark 2:12; Luke 2:28; 7:16; 13:13; 18:43; etc.).

Mat 15:37

**“seven.”** Many theologians have tried to figure out what is the significance of mentioning in the record that there were “seven” baskets of leftover bread—why mention the number seven? The number seven is included in the record for a reason, and while there actually may be several different things it relates to, one of them certainly seems to be a reference to the fact that Jesus would be a blessing to the Gentiles.

To understand the feeding of the 4,000, we must read it in connection with the feeding of the 5,000. The two records both show that the Messiah will provide for God’s people (for all intents and purposes, the audience was God’s people—people who believed in Jesus or were seeking his teaching and help. Surely there were some people who were there just due to curiosity, but even they were “seekers” at some level. Non-believers stayed home and did not take the trouble to follow Jesus from place to place). So the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000 have a similar and interrelated message about the Messiah being the source of blessing for both the Jews and Gentiles, and as such the two records need to be considered together as one interconnected teaching.

The feeding of the 5,000 and the twelve baskets of leftovers point to God’s blessing on the twelve tribes of Israel. Although there were other lessons built into the “twelve baskets” of leftovers, such as that if we will feed God’s people we will be blessed ourselves—the twelve apostles fed the multitude and each got a full basket back—it seems the primary meaning is that all Israel will be blessed by the Messiah. There are many pieces of evidence that point to that. For one thing, the feeding of the 5,000 is one of the few events in Jesus’ ministry that is recorded in all four Gospels (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13). That makes sense because God wanted to magnify the fact that His Messiah would provide for Israel.

In the feeding of the 5,000, the audience was certainly almost all Jews. They came from the surrounding towns and were familiar with where Jesus was going with his apostles to get some time alone. Then, after he fed them, they were about to come and make him king (John 6:15). Furthermore, there are things in the vocabulary of the feeding of the 5,000 that point back to the Pentateuch, and the covenant promises and blessings there. For example, Jesus made the people sit in groups of hundreds and fifties (Mark 6:40; Luke 9:14). This number goes back to the way Israel was governed under the Law, when they had rulers over fifties and hundreds (Exod. 18:25). And under the Law, Israel was promised covenant blessings if they obeyed the Law, which included plenty of food (Deut. 28:4, 5, 8, 11, 12). So the evidence in the accounts, especially when contrasted with the feeding of the 4,000, shows that one of the lessons of the twelve baskets of leftovers from the feeding of the 5,000 is that the tribes of Israel would be blessed by the Messiah.

The feeding of the 4,000 has many things that point to the Messianic blessing on the Gentiles. In contrast to the feeding of the 5,000 which occurs in all four Gospels, the feeding of the 4,000 only occurs in Matthew and Mark, as if saying that although the Messiah came for Israel, the Gentiles would be blessed in him too. Furthermore, the feeding of the 4,000 occurs after Jesus goes to “the region of Tyre and Sidon” (Matt. 15:21). That was Gentile territory, although there would have been some Jews that lived there, which is why he was able to stay in a house there (Mark 7:24). But if Jesus went into the Gentile territory to minister to Jews, there is no record of it. Quite the opposite. The only healing miracle that Jesus did in that Gentile territory was to cast the demon out of a Canaanite woman’s daughter. The fact that the woman is specifically identified as a “Canaanite” (Matt. 15:22) who lived in Syrian Phoenicia (Mark 7:26) is important in tying the feeding of the 4,000 to the Messianic blessing of the Gentiles. We have seen how the feeding of the 5,000 has connections to the Law, now we will see that the feeding of the 4,000 does too. In the Law, the Israelites were told that God would “drive out” the seven nations that were in the Promised Land so God could give the land to Israel (Deut. 7:1) and if any Canaanites remained in the land, the Israelites were to destroy them totally (Deut. 7:2). That the only miracle Jesus is recorded as doing in the region of Tyre and Sidon is healing the daughter of a Canaanite is a clear sign that the Messianic blessing is now extended to them through the Messiah, and it is a fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah was to be a “light to the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). When Jesus left the area of Tyre and Sidon, no doubt a group of Gentiles followed him for the same reason crowds of Jews followed him—to hear him and see the miracles he did. But when Jesus left the area, he did not go back to Jewish territory. Mark tells us that he went to the Sea of Galilee and then to its east coast, “the region of the Decapolis,” which was also territory populated by Gentiles (Mark 7:31). There he healed a deaf-mute, and the people there spread the word about him (Mark 7:31-37).

By now there would have been a large number of Gentiles following Jesus from the region of Tyre and Sidon and from the Decapolis. He went up onto a mountain and did many healings (Matt. 15:29-31), and they “praised the God of Israel.” That the crowd would “praise the God of Israel” points to the fact that this crowd was not primarily Jews. When Jesus did miracles among the Jews, they “praised God” (cf. Matt. 9:8; Mark 2:12; Luke 13:13; 18:43; etc.). Then, after the healings, Jesus fed the 4,000 and took up seven large baskets full of leftovers. In thinking about the feeding of the 5,000 and feeding of the 4,000 we see that the record of the feeding of the 5,000 has distinctive Jewish elements throughout it, and it makes sense that twelve baskets of leftover bread would point to covenant blessings on the twelve tribes of Israel. Then, the feeding of the 4,000 has distinctive Gentile elements, and the seven baskets of leftover bread hearken back to the seven Gentile nations in Canaan that God drove out before Israel that, along with the other Gentiles, will receive a blessing through God’s Messiah.

**“baskets full.”** In the feeding of the 5,000 (Matt. 14:13-21), the Greek word for “baskets” is *kophinos* (#2894 κόφινος), a wicker or reed basket. However, in the feeding of the 4,000 (Matt. 15:29-39), the Greek word for basket is *spuris* (#4711 σπυρίς), which refers to a much larger reed or wicker basket, or a woven hamper. It was one of these larger woven baskets that the disciples put Paul into when they let him down from the wall of Damascus (Acts 9:25). Given the size of the different types of baskets, it is possible that there could have been as much food left over from the feeding of the 4,000 as there was from the feeding of the 5,000.

Mat 15:38

**“And those who ate were 4,000 men.”** The feeding of the 4,000 is in Matt. 15:29-39; Mark 8:1-10. The feeding of the 5,000 is in all four Gospels (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:1-13).

Mat 15:39

**“Magadan.”** Some manuscripts read “Magdala.” It seems that Magadan was contiguous with “Dalmanutha” (Mark 8:10). Magadan also was either Magdala or was included in Magdala. The name “Magdala” is most likely derived from *migdal*, the Hebrew word for “tower,” and Magdala is located at an important road juncture and so it makes sense that at one time there was a well-fortified tower there. Magdala was the hometown of Mary Magdalene; Mary of Magdala.

**Matthew Chapter 16**

Mat 16:1

**“And the Pharisees and Sadducees came.”** This record is also in Mark 8:10-13.

Mat 16:5

**“to the other side *of the lake*.”** The “sea” of Galilee is actually quite a small lake, only 7 miles (11.2 km) across and 12 miles (19.3 km) long, and the entire lake can be seen from the escarpments on both the east and west sides. The Greek word *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα), lake, sea, or ocean, does not really refer to the size of the body of water, and thus has to be translated into the English “lake,” “sea,” or “ocean” by knowing the body of water that is being referred to (see commentary on Matt. 4:18).

Mat 16:12

**“the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”** In Matthew 16:12, the “leaven” of the Pharisees and Sadducees was false doctrine. In contrast, in Luke 12:1, which is a totally different context, Jesus states that the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. Both are related, because the Pharisees and Sadducees taught false doctrine, but did not even keep their own false doctrine (cf. Matt. 23:2-4; Luke 11:46).

Mat 16:14

**“Elijah.”** For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was called “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.

Mat 16:16

**“You are the Christ.”** This statement of Peter’s is in Matthew 16:16, Mark 8:29, and Luke 9:20.

Mat 16:18

**“I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my congregation.”** We can see from the context and grammar that Jesus is addressing Peter here. Jesus said, “I also say to you [singular] that you [singular] are Peter and on this rock I will build my congregation.” There have been many different meanings suggested for what Jesus said. Some of these are that Peter is the rock on which Christ built the church and therefore is the first of a long line of Popes; that Peter is the rock but only in his role of leading the early church; that the confession of Christ as the Son of God was the rock; that Christ himself is the rock; and that the place where they were standing in Caesarea Philippi was the rocky cliff area where Christ would start to build his church.

To understand what Christ said, we must note that there are two words for “rock” in the verse, and the two words are different in Greek. The first is the word translated “Peter,” which is *petros* in Greek and is masculine and refers to a rock, a piece of stone (it could be large or small). The second word for rock is *petra*, and it is feminine and refers to a cliff or rocky shelf or rocky peak. It is sometimes argued that Jesus spoke Aramaic and in Aramaic there was no difference between the words, but William Hendriksen correctly argued: “…we do not know enough about Aramaic to make this assertion. We have the inspired Greek text and we must be guided by that.”[[151]](#footnote-31723) Lenski adds, “this appeal to the Aramaic substitutes something unknown and hypothetical for what is fully known and insured as true on the basis of the inspired Greek of the holy writers themselves.”[[152]](#footnote-22435) Hendriksen adds, “If Jesus had intended to convey the thought that he was going to build his church on Peter he would have said, ‘and on you I will build my church,’” and that point is made by other scholars as well. Also, for Jesus to address Peter as “you” twice in the sentence, but then as “this” argues against Peter being the rock Jesus would build on.

Besides the grammatical evidence in Matthew 16:18 itself, there is a lot of evidence that the “rock” on which Jesus would build his church is not Peter. We must remember that Jesus made this statement in front of all the apostles and perhaps some disciples as well (Matt. 16:13-20). Yet not too long after that time, the apostles were arguing about who among them was the greatest (Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48). Then, later, the mother of James and John asked Jesus if her two sons could be the number one and two men in his kingdom, something that angered the other ten apostles (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45). And even though Jesus tried to teach them how to be great in the Kingdom it was an important subject to them and so they argued about it again at the Last Supper (Luke 22:24). If Jesus had told Peter in front of everyone that he would build his congregation on Peter, there would have been no further argument about who was greatest, and the fact that the apostles argued about who was the greatest right up to the Last Supper shows that Jesus had not made any statement about it. Also, Ephesians 2:20 says the Church is built upon the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. Nothing is said about the Church being built on Peter.

Also, the argument that Peter was the “rock” Jesus spoke of, but only in his role as leader of the early church, falls apart when we see that in Peter’s lifetime, his role as leader of the Church vanishes. By the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), it was Jesus’ brother James (not the apostle James, who was executed by Herod; Acts 12:2) who had the final word, not Peter (Acts 15:13-21). Earlier, Paul had to confront Peter about his error (Gal. 2:11), and Peter had stated that his ministry would be to the Jews, not the Gentiles (Gal. 2:6-9). So, as Jesus expanded his Church to include many Gentiles, Peter declined to go in that direction and decided to focus on the Jews. But it was the Gentiles who, after Acts 15, added the most to the early Church. So to say that the early Church was built on Peter is simply not true. Given all that, the idea that Peter is the rock on which Jesus would build his church must be rejected.

Having rejected Peter as the “rock,” there is no exact way to determine what the “rock” Jesus referred to was. Two very likely suggestions are that the “rock” Jesus referred to was Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16), and that the rock Jesus spoke of was he himself. In favor of the “rock” being the confession of Christ is the wording of Matthew 16:18, that it seems strange for Jesus to speak about a “rock” in the third person if he was referring to himself, and also the fact that people join the Church by believing in and confessing Christ (cf. Rom. 10:9). In favor of Jesus himself being the rock is that the Bible refers to him as the foundation of the Church (1 Cor. 3:11). Scholars are divided on the issue, and we should also consider that Jesus might have been purposely ambiguous because he spoke in such a way as to include both meanings. In the end, the fact that we cannot figure out with certainty exactly what Jesus meant does not affect how we think about the Church. Jesus Christ is clearly the foundation of the Church, and the Church is built person by person as people confess Christ as Lord, as Peter did.

**“congregation.”** This is the translation of the word commonly translated “Church,” *ekklēsia* (#1577 ἐκκλησία). *Ekklēsia* has a wide range of meanings, but none of them refer to a physical building. The word *ekklēsia* refers to an assembly of people, any assembly of people for any reason. It does not have to be a religious gathering. The gathering of people in Acts 19:32 was a mob coming together with no particular ethnic or religious affiliation, in fact, the Bible says, “most of them did not know why they had come together” (ESV). In Acts 7:38 the term is used of the Jewish throng, including some Gentiles (Exod. 12:38), who were led out of Egypt by Moses. Another example is Matthew 18:17, where the “congregation” could refer to a congregation of Jews or the Church. In that verse, “congregation” has a multidispensational application. So the term *ekklēsia* does not solely apply to the Christian Church.

In modern English the term “Church” refers to a Christian building of worship, however, this is not how the word *ekklēsia* is used in Scripture. Translating *ekklēsia* as “Church” causes some problems, primarily because almost everyone who reads “Church” thinks of the Christian Church. But, as we have seen, *ekklēsia* does not always refer to Christians.

We do need to recognize that the most common use of *ekklēsia* is referring to Christians, but as a congregation of people, not as a “church” building. This is made clear in Colossians 1:18: Christ is “the head of the body, the church,” which refers to the entire world congregation of Christians (Cf. also: Acts 5:11). The term *ekklēsia* can be used solely of a particular local assembly of believers (e.g., 3 John 1:10), or to specific groups, which by extension applies to the entire Church (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:22). Lastly, *ekklēsia* is used in Revelation (2:1, etc.) in regard to the “congregation” after the Rapture. These are Jews and some God-fearing Gentiles, but not Christians who have been Raptured off the earth before the book of Revelation starts (see commentary on Rev. 2:1).

**“gates of the grave.”** This was a Semitic idiom for death. The word picture being painted was that when a person died, he entered the world of death (*Sheol* = “gravedom,” the state of being dead) and the gates were shut behind him and he could not get back to the world of life. For the Hebrews who correctly believed that when a person died he was actually dead and not alive in any form, the “gates of the grave” were a picture of the permanence of death, and the only way to reenter life was by resurrection. However, most cultures in the ancient world believed in some form of life after death, and in some of those cultures in the Middle East, dying was thought of as going through a gate or even a series of gates. The NIV Study Bible (1984 edition) text note on Job 17:16 says: “In Mesopotamian literature, all who entered the netherworld passed through a series of seven gates.”

*Sheol* was the Hebrew word for the state of being dead. It was not the act of dying or the grave, which was the physical place where dead bodies were, Sheol was the state of being dead. People who were dead were said to be “in *Sheol*,” in the state of death. The Old Testament refers to the gates of *Sheol* (Job 17:16; Isa. 38:10), and the “gates of death” (Job 38:17; Ps. 9:13; 107:18), and other literature of the time period does too, such as the Apocrypha. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus is speaking of building his “congregation,” which will consist of saved people from Israel and Gentiles, and he knows that some will be alive when he comes and some will be dead, so he makes the point of saying that the “gates of the grave will not prevail against it.” Jesus knew the reason that the gates of the grave would not overcome his congregation was that he would raise those who were dead back to life; the gates of the grave would open and the dead would come out. The Old Testament and Gospels have a number of clear verses about the dead being raised, including Job 19:25-26; Isaiah 26:19; Ezekiel 37:12-14; Daniel 12:2, 13; Hosea 13:14; and John 5:28, 29.

The righteous people who have died will be raised in one of the resurrections (while dead Christians will be raised in the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-17)). Dead people who are resurrected in the “first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5, 6), also called the “Resurrection of the Righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15), and “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29), will be part of the Messianic Kingdom on earth and live forever with Jesus.

There are some commentators who historically have made “death” figurative for the powers of death or evil that cause death and so the way the phrase “gates of hell” is generally used in Christendom is that it means that demons and the powers of the Devil (“hell”) will not overcome the Church. However, although it is true that demons will not overcome the Church, that is not what the verse is saying. Jesus was not making the point that the Devil would not be able to overcome the Church, he was making the point that death could not defeat his Church. A more idiomatic translation of this phrase would be, “the gates of the grave will not be strong enough to hold believers in a state of death.”

[For more on Sheol, see commentary on Rev. 20:13. For more on dead people being dead, lifeless in every way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the Rapture and the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

Mat 16:19

**“I will give to you the keys.”** The “you” is singular; Jesus is speaking most directly to Peter, but the other apostles are included, as we see from John 20:23.

**“whatever you forbid on earth *must* be already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth *must* be already permitted in heaven.”** On the flyleaf of the paper cover to *The New Testament: A Private Translation in the Language of the People*, by Charles B. Williams (1953), the Greek grammarian Mantey, introduced the translation by saying that Williams did a better job of translating the Greek verb into English than any other New Testament he had studied. One of the examples he gave was Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. These are almost always translated as: (NIV) “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

However, the phrase, “will be bound in heaven” is not a good translation of the Greek verb. The “to be” verb is not a simple future, but rather a future passive periphrastic (and thus is most accurately translated “shall have been”), while the verb “bind” is a perfect passive participle. Williams translates the verse as:

Matt. 16:19: “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be what is already permitted in heaven.”  
Matt. 18:18: “...whatever you forbid on earth must be already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be already permitted in heaven.”

The 1995 revision of the New American Standard Bible follows that translation quite closely: Matt. 16:19: “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” Matt. 18:18: “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

Williams’ translation not only fits the Greek, but is how ministry actually works. God’s ministers do not make commands that God must then follow. Rather, God’s ministers work hard to be aware of what God is doing and then follow His lead. God’s ministers follow God’s guidance, so what we bind or loose on earth must be inside the will of God, or what He has first done in heaven. Jesus himself worked that way, even as he said over and over: “So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise’” (John 5:19 ESV). “I am not able to do anything on my own. As I hear, I judge.…” (John 5:30). “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38 ESV). “…I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me” (John 8:28 ESV). “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works” (John 14:10 ESV).

It is clear that even Jesus did not bind and loose on his own, without knowing the Father’s will. Similarly, we also must know what God has already bound or loosed in heaven before we try to act on earth. It is appropriate that when Jesus was giving Peter the keys to the kingdom, he also told Peter that he walk in the will of God and not try to bind or loose on his own. The ministry does not belong to people, it belongs to God and Jesus, and the minister of the Lord follows the leading of the Lord.

Robertson provides a wonderful explanation of this difficult verse, based on his extensive knowledge of Greek and understanding of the use of the language at the time by the Rabbis. He writes:

“The same power here given to Peter belongs to every disciple of Jesus in all the ages. Advocates of papal supremacy insist on the primacy of Peter here and the power of Peter to pass on this supposed sovereignty to others. But this is all quite beside the mark. We shall soon see the disciples actually disputing again (Matt. 18:1) as to which of them is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven as they will again (Matt. 20:21) and even on the night before Christ’s death. Clearly, neither Peter nor the rest understood Jesus to say here that Peter was to have supreme authority. What is added shows that Peter held the keys precisely as every preacher and teacher does. To ‘bind’ (*dêsêis*) in rabbinical language is to forbid, to ‘loose’ (*lusêis*) is to permit. Peter would be like a rabbi who passes on many points. …The teaching of Jesus is the standard for Peter and for all preachers of Christ. Note the future perfect indicative (*estai dedemenon, estai lelumenon*), a state of completion. All this assumes, of course, that Peter’s use of the keys will be in accord with the teaching and mind of Christ. The binding and loosing is repeated by Jesus to all the disciples (Matt. 18:18). Later after the Resurrection Christ will use this same language to all the disciples (John 20:23), showing that it was not a special prerogative of Peter. He is simply first among equals because on this occasion he was spokesman for the faith of all. …Every preacher uses the keys of the kingdom when he proclaims the terms of salvation in Christ.”[[153]](#footnote-18449)

Robertson correctly states (above) that the Greek is a future perfect indicative, and could literally be translated “will have been bound…will have been loosed.” As he points out, this construction indicates a state of completion. Williams understands this when he translates the verse such that what we allow or forbid must be inside the will of God, or already allowed or forbidden in heaven. If God had wanted the verse to say that what we bind on earth will then be bound in heaven, the Greek would have been worded quite differently than it is.

Mat 16:21

**“From that time Jesus began to show to his disciples.”** Once the disciples realized that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus began to tell them that he must suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. Jesus taught about his suffering, death, and resurrection many times. He taught about it right after the disciples recognized him as the Christ (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31, 32; Luke 9:22). Then he taught about it again immediately after the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:9-12; Mark 9:9-13); then again when he was in Galilee shortly after the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:22, 23; Mark 9:31, 32; Luke 9:43-45), then again at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 8:21, 28); then again while he was going up to Jerusalem for the Passover, at which time he would be killed (Matt. 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34); and then again when he was in Jerusalem for the Passover (Matt. 26:2; cf. John 12:7). In spite of his clear teaching about it, however, they did not understand what he meant.

[For more on Jesus’ teaching about his suffering and death, see commentary on Luke 18:34.]

**“be raised *from the dead*.”** The words “from the dead” are added for clarity. Jesus would be killed and after three days, “rise,” which would have to mean rise from the dead. This teaching of Jesus was very important, and is repeated in Matthew 16:21, Mark 8:31, and Luke 9:22.

Mat 16:22

**“And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.”** The record of Peter rebuking Jesus is only in Matthew and Mark.

**“never, ever.”** The Greek double negative *ou mē* is usually translated “by no means” in the REV. However, in this case, the reader may think that Peter is saying that Jesus could not be killed by any means known to man. The “never, ever” makes the point clear and preserves the double use of “no.”

The disciples did not expect Jesus to be killed and then raised from the dead. That is simply not what most first-century Jews believed about the Messiah, so they did not understand what Jesus was speaking of when he spoke of being raised from the dead (see commentary on Luke 18:34).

Mat 16:23

**“Get behind me, Adversary!”** The Greek is *hupagō opisō satanas*, “Go behind me, Adversary!” This is a very strong rebuke. Jesus is calling Peter an “Adversary,” and is likely comparing him by the figure hypocatastasis to the Devil.

[For more on the figure of speech hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

The Greek is similar to what Jesus said to the Adversary in Matthew 4:10, *hupagō Satanas* “Go away, Adversary!” It is most likely that what Jesus said to Peter was just a rebuke meaning “Get away from me”;[[154]](#footnote-14652) “Get out of my sight.”[[155]](#footnote-29298) However, the addition of *opisō* (“behind, after”), which can in certain contexts be translated “follow,” (“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”; Matt. 4:19, ESV) has led some people to conclude that Jesus is saying in essence, “Get following me,” meaning, “become a disciple again.” Although that is a lexical possibility, there are a couple of reasons that militate against it. For one thing, if Jesus was telling Peter to be a follower again, it seems that he would not have added “Adversary.” After all, “Follow me again, Adversary,” does not seem very likely. Secondly, early scribes ascribed the same phrase to the Adversary himself in Luke 4:8. Although modern textual research shows that the phrase was added later, many Greek texts in the Western family have the same phrase in Luke 4:8 when Jesus was speaking to the Adversary (which is why “Get thee behind me, Satan” appears in the KJV). Thus it is clear that the early scribes did not think it was a request to return to being a proper follower, or disciple. Given the evidence, it seems that Jesus was strongly rebuking Peter, saying in essence, “Go away from me, Adversary,” a harsh rebuke that would have gotten Peter’s attention immediately, and caused him to think about the seriousness of the situation.

**“Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the important meaning of the word “Satan” to be lost. For more information on it, see commentary on Mark 1:13.

[For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Mat 16:24

**“Then Jesus said to his disciples.”** This record is in Matthew 16:24-28; Mark 8:34-9:1; and Luke 9:23-27. Matthew says Jesus is speaking with his disciples, which was the major intent of what he was saying, however, Mark and Luke point out that the multitude was there also and was listening to this part of what he was teaching. What Jesus taught about him being the Messiah and suffering and dying was only taught to the disciples, which is why for this teaching he had to call the multitude to him.

**“he must.”** Jesus’ statement contains three imperative verbs: “deny,” “take up” [lift up], and “follow.” In some cases, the imperative verb has the sense of an invitation, hence the traditional translation, “let him.” In this context, however, the sense of the verse is not an invitation, but a command, and a number of versions pick up on that fact (cf. HCSB, NAB, NET, NIV, and The Source New Testament). However, in this case, the first two imperatives are aorist while the last is present tense, which makes a difference (see commentary on Mark 8:34).

**“take up his cross.”** To “take up one’s cross” is to be willing to do what is right for the sake of Christ even if you do not want to (like Christ in Gethsemane who did not want to be crucified), and also to suffer for Christ if doing the will of God means suffering (1 Pet. 3:17; 4:9; cf. Phil. 1:29). Carrying one’s cross is mentioned several times in the Gospels (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:27).

The phrase “take up one’s cross” comes from the Roman custom of crucifixion and the fact that it often occurred that the person about to be crucified had to carry his own cross or a piece of it, just as Jesus and then Simon had to carry the cross-piece of Jesus’ cross (John 19:16-17; Matt. 27:31-32). Although the custom of crucifixion was Roman, the dominance of Rome at the time of Christ was such that the whole Mediterranean world and the Middle East were familiar with it, and thus understood what Jesus meant when he said that anyone who followed him must take up their cross.

Sadly, the term “taking up one’s cross” or “bearing one’s cross” has been misunderstood and misused in Christendom. It does not refer to “suffering” in general. The wicked suffer for many reasons, but they do not suffer for the cross. Furthermore, much of the suffering righteous people endure is not related to following Jesus.

Jesus was not speaking of the fact that everyone suffers, he was specifically referring to the fact that godly people who openly follow him will suffer (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12). Jesus knew that the Devil has so orchestrated life that people who live godly lives will suffer, and it is not right or godly for a disciple of Christ to act like the people of the world act and thus try to avoid the suffering that comes with being a follower of Christ. Jesus said, “he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” The true disciple “must” be willing to suffer for Christ, as difficult as that suffering can be.

It should be noted that in Luke 9:23 Jesus says that one must take up their cross “daily.” The difficulties of life and the ongoing war between Good and Evil is such that there can be daily struggles, and the believer must be mentally prepared to take up their cross and struggle against evil day after day.

[For more on the transfer of the cross from Jesus to Simon, see commentary on John 19:17. For more on the chronology of the events of the last week of Jesus’ life, see commentary on John 18:13.]

Mat 16:25

**“life” (2x).** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. However, although the interpretation of “lose his life” is to die, what Christ said has a wider application, because often, for the work of Christ, the believer “loses their life” in the sense of giving up things that they desire or want to do. The believer must be willing to die for Christ if that is what is called for, but they also must be willing to give up things they want for the cause of Christ.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“because of me.”** For an explanation of this phrase, see the commentary on Matthew 5:11.

Mat 16:26

**“life” (2x).** The Greek word is *psuchē*, as in Matt. 16:25. It is used twice in verse 25 of the life of the body, and it is expanded in this verse to be life in general, both here and the hereafter, which is why many versions translate it “life” in verse 25 but “soul” in verse 26 (ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV). We felt it was better to translate the word the same way in these two verses and point out that “life” can be just our physical life or both our physical and everlasting life.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Mat 16:27

**“about to come”**[[156]](#footnote-16136) Jesus spoke of his Second Coming and the events that surround it quite often, although at the time, the disciples did not realize that he was speaking about a Second Coming. They thought that Jesus’ conquering the earth was going to happen later on in his ministry; they did not yet know, and never really understood until after his resurrection, that he was going to die. Yet now, with 20/20 hindsight, we can see some things he taught are about his second coming (Matt. 16:27 (cf. Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26); Matt. 24:30-44 (Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27); Matt. 25:31-46; 26:64 (Mark 14:62); Mark 8:38; Luke 12:40; 17:24-30; John 14:3, 18; 21:22). The Old Testament also is worded such that it seemed the Messiah was only going to come one time. Nevertheless, we today can look at the Old Testament and see that some of them are speaking of Jesus’ Second Coming even if the people of the time did not know it (cf. Isa. 63:1-6, Dan. 2:34-35, 44; and Zech. 14:3-6, and there are many more that speak of Christ ruling the earth, which we today know he will do after his Second Coming.

The “Second Coming” is not “the Rapture,” which is a totally different event that is best described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. In the Rapture, Jesus does not land on earth, but Christians are taken up into the air to be with Christ. There is a debate among Christians who believe in the Rapture (some do not believe there will be one) as to exactly when it will occur and whether it is before all the tribulation described in Revelation, during it, or after it, but all agree that the Rapture and the “Second Coming” when Christ physically comes to earth and conquers it, are different events.

**“with his angels in the glory of his Father.”** In the future, there will be a time of great tribulation; a time of terrible destruction and death. The Old Testament prophets spoke of it often (see commentary on Dan. 12:1), Jesus Christ taught about it (Matt. 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) and it is described in some detail in the book of Revelation which says there will be seal judgments, trumpet judgments, thunder judgments, and bowl judgments. That time of great tribulation will end when Jesus Christ comes down to earth and fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth (Rev. 19:11-21). Then Jesus will set up his 1,000-year kingdom on earth. There will be the resurrection of the righteous (the first resurrection; Rev. 20:1-5) and the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46), and Jesus will reward those people for what they had done for him. Other scriptures also speak of Jesus coming with his angels when he comes to earth (Matt. 13:41; 16:27; 24:31; 25:31; Mark 8:38; 13:27; Luke 9:26).

[For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment, see commentaries on Matt. 25:32 and 25:33. For more about Jesus’ future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“he will repay.”** Jesus Christ stands at the right hand of God and is the agent through whom God acts. Note that Romans 2:16 says that “God, through Jesus Christ, will judge what people have kept secret.” Jesus knew that he was going to be God’s agent even before his death and resurrection, so he said, “…the Father does not judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22; cf. Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16).

[For more on Jesus Christ judging as the agent of God, see commentary on Rom. 14:12.]

**“repay.”** The teaching that on Judgment Day people will get what they deserve, good or bad, based on what they have done in their life is taught many times in Scripture (e.g., Job. 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; see commentary on Ps. 62:12). The Greek word translated as “repay” is *apodidōmi* (#591 ἀποδίδωμι), and it means to give or give out; to pay, repay, or fulfill a contractual obligation, to reward or give a recompense. It is used in both a positive sense (Matt. 6:4) and a negative, or bad sense (Matt. 12:36). In this verse, the word “repay” can refer to a good repayment if the person has obeyed God, or a bad repayment if the person has disobeyed God. Those people who have completely ignored God and not even gotten saved will be “repaid” by being thrown into the Lake of Fire and burned up (see commentary on Rev. 20:10). Those people who have gotten saved will be “repaid” with everlasting life, and also rewarded in the future Millennial Kingdom, for what they have done for Christ (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil”).

Mat 16:28

**“some of those who are standing here who will absolutely not taste of death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”** Jesus taught the same thing in Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27. “Taste of death” is an idiom that means “die,” and Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, and Luke 9:27 are some of the very clearest scriptures that show us that Jesus taught that the end of this age and his Millennial Kingdom were going to come very soon. The “kingdom” that Jesus taught was going to come before some of the people he was speaking to would die is his Millennial Kingdom on earth. This “kingdom” was the primary subject of his teaching ministry, and it would be established when he came back to earth in power and glory with his angels, as Matthew 16:27 says.

The reason that Matthew 16:28 is problematic is that in spite of what Jesus said about some of his disciples not dying before they saw the Kingdom come in power, all of them are now dead and the Son of Man has still not come in his kingdom. Theologians who do not believe that Christ can be mistaken in what he said have given various possible explanations for what Christ said, and these will be handled further on in this commentary entry.

What Jesus said is very clear if we understand that he taught that his Second Coming would occur shortly after his death, which is certainly implied in the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah 61:1-2 ties “the year of Yahweh’s favor” to “the day of vengeance of our God,” and there are other scriptures that do that too (cf. Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-9; 61:1-3; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 9:9-10; Mal. 3:1-3; 4:1-3). The New Testament also has many verses that show that people thought the Second Coming was going to be soon, even in the lifetimes of those people who saw Jesus when he was alive on earth (cf. Matt. 3:2; 10:23; 16:28 [Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27]; Matt. 23:35-36 [Luke 11:49]; Matt. 24:34 [Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32]; Matt. 26:64; Mark 1:15; John 4:23-24; John 5:25; 12:31; 21:22; Rom. 13:12; 16:20; 1 Cor. 7:29; Phil. 4:5; Heb. 10:37; James 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:6, 20).

Jesus taught that “the year of the Yahweh’s favor” was already happening during his ministry, because he quoted these verses in Isaiah and said, “**Today** this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). Jesus knew the acceptable year of the Lord had started, and so he taught that his Second Coming and the “day of vengeance” would be shortly after his death. In fact, the apostles expected him to establish his kingdom soon after his resurrection (Acts 1:6).

Here in Matthew 16:28, we know what Jesus meant by his “kingdom,” because the context is clear: it is the Second Coming, complete with angels, the glory of God, the Judgment, and repaying people for what they had done on earth. This has not ever happened, not back then, and not yet, but it will happen when Jesus returns to earth and sets up his Kingdom.

Many theologians do not believe Jesus could have been inaccurate in what he said about the timing of the coming of his kingdom in spite of the fact that prophets had written the Old Testament books centuries earlier and had been inaccurate about it, something that is clear in the Old Testament Scriptures themselves. Therefore, some theologians say that the “Kingdom” that Christ was referring to in Matthew 16:28 came at the Transfiguration, but there are a number of reasons why this cannot be the case. The first and foremost is that what Jesus said would happen in Matthew 16:27-28 did not happen at the Transfiguration and still has not happened. Jesus said he was going to come with his angels, and that did not happen at the Transfiguration. He also said that when the kingdom came he would, “reward each person according to what he has done,” and that has not happened yet either. The Transfiguration simply does not fulfill the words of Christ.

People knew then, as they should now, that when the Kingdom comes, it will stay. No one thought of the kingdom that figured so prominently in prophecy as being temporary, or just “coming” as a vision but not in fact. In fact, if the disciples standing there with Jesus thought he was actually saying, “some who are standing here will not die before God gives a secret vision of the future Kingdom to three men,” no one would have been particularly excited. God had given visions of the Kingdom to prophets who lived before Jesus, such as Ezekiel (chapters 37-48), and also to people who lived after Jesus, such as Paul (2 Cor. 12:1-7). Jesus’ words were exciting to the disciples specifically because they understood perfectly what he was saying: Jesus’ Kingdom on earth would come very soon.

Jesus had been teaching that the Kingdom was near since he started his ministry (Mark 1:15), and no theologian says that Christ’s message, “the Kingdom is near,” is actually saying, “the Transfiguration is near.” Most scholars agree that the Kingdom was the central theme of Christ’s teaching ministry. Therefore, we must stress that the one and only time when Jesus taught about the Kingdom, concerning which some scholars say he was speaking about the Transfiguration, is the event recorded in Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, and Luke 9:27. Their only reason for saying so is that what Jesus said about some disciples not dying did not come to pass. To say that only in that one single teaching of Jesus, “the Kingdom” refers to the Transfiguration is just sophistry to make what Jesus said in that one place become historically correct.

The Transfiguration was a vision of Christ in his glorified body. It was not “the Kingdom of Heaven come in power,” and in fact, it was not even a vision of “the Kingdom of Heaven” at all; it was a vision of the glorified Christ. This is confirmed by Peter, who wrote: “we were eyewitnesses of his majesty,” which referred at least in part to Peter seeing the glorified Christ at the Transfiguration. Peter saw the glorified Christ, but never claimed the kingdom came in any way. Matthew 17:9 clearly calls the experience a “vision” (ESV, HCSB, KJV, NASB), although the NIV and some other English translations do not clearly make that point.

Many of the prophets of old, and certainly the apostles Paul and John, had visions of the future Kingdom, but it would be wrong to say that because Isaiah, Zechariah, Paul, or John got a vision of the future Kingdom, then the Kingdom had actually come in some way. Similarly, it is wrong to say that the Transfiguration was what Jesus was referring to when he spoke of his Kingdom and the judgments associated with it.

The purpose of the Transfiguration was to help prepare Jesus for his suffering and death, and in the vision at the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus and spoke with him about his death, his “departure” from life (Luke 9:30-31). Mankind could not be redeemed if Jesus “broke” while being tortured or while he was on the cross, so God, via a vision, prepared him for his suffering. It bears repeating that this was not a vision of the coming kingdom and was not the kingdom actually coming in some way.

It is important that we understand what Peter wrote about the vision, because the fact that the Transfiguration is mentioned in 2 Peter 1:16-17 is a major reason people say Jesus was speaking of his Transfiguration. In those verses, Peter spoke of being an eyewitness of the majesty of Christ, and he was, but in a prophetic sense. Peter did not see the reality of Christ as the exalted Messianic King, he saw a prophetic image of it. The vision that Peter, James, and John saw does not mean that the “kingdom” came at the Transfiguration any more than the kingdom came when Daniel, Ezekiel, Paul, or John had a vision of it.

One of the themes of 2 Peter is to convince his readers of the divine origin of the Scripture and that it is trustworthy. So he said the power and glory of the coming of Christ was not “cunningly devised myths,” but will really happen (cf. 2 Pet. 1:11; 1:16; 2:9; 3:7-14). As evidence of that fact, he speaks of being an eyewitness of the majesty of Christ in a prophetic sense. The whole context of the mention of the Transfiguration in 2 Peter is prophecy. In fact, the Transfiguration made the word of the prophets “more reliable” (2 Pet. 1:19). To say that the Transfiguration is the fulfillment of what Jesus spoke of in Matthew 16 is to misunderstand both Jesus and Peter.

Theologians who make the Transfiguration the fulfillment of Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:28 create a couple of insurmountable problems. One of those problems is that Jesus’ words in Matthew 16 were not fulfilled at the Transfiguration: angels did not come and people were not repaid for their works. Worse, however, is the fact that if the Transfiguration was the fulfillment of what Jesus said in Matthew 16:28—that “some” of the disciples would not die until they saw Jesus coming in his kingdom—then that certainly did not come to pass. The Transfiguration was only about 8 days after Jesus spoke in Matthew 16:28 (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28), and it is certain that not just “some” of Jesus’ disciples were still alive, but likely that all of them were still alive 8 days later.

The short eight-day period puts the people who say that Jesus could not be wrong about the timing of his coming kingdom into a vice. If Jesus was not wrong about the timing of the coming of his kingdom and it actually was the Transfiguration, then he was wrong about only “some” of the believers still being alive 8 days after he taught. If he was not wrong about only “some” of his audience being alive when the kingdom came, then he was inaccurate when it came to the time of his kingdom because they are all dead. Since the evidence is that the Transfiguration was not the coming of his kingdom, and since Jesus himself made it clear that he did not actually know when the kingdom would come (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32), the evidence is that it was God who delayed the coming Kingdom of Christ, but Jesus did not know that was going to happen. We learn from reading the prophecies about the End Times in the Old Testament that God had delayed it before, so delaying it again was not out of character for God, who in His great mercy keeps giving humankind more and more time to be saved.

The renowned scholar, F. F. Bruce saw the problem with the 8 days, and did not believe the Transfiguration was what Jesus was speaking about in Matthew 16:28. He wrote: “It cannot be said that the transfiguration was the event which Jesus said would come within the lifetime of some of his hearers: one does not normally use such language to refer to something that is to take place in a week’s time.”[[157]](#footnote-17490) F. F. Bruce believed that the Kingdom came on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), but that date does not fulfill the words of Christ either. For one thing, even if Jesus’ ministry was over three years, it would still have been probable that almost all of the disciples Jesus addressed in Matthew 16 were still alive. Besides that, on the Day of Pentecost, no angels came and no one was judged and rewarded or punished. Pentecost and the Age of Grace are not the Kingdom and are not a fulfillment of what Christ said in Matthew 16:27-28. Jesus was speaking to his disciples about a kingdom, glory, angels, judgment, rewards, and repayment, all of which they understood, and none of which has occurred yet, but they will occur at the Second Coming of Christ.

Jesus said that only “some” of his followers would be alive when he came and set up his kingdom on earth, and that is because the Great Tribulation spoken about in the Old Testament, and which Jesus himself taught about, was to come between his teaching in Matthew 16:28 and his Second Coming. Daniel 12:1 speaks of that time of tribulation, and so do many of the other prophets. Jesus taught about it in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. The book of Revelation describes this tribulation in graphic detail. The majority of the people on earth will not survive the tribulation, but Jesus prophesied that some of his disciples would live through it and see him come into his kingdom, and we can assume that his prophecy would have come true if God had not delayed his Second Coming.

In summary, it needs to be restated that the one and only reason that anyone says that the Transfiguration, resurrection, Day of Pentecost, or other events that occurred in apostolic times is what Christ was talking about in Matthew 16:28 is that the people he was speaking to are dead, which makes Christ’s statement not historically accurate. But prophets and apostles such as Ezekiel, Isaiah, Joel, Zechariah, Peter, Paul, and John also wrote that the Day of the Lord was close at hand, and what they said has turned out to be inaccurate too. What we see is that God is a God of mercy, and for His own purposes He delays the timing of the End without announcing that He will do so, most likely in the hope that more people will get saved and join Him in Eternity. For his part, Jesus, like the prophets of old, could not go beyond what God revealed to him, and, in the case of the time of the Second Coming, God had indicated it was coming soon.

Although some people teach that the Kingdom of God is here now, or it was here on earth when Jesus was here, that is not reflected in what Jesus prayed or taught. In the Lord’s prayer he prayed “your kingdom come,” and in verses like Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, and Luke 9:27 he taught the Kingdom was not here yet. All the evidence indicates that the message Christ was preaching was straightforward and were the words he received from God: that the Kingdom was near (cf. John 7:16; 12:49; 14:10; 14:24). The same thing can be said for the prophets of old. Jesus and the prophets had proclaimed the Kingdom was near because God told them to say that, but then for reasons known only to Him, God delayed what He said would come soon. Many people have a hard time with this because they say that it made what Jesus said historically inaccurate, but the same thing had happened to many prophets before Jesus, and the fact is that God controls the timing of the Second Coming, and if God saw fit to delay it then we should accept what God did and not think less of Jesus, John the Baptist, or the prophets because of an action God took for His own reasons.

[There are more verses in which Jesus made statements that his coming was near (cf. Matt. 10:23; 23:35; 24:34; 26:64; Mark 1:15; Luke 11:50, 51; John 4:23; 5:25; 12:31). For more on the Kingdom of God being “near,” see commentary on Mark 1:15. For more about the wrath in the Great Tribulation and that most of the people on earth will die, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**Matthew Chapter 17**

Mat 17:1

**“led them by themselves up onto a high mountain.”** The evidence is that the “high mountain” was Mount Hermon, the start of which is immediately adjacent to Caesarea Philippi (see commentary on Mark 9:2).

Mat 17:2

**“transformed.”** The event described as the “Transfiguration” is recorded in three Gospels (Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36). In this event, Jesus was “transformed” before Peter, James, and John, and the event is referred to as “the Transfiguration” because early influential English versions used the word “transfigured” (cf. Tyndale’s New Testament, KJV). Today we would usually say “transformed,” or his “appearance changed” (GW), or his “appearance was transformed” (NLT).

The Transfiguration was a wonderful miracle of God’s grace, preparing Jesus for his torture and death by giving him a taste of his glorious future and by having him talk, via a revelation vision, with “Moses,” and “Elijah.” The Transfiguration shows how much God loved both Jesus and us, and it serves as a model and reminder that God is always at work behind the scenes to prepare people for the difficulties that they will face in life.

Many theologians do not believe Jesus could have been inaccurate in what he said about the timing of the coming of his kingdom in spite of the fact that many Old Testament prophets had been inaccurate about it, saying the Day of the Lord would come soon, but it did not come soon (cf. Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14; Isa. 13:6; 29:17; 46:13; 51:5; 56:1; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Ezek. 30:3; Obad. 1:15; Hag. 2:6-7). Therefore, some theologians say that the “Kingdom” that Christ was referring to in Matthew 16:28 came at the Transfiguration, but there are a number of reasons why this cannot be the case.

The first and foremost reason is that the Kingdom did *not* come at the Transfiguration; what Jesus said would happen in Matthew 16:27-28 did not happen at the Transfiguration and still has not happened. Jesus said he was going to come with his angels, and that did not happen, and he also said that when the kingdom came he would, “repay each *person* according to what he has done,” and that has not happened yet either. Furthermore, beyond what Christ said, the Old Testament prophecies make it clear that when Christ’s kingdom comes to earth, he will rule the earth from Jerusalem, the land and water will be healed, the animals will not be dangerous anymore, there will be plenty of food for everyone, wars will cease, and there will be other blessings as well. None of those things happened at the Transfiguration; for all those reasons and more, the Transfiguration simply does not fulfill the words of Christ, it was not the Kingdom coming in power (Mark 9:1).

People knew then, as they should know now, that when the Kingdom comes to earth, it will stay. No one would have ever thought, based on what the Old Testament, John the Baptist, and Jesus himself said about the Kingdom, that it would come in a short vision and be gone. In fact, if the disciples standing there with Jesus thought he was actually saying, “some who are standing here will not die before God gives a secret vision of the future Kingdom to three men,” no one would have been particularly excited. God had given visions of the Kingdom to prophets who lived before Jesus, such as Ezekiel (chapters 37-48), and also to people who lived after Jesus, such as Paul (2 Cor. 12:1-7). Jesus’ words were exciting to the disciples because they understood perfectly what he was saying: Jesus’ Kingdom on earth would come very soon.

Jesus had been teaching that the Kingdom was near since he started his ministry (Mark 1:15), and there is no theologian who says that Christ’s message, “the Kingdom is near,” is actually saying, “the Transfiguration is near.” Most scholars agree that the Kingdom was the central theme of Christ’s teaching ministry. Given that, it is important to point out that the one and only time when Jesus taught about the Kingdom that some scholars say he was speaking about the Transfiguration is the event recorded in Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, and Luke 9:27, and their only reason for saying that is what Jesus said about some disciples not dying did not come to pass. To say that in all of Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God, only that one time in Matthew 16:28 the “kingdom” meant “the Transfiguration” is just sophistry to make what Jesus said in that one place become historically correct. Furthermore, saying the kingdom somehow came at the Transfiguration introduces confusion into the Gospel record because Jesus prayed and taught about the Kingdom throughout his ministry, including after the Transfiguration. For example, although the Transfiguration is recorded in Luke 9, in Luke 11 Christ prayed in the Lord’s Prayer, “Your kingdom come.” If Christ prayed for the Kingdom to come soon after the Transfiguration, then it seems evident that the Transfiguration was not the Kingdom.

The purpose of the Transfiguration was to help prepare Jesus for his suffering and death, and in the vision at the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus and spoke with him about his death, his “departure” from life (Luke 9:30-31). The Kingdom could not come if the Messiah was an unacceptable sacrifice, and so his continuing to be without sin until his death was extremely important. Mankind could not be redeemed if Jesus “broke” and sinned while being tortured or while he was on the cross, so God, via a vision, prepared him for his suffering.

At the Transfiguration, Jesus was given a taste of what he would be like in the future; he was clothed in white and was glorious in appearance to help prepare him for “his departure.” Thus, the Transfiguration was not “the Kingdom of Heaven come in power,” and in fact, it was not even a vision of “the Kingdom of Heaven” at all, it was a vision of the glorified Christ. This is confirmed by Peter, who wrote: “we were eyewitnesses of his majesty,” which referred at least in part to Peter seeing the glorified Christ at the Transfiguration. Peter saw the glorified Christ, but never claimed the kingdom came in any way. Matthew 17:9 calls the experience a “vision” (ESV, HCSB, KJV, NASB). Many of the prophets of old, and certainly the apostles Paul and John, had visions of the future Kingdom, but it would be wrong to say that because Isaiah, Zechariah, Paul, or John got a vision of the future Kingdom, then the Kingdom had actually come in some way. Similarly, it is wrong to say that the vision of the glorified Christ at the Transfiguration was what Jesus was referring to when he spoke of his Kingdom and the judgments associated with it.

It is important that we understand what Peter wrote about the vision, because the Transfiguration being mentioned in 2 Peter 1:16-17 is a major reason people say Jesus was speaking of his Transfiguration. In those verses, Peter spoke of being an eyewitness of the majesty of Christ, and he was, but in a prophetic sense. Peter did not see the reality of Christ as the exalted Messianic King, he saw a prophetic image of it. But the vision that Peter, James, and John saw does not mean that the “kingdom” came at the Transfiguration any more than the kingdom came when Daniel, Ezekiel, Paul, or John had a vision of it.

One of the themes of 2 Peter is to convince his readers of the divine origin of the Scripture and that it is trustworthy. So he said the power and glory of the coming of Christ was not a “cleverly invented” story, but will really happen (cf. 2 Pet. 1:11; 1:16; 2:9; 3:7-14). As evidence of that fact, he speaks of being an eyewitness of the majesty of Christ in a prophetic sense. The whole context of the mention of the Transfiguration in 2 Peter is prophecy. In fact, the Transfiguration made “the word of the prophets more certain” (2 Pet. 1:19). To say that the Transfiguration is the fulfillment of what Jesus spoke of in Matthew 16 is to misunderstand both Jesus and Peter.

Another reason that the Transfiguration cannot be “the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom” is that there is no evidence Jesus knew it was coming until shortly before it happened. It was a miracle done by God to help prepare Christ for his death. It was not foretold in prophecy nor anticipated in Scripture in any way. It certainly caught the only three witnesses by surprise. Jesus may have been given revelation that it was going to occur shortly before it happened, but none of the disciples knew anything about it. For Christ to tell his disciples that some of them would not die until he came in his Kingdom, and then somehow to expect them to realize that he was speaking about an unknown future event and not about the well-known Kingdom they and their ancestors had expected for years makes that interpretation unacceptable. There is simply no good reason to equate the well-known and expected “Kingdom” with an unknown and unexpected vision of the glorified Christ.

Theologians who make the Transfiguration the fulfillment of Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:28 create a few insurmountable problems. One of those problems is that Jesus’ words in Matthew 16 were not fulfilled at the Transfiguration: angels did not come and people were not repaid for their works.

Another problem is that in one way or another what Jesus said turned out to be inaccurate. If the Transfiguration was the fulfillment of what Jesus said in Matthew 16:28—that “some” of the disciples would not die until they saw Jesus coming in his kingdom—then that certainly did not come to pass. The Transfiguration was only about 8 days after Jesus spoke in Matthew 16:28 (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28), and it is certain that not just “some” of Jesus’ disciples were still alive, but most or even all of them were still alive 8 days later.

The short 8-day period puts the people who say that Jesus could not be wrong about the timing of his coming kingdom into a vise. If Jesus was not wrong about the timing of the coming of his kingdom and it actually was the Transfiguration, then he was wrong about only “some” of the believers still being alive 8 days later—most or all of them would be alive. If what he said about only some of the disciples being alive when the kingdom came in power—and it has not come yet—then he was wrong because “some” of the disciples are not still alive, they are all dead now. So people who try to rescue Jesus from making a statement that is historically inaccurate do not succeed. The solution is easy and biblical: Jesus, like the prophets, said the Second Coming was near but God for His own purposes delayed the Second Coming.

The renowned scholar, F. F. Bruce saw the problem with the 8 days, and did not believe the Transfiguration was what Jesus was speaking about in Matthew 16:28. He wrote: “It cannot be said that the transfiguration was the event which Jesus said would come within the lifetime of some of his hearers: one does not normally use such language to refer to something that is to take place in a week’s time.”[[158]](#footnote-11773)

It should be pointed out that F. F. Bruce believed that the Kingdom came on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), but that date does not fulfill the words of Christ either. For one thing, even if Jesus’ ministry was over three years, it would still have been probable that almost all of the disciples Jesus addressed in Matthew 16 were still alive, not just “some” of them. Certainly, all of the apostles were still alive. Besides that, on the Day of Pentecost, no angels came and no one was judged and rewarded or punished. Pentecost and the Age of Grace are not the Kingdom and are not a fulfillment of what Christ said in Matthew 16:27-28. Jesus was speaking to his disciples about a kingdom, glory, angels, judgment, rewards, and repayment, all of which they understood, and none of which has occurred yet, but they will occur at the Second Coming of Christ. God has the power and authority to delay the Second Coming, and that is what He did.

Another way we know that the Transfiguration was not the fulfillment of what Jesus said in Matthew 28:16 is that Jesus foretold that “some” of his disciples would still be alive when the Kingdom came with power and those disciples would “see” it (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). But by eight days later when the Transfiguration occurred, all of the apostles were at least to see the Kingdom, but only Peter, James, and John were present at the Transfiguration, and they were strictly told to keep it a secret (Matt. 17:9). If the Transfiguration was a secret between Jesus and 3 disciples, it was not the fulfillment of Jesus’ public prophecy that “some” of his disciples (including at least all of his apostles) would be alive to see it.

Since the evidence is that the Transfiguration was not the coming of his kingdom, and since Jesus himself made it clear that he did not actually know when the kingdom would come (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32), the evidence is that it was God who delayed the coming Kingdom of Christ, but Jesus did not know that was going to happen. We learn from reading the prophecies about the End Times in the Old Testament that God had delayed it before, so delaying it again was not out of character for God, who in His great mercy keeps giving humankind more and more time to be saved.

[For more on Christ’s coming kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the Resurrection of the Righteous and Resurrection of the Unrighteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

Mat 17:3

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Moses and Elijah.”** To properly understand the Transfiguration, we must recognize that it was “a vision;” a spiritual experience. Moses and Elijah were not there in person, but only as part of the vision. Matthew 17:9 clearly calls the experience a “vision.” The Greek word translated “vision” is *horama* (#3705 ὅραμα), and besides here, it is used of visions in Acts 9:10, 12; 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9-10 and 18:9. Many Bible versions translate the Greek text as “vision” (cf. HCSB, DBY, ESV, KJV, NAB, NASB, NET, NKJV, RSV, YLT). The NIV is not as clear, saying, “What you have seen.”

In the revelation experience at the Transfiguration, Jesus was transported to the future, to the exalted state he would have after his resurrection. The Bible says, “and his face shone like the sun” (Matt. 17:2), which is exactly how it was after he was glorified when he appeared to the apostle John (Rev. 1:16); in fact, the promise of God is that after the resurrection, all the righteous people “will shine like the sun” (Matt. 13:43). And just as on that mountain that day Jesus was not yet actually glorified, neither were Moses and Elijah actually there in person. But the promise was that if Jesus succeeded in being a sinless sacrifice for the sins of mankind, he would be glorified, and also Moses and Elijah would really be raised from the dead in the Resurrection of the Righteous (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15). The vision God gave Christ would one day be a reality if Jesus endured to the end, which he did.

The most likely reason that God had Moses and Elijah in the vision is that Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented the prophets. Beyond that, both Moses and Elijah ministered for many years in extremely difficult circumstances. Moses had spent 80 years serving God (40 in exile and then 40 in the wilderness) and Elijah had spent years ministering during the time of Jezebel when his life was in danger all the time. So Moses and Elijah were fine examples of people who suffered and endured, and that was what the Transfiguration was about, it was God preparing Jesus to endure the pain and suffering of torture and crucifixion until his last breath, and Moses and Elijah spoke to Jesus about his death (Luke 9:31).

God gave Jesus a revelation vision of what things would be like in the future for the same reason that He gave many prophets a vision of the future—for encouragement, strength, and hope. God gave Christ the vision to help prepare him for “his departure,” and the subject that “Moses” and “Elijah” discussed with Jesus was his *death* (Luke 9:31). Jesus was not the only one to whom God gave courage and hope by giving them a revelation vision of the future. Prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah had very clear revelations of the future, and so did New Testament figures such as Paul and John. So while what God did for Jesus at the Transfiguration was very graphic, it was not materially different from what God had done to encourage others. This should show us the importance of having a clear hope, and building hope in the lives of others.

Although it is commonly taught that Moses and Elijah appeared in person at the Transfiguration, they were only there in a vision, not in reality. The Bible teaches that when a person dies, he is dead in every way, and not alive in any form until God raises him from the dead at the Rapture or one of the resurrections.

[For more information, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Another clear reason that Moses and Elijah could not have been on the Mount of Transfiguration is that they could not be alive before Christ paid the price for their sin. If Moses and Elijah could get up from the dead and be in a glorified state before Jesus paid for their sin, then anyone could be raised before Jesus paid for their sin. In that case, there would have been no point in Jesus dying. Some people say, “Well, the body does die, but the soul lives on.” That cannot be correct. If the “souls” of Moses and Elijah could be as glorious as they were on the Mount of Transfiguration before Christ died for sin, then anyone’s soul could live with God in a glorified state before Christ died, so we again arrive at the conclusion that there would have been no need for the death and resurrection of Christ. The Bible is clear that until the death of Christ, no one’s sin had been paid for, which is why no one who had died could be alive in any form before the death and resurrection of Christ.

Another reason we know it was not really Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus is that 1 Corinthians 15:23 says that Christ is the “firstfruits” from the dead. However, if Moses and Elijah were alive on the Mount of Transfiguration in glorified bodies, then they were alive and glorified before Jesus got up from the dead. In that case, Jesus would not have been the “firstfruits” from the dead, but Moses, Elijah, or even some other godly person who died before they did would have been the real “firstfruits.” That cannot be the case. Moses and Elijah were not “firstfruits” before Jesus; they were a vision of the future.

Another reason that we know the Transfiguration event was a “vision” was that neither Jesus nor the apostles would have known Moses and Elijah by sight. So part of the revelation vision was that Jesus, Peter, James, and John actually understood who and what they were seeing. God did not need to say, “Hey everyone, this is Moses and Elijah.” It often happens that when God gives someone a revelation vision, He also gives him an understanding of what he is seeing in the vision, and that is what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration.

It is sometimes taught that Elijah could be on the Mount of Transfiguration because he never died, but was taken directly up to heaven by God. This idea comes from 2 Kings 2:11, which says that Elijah “goeth up in a whirlwind, to the heavens” (YLT). To understand this verse we need to understand that the word “heaven” (“heavens” in the Hebrew), can refer either to the dwelling place of God or to the air above the earth. That is why the Bible speaks of the birds of heaven (often translated “birds of the air), the rain from heaven, and the snow from heaven (2 Sam. 21:10; Deut. 11:11; Isa. 55:10). Elijah was taken by God’s whirlwind into the air, and in that manner moved away from Elisha, who could then take over his position as head prophet. Culturally, Elisha could never replace Elijah as long as Elijah was there, so God took Elijah away in a dramatic fashion.

The prophets with Elisha knew that God did not take Elijah to heaven, but to somewhere else on earth, and they begged Elisha to let them go look for him, which he finally allowed them to do. Of course, they never found Elijah—God made sure of that, and Elisha stepped into the leadership role over the prophets of Israel. In any case, Moses and Elijah appeared in a vision at the Transfiguration, and even if Elijah never died that does not explain how Moses could have been there.

Elijah eventually died somewhere on earth. We know that because the wages of sin is death, and Elijah was not sinless; no person has ever lived a sinless life except Jesus Christ. If God could take Elijah to heaven and give him everlasting life without Jesus dying for his sins, then God could have taken any good person to heaven before Christ paid for their sins, and the death of the Christ would have been unnecessary. In summary, Moses and Elijah were visions. If Moses and Elijah could have been alive in glorified bodies before Christ died, then Christ did not need to die.

Mat 17:5

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“a bright cloud overshadowed them.”** This “bright cloud” was a cloud of brilliant light that surrounds God, and it is mentioned in many places in the Bible. For example, the cloud of God’s presence covered Mount Sinai, and Moses went into the cloud, into the presence of God (Exod. 24:19). This “cloud” covered the Tabernacle and was inside it (Exod. 40:35-36) and also filled the Temple (1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chron. 5:13-14). The “cloud” around God was what Ezekiel saw in his vision when God’s presence went into the Temple (Ezek. 10:4; see commentary on Ezek. 1:4). This cloud of glorious light that surrounds God is referred to as “the glory of Yahweh” (Ezek. 1:27-28) and it is why 1 Timothy 6:16 says God lives in “unapproachable light.” When God was present at the birth of His Son, Jesus, “the glory of the Lord,” i.e., the brilliant light that indicated God’s presence, shined all around the shepherds (Luke 2:9,13). At the Transfiguration, God was in the middle of the cloud of light that overshadowed the men, and that is why the text says that God’s voice came out of the cloud (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). God was present in a very powerful way inside the “glory” that surrounded Him.

[For more on the bright cloud and the “glory of Yahweh” see commentary on Ezekiel 1:28.]

Mat 17:9

**“from among the dead.”**[[159]](#footnote-30586) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Mat 17:10

**“Then why do the experts in the law say that Elijah must come first?”** The religious leaders of Christ’s day taught that Elijah would come before the Messiah, a doctrine based on a misunderstanding of Malachi 4:5: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible Day of Yahweh comes.” However, Elijah was long dead, and God did not raise him from the dead to live again before the time of the Messiah. To properly understand Malachi 4:5, we need to know that the name “Elijah” in that verse is the figure of speech antonomasia, or “name change.”[[160]](#footnote-18496) Antonomasia is the figure of speech in which one person is called by the name of another person in order to ascribe the characteristics of the second person to the one we are addressing. For example, we might say to a child who is jumping on the couch, “Stop that, Tarzan!” We know the child’s name is not “Tarzan,” but by calling him “Tarzan,” we ascribe the jungle behavior of Tarzan to the child. Some examples of antonomasia in the Bible include:

* Jezebel called Jehu, “Zimri” (2 Kings 9:31) as a threat that his reign as king would be short if he killed her (which he did and still reigned for 28 years; 2 Kings 10:36).
* The Bible calls the Messiah, Jesus Christ, by the name of “David” in Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23, 24; 37:24, 25, and Hosea 3:5 (see commentary on Ezek. 34:23).
* Judah is called “Sodom” and also “Gomorrah” because it was so wicked (Isa. 1:10).
* John the Baptist is called “Elijah” because Elijah’s life and ministry paralleled John’s in many ways.

That John would be like Elijah was made clear to Zechariah by the angel Gabriel. When Zechariah was ministering in the Temple, Gabriel appeared to him and said that Elizabeth would have a son they were to name “John,” and he would go before God “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). For those who remembered the angel’s words years later when John started his ministry, it was clear that John was indeed the “Elijah,” who was to come.

[See Word Study: “Antonomasia.”]

Mat 17:11

**“Elijah is coming and will restore all things.”** Jesus knew that John the Baptist was “Elijah.” Here Jesus used the words of the doctrinal formula commonly used about Elijah by the religious leaders. They would say, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things,” and they were correct in saying that Elijah would come, but they missed him when he came because they were expecting “Elijah” to do things that the Elijah of the Old Testament did, such as raise the dead and confront the government in power at the time, things that John the Baptist was not called to do. So by the time Jesus was speaking to his disciples here after the Transfiguration, he had already come. The Scribes had not been wrong when they said “Elijah is coming”; they just did not know to whom they referred and thus missed it when he was among them. Jesus, however, knew that “Elijah” was John the Baptist, as is clear from Matt. 17:12-13.

In this verse, Jesus was referencing the promise in Malachi that Elijah would come. The verb “will restore” (*apokatastēsei* #600 ἀποκαταστήσει) appears here in the same form as in the Septuagint text, an echo of the fact that Jesus, speaking Hebrew or Aramaic, would have been using the same vocabulary as Malachi. The apostles were not confused by Jesus saying John “will restore” things because they knew the Old Testament text and Jesus immediately followed up what he said by adding that “Elijah” was John. Since John was already dead (see Matt. 14:1ff), it was clear that the restoration work that John did in turning the hearts of the people back to God was done. That restoration work was now left to Jesus. We learn from Mark that John the Baptist came to restore things, and he did baptize many people and turn them back to God, but neither he nor Jesus Christ could turn the nation back to God. Jesus suffered and died so that those who did turn to God and believed could have everlasting life (see commentary on Mark 9:12).

Mat 17:14

**“And when they came to the crowd.”** The record of the healing of the epileptic boy is in Matthew 17:14-20, Mark 9:14-29, and Luke 9:37-43.

Mat 17:18

**“And Jesus subdued him.”** The “him” refers to the demon. This is a good example of how spiritual insight and being a “sympathetic listener” (one who is looking for the author’s meaning, not stumbling at every “possible meaning) is necessary to understand the text. Jesus did not “subdue” the child.

**“subdued.”** The Greek word translated “subdued” is *epitimaō* (#2008 ἐπιτιμάω). Usually, *epitimaō* means to express strong disapproval of someone: rebuke, reprove, censure; or to speak seriously, and thus warn in order to prevent or end an action. It can also mean “punish.”[[161]](#footnote-27487) However, in this context, *epitimaō* has the technical meaning it has in Greek religion of gaining control over a spirit, a demon. Robert Guelich notes that in contexts like these *epitimaō* is “a commanding word uttered by God or by his spokesman, by which evil powers are brought into submission.”[[162]](#footnote-24409) Jesus subdued the demon by the power of God that he wielded, power that he expressed in words.

The demon would not respond to just being “rebuked.” Therefore, we cannot agree that Jesus “reproached the demon for having taken possession of the boy.”[[163]](#footnote-11115) For a “rebuke” to be effective, the hearer must have a heart to listen to and obey God, and demons do not have that kind of heart. The demon had to be dealt with by spiritual power. See commentary on Mark 1:25.

**“in that moment.”** See commentary on Matthew 9:22.

Mat 17:20

**“trust like a mustard seed.”** This phrase has been mistranslated in a number of versions, resulting in confusion and Jesus giving a teaching contradictory to the context. The context of Jesus’ statement is that Jesus’ disciples were not able to cast a demon out of a boy (Matt. 17:16) and wanted to know why (Matt. 17:19). Jesus told them it was because of their little trust (Matt. 17:20). At that point, the Greek text says: “If you have trust [faith] like a mustard seed….” How much trust does a mustard seed have? Total trust! It may look small to the world, but it has no doubt that it can do what God created it to do and become the largest garden herb. That is the point Jesus is trying to make. It does not matter what he, or his disciples, looked like to the world, if they have the same kind of total trust that a mustard seed does, they could move mountains.

Unfortunately, many translations entirely miss the point that Jesus was making. For example, the NIV84 has Jesus saying, “…if you have faith as small as a mustard seed….” But they added the word “small,” which is not in the Greek text, and that added word completely turns the parable upside down. Other versions that add words about the size of the mustard seed include the HCSB, NET, and NRSV. The problem the disciples had was that their trust was too small for them to cast out the demon. So Jesus is not saying if they had small faith they could move mountains—that is the opposite of what he is saying! Small faith won’t cast out demons or move mountains. But total trust, like the tiny mustard seed has in its ability to grow into a huge plant, will cast out demons and move mountains.

Mat 17:21

This verse was added to some texts by being copied from Mark 9:29. The textual evidence is quite clear that it was not in the original version of Matthew.

Mat 17:22

**“about to be.”** (Lenski; Wuest’s Expanded New Testament).

**“handed over.”** Jesus’ teaching that he (the Messiah) was going to be betrayed, suffer, and die, was so contrary to what the disciples believed that they could not grasp his clear teaching about it. See commentary on Luke 18:34.

Mat 17:23

**“kill him.”** For more on Jesus’ clear teaching that he would suffer and die, see commentary on Luke 18:34.

Mat 17:24

**“the two drachma *Temple tax*.”** This tax was paid by every Israelite male 20 years old and older for the maintenance of the Tabernacle and later the Temple (Exod. 30:13; 2 Chron. 24:9; Neh. 10:32). During the Greek control of Palestine, the tax was paid with a coin referred to as the *didrachmon* (“double drachma”) and the tax took on that name. At the time of Christ, the *didrachmon* coin was no longer in circulation and the tax was paid with other coinage, but the name of the tax remained the same. The tax was equivalent to about 2 days’ wages.

Mat 17:25

**“poll tax.”** The Greek word is *kēnsos* (#2778 κῆνσος). In the NT it referred to the tax or tribute levied on individuals, and it was to be paid yearly. See commentary on Mark 12:14.

Mat 17:27

**“the lake.”** The “sea” of Galilee is actually quite a small lake, only 7 miles (11.2 km) across and 12 miles (19.3 km) long, and the entire lake can be seen from the escarpments on both the east and west sides. The Greek word *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα), lake, sea, or ocean, does not really refer to the size of the body of water, and thus has to be translated into the English “lake,” “sea,” or “ocean” by knowing the body of water that is being referred to (see commentary on Matt. 4:18).

**Matthew Chapter 18**

Mat 18:1

**“At that time.”** The Greek is literally, “in that hour,” but it means “at that time.”

**“Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”** The word translated “greatest” is actually “greater,” the comparative, not the superlative (This record occurs in Matt. 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37, and Luke 9:46-48. See commentary on Luke 9:46).

Mat 18:2

**“him.”** The same record is in Matthew 18:2 and Mark 9:36 (see commentary on Mark 9:36).

Mat 18:6

**“huge millstone.”** The Greek literally reads, “millstone of a donkey,” and it refers to the large commercial millstones, which weighed many hundreds of pounds and were turned by donkeys or oxen; see commentary on Mark 9:42.

**“the lake.”** The “sea” of Galilee is actually quite a small lake, only 7 miles (11.2 km) across and 12 miles (19.3 km) long, and the entire lake can be seen from the escarpments on both the east and west sides. The Greek word *thalassa* (#2281 θάλασσα), lake, sea, or ocean, does not really refer to the size of the body of water, and thus has to be translated into the English “lake,” “sea,” or “ocean” by knowing the body of water that is being referred to (see commentary on Matt. 4:18). The name, “the Sea of Galilee,” was given by people who had never seen it. It is actually quite a small lake. Using “the sea” here makes Jesus’ statement much more general and removes it from its geographical context.

Mat 18:7

**“how terrible.”** The Greek word is *ouai* (#3759 οὐαί, pronounced ooh-'eye). For an explanation of the meaning of “woe,” see commentary on Matthew 11:21. In the phrase, “Woe to the world,” the “world” is put by metonymy for the people in the world, and woe to them because of the *skandalon* (#4625 σκάνδαλον) that are in the world. A *skandalon* is technically the movable stick or trigger of a trap; a trap-trigger; then, a trap or snare; and then any impediment placed in the way and causing one to stumble or fall, thus a “stumbling block.” Here, a *skandalon* could be translated as a stumbling block, a trap or snare, or even a “death trap,” since final and ultimate death is the result of being caught in the world’s trap. In this context, “how terrible” is an expression of warning of grief and disaster that is coming. Woe to the world, and especially “woe,” a warning about divine retribution, to the person who is so caught up in the Devil’s trap that he or she becomes a trap to others.

Mat 18:8

**“life.”** This refers to “everlasting life”. See commentary on Luke 10:28.

**“the fire of the age *to come*.”** See commentary on Matthew 25:46 for information about a parallel passage.

Mat 18:9

**“gouge it out.”** The Greek is literally “tear it out,” which is different from the phrase in Mark 9:47. Christ’s making this point is important, and occurs three times (Matt. 5:29; 18:9; and Mark 9:47).

**“life.”** The Greek is literally, “the life,” which refers to the life in the Age to Come, that is “everlasting life.” See commentary on Luke 10:28.

**“fire of Gehenna.”** The Greek is literally, “the Gehenna of the fire,” which could be more literally understood as “the Gehenna which has the fire,” or we would say, “the fire of Gehenna.” See commentary on Matthew 5:22.

[For information on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Mat 18:11

The textual evidence is that this verse was not in the original text, but was added by copyists to harmonize with Luke 19:10.[[164]](#footnote-14312)

Mat 18:12

**“does he not leave the 99.”** This is similar to the parable in Luke 15 (see commentary on Luke 15:4).

Mat 18:15

**“sins.”** It is very important to pay attention to the word “sins” here. Far too often in the Church, someone becomes offended at the behavior of someone else and makes it his or her job to “set them straight.” This verse is not about enforcing our opinions as to what is right, but correcting someone who is actually sinning in the eyes of God. While having friendly relations in the Church is important, there is a huge difference between helping people avoid being offensive to each other and helping people to stop sinning.

**“against you.”** Early and important manuscripts of this passage omit “against you.” It is possible that scribes added the words “against you” to make it agree with what Peter said in Matthew 18:21, about a brother sinning “against me.” It is also possible, however, that the scribes copying the earlier manuscripts omitted the words to make the text have a wider application: i.e., that a person did not have to wait until someone sinned “against him,” he could intervene if he saw someone sinning. However, it was the tendency of scribes to add material to the text for clarity or harmony, rather than delete material from the text, making the shorter reading more likely to be original. Although most modern versions leave “against you” in the text, some modern versions omit the phrase (cf. GW, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB, and Rotherham).

Whether the words “against you” are in the text or not, it is clear from the scope of Scripture, including verses such as Galatians 6:1, Ephesians 5:11, and 1 Timothy 5:20, that Christians do not have to wait until someone actually specifically sins against them personally before going to the person and pointing out the problem.

**“go and tell him his fault.”** This passage of Scripture in Matthew 18:15-17 gives four stages of action that a believer should take if there is someone in the congregation who is sinning. First, take the person aside and discuss it between yourselves. Second, take two or three other witnesses with you and discuss it together. Third, take the issue to the congregation, and fourth, if the person will not even listen to what the whole church congregation has to say, excuse that person from your company. The disciplined believer follows this pattern. Far too many believers are scandalized by the behavior of someone else and then go and tell lots of other people about it before they ever (if they ever!) tell the sinner to his or her face. If we want the Church to be a loving and godly place for people, we must follow Christ’s directives about how to handle problems.

We should also be aware that in many cases there is a fifth action, a very first action, that is not mentioned in the list of four actions here, and that is to overlook the sin if that can be done without compromising godliness (Prov. 19:11). Many times the best action to take when someone sins, especially since many sins are accidental and/or not habitual, is simply to overlook them. We sin too, and it would cause many hard feelings and be divisive in the Church if every time someone sinned another person tried to reprove him for it (cf. Eccl. 7:21-22).

Mat 18:18

See commentary on Matthew 16:19.

Mat 18:19

**“Again.”** The Greek word *palin* (#3825 πάλιν), here rendered as “again,” could be translated “furthermore.” The sense of the word is described by BDAG as a “marker of a discourse or narrative item added to items of a related nature, *also, again, furthermore, thereupon*” The word is not necessarily totally changing subjects but introducing a slightly related subject—that is, the topics of binding and loosing covered in Matthew 18:18 and of agreeing together in Matthew 18:19 are technically different subjects, although they are slightly related. Other examples of *palin* being used to change subjects are Matthew 5:32-33 and 2 Corinthians 11:15-16.

Mat 18:22

**“seventy times seven.”** Forgiveness: “77” or “70 times 7?” The versions differ. The King James Version says, “Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” In contrast, the NIV says: “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”

Although the Greek reads in a way that means seventy times seven in regular Greek, Matthew 18:22 may not be “regular” Greek. The Greek in Matthew 18:22 is the exact wording of the Septuagint (LXX) of Genesis 4:24, where Lamech is bragging to his wives about the vengeance he will take on his enemies: “77” times. The Hebrew text of Genesis 4:24 is very clear: 77 times, and very noted linguists assert that the accepted translation of the LXX came into Greek usage such that what in classical Greek meant “70 times 7,” in this biblical context of revenge and forgiveness it meant “77.” If this is the case, Jesus was contrasting the vengeful Lamech, who stated he would avenge himself “77 times” with the behavior of a godly person, who should forgive “77 times.” If the allusion is to Lamech, it forces us to be forgiving, but also to face the end of our forgiving. Will we act like the vengeful Lamech, willing to take vengeance on those we will not forgive?

Scholars who assert that the number should be “70 times 7” play down the association with Lamech and assert that the standard reading of the Greek should apply here. Some argue that “77 times” is not enough, and that the larger figure, 70 times 7, is *hyperbole* (exaggeration), which was common in oriental thought. In that case, the hyperbole would be simply making the point that all the forgiving we can do is not enough—we must keep on forgiving.

Michael Hall (unpublished manuscript) pointed out that there were 70 periods of 7 in Daniel 9:24, from the going forth of the commandment to restore Jerusalem until the Messiah came and set up the Millennial Kingdom. Thus, he suggested that “70 times 7” was a veiled way of saying, “until the Millennial Kingdom.” If that is the case, then Jesus told us to forgive and forgive until this age of sin is over and he sets up his kingdom on earth. Mitigating against that idea are the number of scriptures showing that sin and forgiveness will still be necessary in the Messianic Age. Although Christ will reign, he will rule with a rod of iron, and although he, and the judges he appoints, will judge justly, they will still have to “settle disputes for many peoples” (Isa. 2:4). Furthermore, the existence of the Temple and the sin offering (Ezek. 43:19ff) show that mankind will still make mistakes and need forgiveness.

There is a good reason why scholars are in profound disagreement about this verse: the real meaning is not clear. If we had the original Hebrew or Aramaic that Jesus was speaking we could be sure, but we do not have them. It could also be argued that Jesus knowingly used a number that was unclear, driving us to both conclusions at the same time: by hyperbole, we should always forgive people, and by comparison, when we refuse to forgive anymore, we become like ungodly Lamech who boasted of his revenge. However, there is no way to know that for sure either.

Mat 18:23

**“That is why.”** The Greek is *dia touto*, and it connects the parable which follows with the forgiveness in the verses above. Jesus was teaching on unlimited forgiveness, and after making the statement that Peter should forgive seventy times seven times, he said that is why what we should be doing can be compared to the Kingdom of Heaven, because God practices unlimited forgiveness.[[165]](#footnote-26680)

**“a certain king.”** The certain king in the parable represents God, who will one day in the future have a Day of Judgment and settle accounts with people. In Christ’s parables, the “king,” and often the “man” or “landowner” represented God.

[For more on the “king,” “landowner,” “ruler,” or “man” in Christ’s parables being God, see commentary on Luke 15:11. For more on Christ ruling the earth in the future, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 18:24

**“10,000 talents.”** In the New Testament, the “talent” was once used as a unit of weight (cf. Rev. 16:21), but otherwise, it was a unit of money. Different cultures had different talents, but most scholars believe Christ would have been referring to the Attic talent, which was equal to 6,000 denarii, or 6,000 days’ wages. One denarius (the plural is denarii) was a day’s wage for a field hand or a soldier. Different classes of workers worked different weeks, most would work 6 days per week in the biblical world. If we assume they would have two weeks off for sickness and perhaps a small vacation, the worker would work 50 weeks, or 50 X 6 days, which equals 300 days. Thus, to be paid a talent he would work 6,000 ÷ 300, or 20 years. If one talent was 20 years wage, then 10,000 was the wages for 200,000 years, or 60 million days. To arrive at an idea of how much money is being referred to, if a field hand made $8 per hour ($64 per day), then one talent was $384,000, and 10,000 talents was $3,840,000,000 dollars (3 billion, 840 million dollars), a ridiculously huge sum. According to Josephus, the total taxes that Judea, Samaria, and Idumea made to imperial Rome was only 600 talents a year. The figure is meant to make the point that no one can ever actually pay off their debt to God. Another way of looking at the debt would be that a minimum wage worker would have to work 6,000 days times 10,000 talents, or 60 million days to work off the debt. Even if a person had a working life of 100 years he or she would only work 30,000 days, far short of the 60 million he would need to pay off the debt. At the time of Christ, the average lifespan for a woman was in the early 30s and for men, it was their late 30s. Since a person usually only worked about 300 days per year, if a boy started to work at 10 and worked to 50, he would only work 12,000 days in his life, not even getting a good start on the 60 million days needed to work to pay his debt.

Mat 18:25

**“his lord commanded him to be sold…”** Slave owners were under no obligation to keep families together, and it was common for slave families to be separated by being sold one by one to others, although sometimes more compassionate owners tried to keep families together. This was at least as true in Rome as in Israel and the other countries of the East. Furthermore, people sometimes even sold their own children to pay their debt (Neh. 5:5).

Mat 18:26

**“the slave.”** This man was a slave, not a “servant.” We can tell that because the master was going to sell him to help pay his debt, and a slave can be sold but a servant cannot be.

**“and bowed down before him.”** The way of bowing down was to either get on one’s knees and put one’s chest to the ground, or it was to lay prostrate with the whole body on the ground.

Mat 18:28

**“100 denarii”** This equals 100 days’ wages, which, by the figures given for Matt. 18:24 above, would be $6,400. Not a small sum, but infinitesimal compared to the 10,000 talents. Jesus made an important point in his parable. Notice that he did not act as if the slave was owed nothing by his fellow slave. When people sin against us it hurts, sometimes very deeply. Jesus knows that and used the figure of 100 denarii to demonstrate that the debt we feel that is created by the sin of others is very real. Nevertheless, if we keep in mind how much we have been forgiven for, we can forgive it.

Mat 18:34

**“the torturers.”** Prisoners were often tortured, so what Jesus said would have made sense in his social context. At the time Jesus was teaching, under the Law Administration, salvation was not guaranteed, and thus if lack of forgiveness was profound enough to destroy a person’s trust (“faith”) in God, it could jeopardize his everlasting life. Today in the Grace Administration, everlasting life is guaranteed after a person has trust in Christ, but rewards are not, so profound disobedience in the form of unforgiveness could lead to a loss of rewards in the Kingdom.

**“until he paid back all that was owed.”** This is one of the many verses that supports that unsaved people will be annihilated in the Lake of Fire and that they will not “burn forever in hell,” as many Christians teach. The Bible teaches that the unsaved will be thrown into the Lake of Fire where they will suffer until their crimes have been paid for and then they will be annihilated—completely burned up. Christians who teach that people burn forever in the Lake of Fire assert that no one can ever pay back what they owe to God so they must burn forever, but the Bible never says that, and furthermore that contradicts what Jesus clearly said; that the unsaved will suffer until they have paid for their sin. Sin can be paid for just as Jesus taught; it is not an unpayable amount.

[For more on people being annihilated in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**Matthew Chapter 19**

Mat 19:3

**“testing him.”** This record in Matthew 19:3-9 is the same event as is recorded in Mark 10:2-12, which includes different details than the Matthew record. However, this event is different than Jesus’ teaching at the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:32), and when he spoke directly to the Pharisees about divorce (Luke 16:14-18).

The short phrase, “tempting him,” reveals the heart of the Pharisees in this situation. Their question about marriage and divorce was a genuine one and hotly debated in the culture of the day. However, they were not being genuine in asking it. They had no intention of changing what they believed based on Jesus’ answer to their question. In that light, we can see that the real reason they asked the question was to discredit Jesus. They were supporters of the school of Hillel and champions of “easy divorce,” which was popular in their culture just as it is in ours today. It is likely that they thought that Jesus would not support easy divorce (a correct conclusion) and that by making that fact public they could take away part of his popular support and possibly even sow division among his followers. Thus God calls their question a “temptation.” Jesus was tempted, as all ministers are, to avoid “hot topics” that may cause division in the Church. As we see from Jesus’ answer, he was more interested in pleasing God and telling the truth than he was in pleasing people—something we should all emulate.

**“for any reason *at all*.”** The Pharisees were asking Jesus a technical question about the Law: they were asking him how he would interpret Deuteronomy 24:1, which is about divorce. At the time of Christ, the Jews differed in their interpretations of Deuteronomy 24:1, which allowed for a man to divorce his wife if he found something “shameful” or “improper” in her. The problem is that the wording of Deuteronomy 24:1 in the Hebrew text is unclear. The relevant Hebrew word is *`ervah* (#06172 עֶרְוָה), translated “some uncleanness” in the KJV; the man could divorce his wife if he found “some uncleanness” in her. *`Ervah* has a rather wide range of meanings and interpretations including nakedness, pudenda, shame, shameful exposure, indecency, and improper behavior.

Many rabbis, particularly those of the school of Hillel, believed that Deuteronomy was saying that a man could divorce his wife for any reason whatsoever; he just had to find something indecent, improper, or displeasing in her. The rabbis of the school of Hillel thought *`ervah* could not just be referring to sexual immorality because the woman was married. That would mean that any “sexual immorality” would almost always be adultery, and adultery was punishable by death, not divorce. The teaching of Hillel was very popular at the time of Christ and many men were divorcing their wives on all kinds of pretexts just because they found another woman they liked better.

In contrast to the school of Hillel, rabbis in the school of Shammai taught that Deuteronomy 24:1 was speaking of sexual sin. They pointed out that a man did not have to have his wife stoned for adultery. He could have her stoned, but he could also just divorce her, just as Joseph was going to divorce Mary when she was found to be pregnant before they had come together sexually. Since the debate on the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1 was a “hot topic” at the time of Christ, the Pharisees came to Christ and tempted him by asking for his opinion.

It is the social context of the time and the Pharisees’ specific question that sheds light on Jesus’ answer about divorce in Matthew 19:9, an answer that has been mistranslated in most English versions and misunderstood by most Christians.

[For more information on divorce and remarriage, see commentary on Matt. 19:9.]

Mat 19:5

**“be joined to.”** The Greek word translated as “be joined to” is the verb *kollaō* **(**#2853 κολλάω), which literally means “to be glued to,” related to the noun *kolla*, “glue.” This verse is closely related to Mark 10:7 and Ephesians 5:31 (see commentary on Eph. 5:31).

Scholars have been able to determine that the original Greek text read *kollaō* here in Matthew 19:5, but there are later Greek manuscripts that read *proskollaō* as Mark and Ephesians do. However, changing a word in one verse—in this case, Matthew 19:5—to match a word in another verse—Mark 10:7 and Ephesians 5:31—was a common scribal tendency known as “harmonization,” and that is no doubt what happened to the Greek text of Matthew 19:5 in some later manuscripts.

Mat 19:7

**“command.”** The hard-hearted Pharisees used the word “command,” emphasizing their belief that if a woman committed adultery, the husband had to divorce her. Jesus gently corrected their belief by saying Moses “allowed” (or “permitted”) divorce (Matt. 19:8), but it certainly was not a command. Many marriages have been healed even though one spouse committed adultery.

Mat 19:9

**“commits adultery.”** The context of Jesus’ statement in Matthew 19:9 is the debate on the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1 and the reasons a man could divorce his wife (see commentary on Matt. 19:3 for more on that debate).

Before we examine the meaning of Matthew 19:9, there are a couple of things to consider. First, we should know that Jesus spoke about divorce on three different occasions (Matt. 5:32; Matt. 19:3-9 and Mark 10:1-12; and Luke 16:14-18). Although there are similarities between these three teachings, there are also significant differences. What we can conclude from reading these three distinct teachings and putting them together is that divorce is a sin in the eyes of God, but God allowed it because of the hardness of human hearts. Nevertheless, even though there are cases in which a mostly innocent party has been harmed and can remarry without it being sin (see commentary on Matt. 5:32), there are times when divorce and remarriage are tantamount to adultery (that is the case here in Matt. 19 and in Luke 16).

Second, the Greek texts on Matthew 19:9 differ: there is a shorter and longer reading of the verse. Textual scholars have concluded that the shorter reading is original, but the longer reading has been translated into many of the older English versions of the Bible, such as the King James, ASV, and YLT. The versions with the longer reading usually have a final phrase that reads something such as: “and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (NKJV).

The key to understanding Jesus’ statement in Matthew 19:9 is to recognize that it is not a “blanket statement.” Jesus was not saying that anyone who remarries after being divorced, unless the divorce was due to adultery, commits adultery; we can see this from reading what Jesus said in Matthew 5:32. In this case, Jesus was addressing a specific debate between the rabbis about the Law, which is why he focused on divorce connected with remarriage, and ignored the possibility of divorce without it. He said that a man who got divorced and remarried committed adultery, but he ignored the sin of a man just divorcing his wife for his personal reasons and ruining her life. In that culture, divorcing a woman could leave her alone and destitute, certainly a grievous sin, but Jesus did not address it because it was not a part of the question and debate the Pharisees wanted Jesus to comment on (cf. Matt. 19:3).

As was just stated, Jesus was not making the blanket statement that anyone who remarried after being divorced was committing adultery unless the divorce was because of sexual immorality. For one thing, the Old Testament Law allowed a divorced person to remarry, and the Pharisees were asking Jesus to interpret and explain the Mosaic Law, not to void it and make a new law, something they would not have accepted anyway. Also, for his part, Jesus explained and confirmed the Mosaic Law; he did not say that Mosaic Law needed modification. However, he appealed to God’s original intentions as revealed in Genesis, and pointed out that although Moses allowed for divorce, it was never God’s original intention.

Paul, in the Church Epistles, again confirmed what both the Law, and Jesus, said: that a person should not divorce, but if they did then it was not a sin to remarry after being divorced. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:27-28: “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned….”

Also, although Deuteronomy 24:1 does not give any specific reasons for divorce, other places in the Mosaic Law do set forth some specific circumstances in which divorce was allowed. For example, the Law said that if a man took a second wife, but then did not provide his first wife with food, clothing (and by extension, shelter), and conjugal rights, his wife could divorce him. Just as He does today, God honored the marriage covenant, and both parties of the marriage covenant had responsibilities. The man was responsible for providing for his wife and making sure she had food, clothing, and shelter, and the sexual intercourse that gave her the opportunity to have children who would protect and care for her. If a man would not do these things for his wife, then he was not keeping his part of the marriage covenant and God allowed the wife to divorce him (Exod. 21:10-11). At that point, she was free to marry someone else (Deut. 24:1-4).

In Matthew 19:9, Jesus was not nullifying the Mosaic Law. He was not saying that although it was okay according to the Mosaic Law for a woman to leave her husband and remarry if he did not provide her with food, shelter, and sexual intercourse, it was not okay according to him. In other words, Jesus was not saying that now, according to his teaching, a woman could only divorce and remarry if sexual immorality was the cause of the divorce, otherwise, she was committing adultery if she remarried.

Matthew 19:9 can only be fully and properly understood if we know what the Old Testament says about marriage and divorce, and if we also know that Jesus was speaking in the very specific context of an ongoing debate between the rabbis about what constituted legal grounds for divorce. Jesus was making a specific statement and saying that God intended for men and women to stay together in marriage, so if a man or woman divorced simply in order to marry someone they liked better, in God’s eyes they were committing adultery.

Jesus anchored his comments firmly in the writings of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy), and this silenced the Pharisees, who then left the scene. The disciples, however, were steeped in the culture of easy divorce and were still confused about what Jesus said, and that part of the record is recorded in Mark 10:10-12 (see commentary on Mark 10:10).

On a technical note, it is worth noting that the phrase “commits adultery” is actually a passive verb in the Greek text. The verb is *moichaō* (#3429 μοιχάω, pronounced moy-'kah-ō), and it is in the passive voice. The passive verb is very important for the interpretation of the verse in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (see commentary on Matt. 5:32), but not so important here, because in this verse the wicked husband is both the agent and the subject of the verb. Thus, while it is true that the husband “is made to commit adultery,” he was the one who made himself adulterous by his own action of divorcing his wife and remarrying another woman. Nevertheless, a technically correct translation of the last phrase of the verse would be “is made adulterous,” instead of “commits adultery.”

[For more on divorce and remarriage, see commentary on 1 Cor. 7:27.]

Mat 19:13

**“so that he could lay his hands on them.”** It was common in the culture that people would bring their children to the rabbis, and the rabbis would put their hands on the children and bless them. Note that in this case, Jesus was not asking to bless the children, this is what the parents wanted.

Mat 19:15

**“And, having laid his hands on them.”** Jesus laid his hands on the children and blessed them (Mark 10:16).

Mat 19:16

**“And look! A man came to him.”** The record of the rich young ruler is in Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22, and Luke 18:18-23. It is Luke who tells us that the man was a ruler. The Greek text reads more literally, “one came to him,” but the context makes it clear it was a man.

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20. The “look” (the figure of speech asterismos) in this verse is important because it shows that it was considered remarkable that someone (especially someone well off) would come to Jesus and ask how to have everlasting life. How many people actually seek everlasting life, especially rich people?

[See Word Study: “Asterismos.”]

**“what good thing must I do.”** Although this is worded differently than the question in Mark and Luke, the records are the same; they only have a different emphasis. Mark 10:17 and Luke 18:18 say, “what must I do,” instead of “what good thing must I do,” but of course whatever the man had to do to attain life in the Age to Come would have been a “good thing.” The man involved was a “rich,” “young,” “ruler,” something we learn by piecing together the information in the different Gospels (Matt. 19:20; Luke 18:18, 23). We also learn from piecing the details in the different Gospels together that the fullness of what he said to Jesus was, “Good master, what good thing must I do….” The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus’ response to the question, “what good thing…,” while in contrast, Mark and Luke record the part of the conversation when Jesus responds to the man’s saying, “Good master.” There are multiple issues involved in the man’s question, and the different Gospels engage those different issues. There is no contradiction between the Gospels, they just deal with different details in the record.

Jesus’ answer is different in Matthew than it is in Mark and Luke, although the conclusion is the same, that there is only one who is good, and that is God. The issue being dealt with in Matthew, and Jesus’ answer to this rich young ruler, is an important lesson for each of us. Jesus said, “Why do you ask me about that which is good?” (Matt. 19:17). Jesus went on to say, “You know the commandments” (Mark 10:19). Jesus was making a powerful point. God is good, and truth and everlasting life come from Him. Furthermore, God has not made salvation difficult to understand; it is clearly presented in His Word. Although this man was young, because he was a rich ruler he would have been well educated and experienced in life. Educated people should have the confidence to read and believe the fundamental truths of the Word of God without having to have them explained to them.

One of the huge problems among believers today is that they spend very little time actually reading the Bible and learning it, so they end up confused by it and all the different opinions people have about it. As we see from the record, when Jesus did say what it took under the Old Covenant to have everlasting life, the young ruler already knew it and was doing it. In the Grace Administration in which we live, salvation is very easy (because Jesus paid for it and all we do is accept it!), and also clearly set forth in the Bible: “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from among the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

[For more on Jesus’ answer to the rich young ruler, see commentary on Mark 10:18.]

**“life in the age *to come.”*** The “age to come” is the future Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth, when Christ will reign over the whole earth as king. Once a person is raised from the dead in the age to come, they will never die again, thus it is appropriate, although not as accurate, to use “everlasting life” instead of “life in the age to come.”

[For more on the translation “life in the age to come,” see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Mat 19:17

**“Why do you ask me about that which is good.”** For an explanation of Jesus’ answer, see commentary on Matthew 19:16. This verse reads differently in some of the English versions such as the KJV. For example, in the KJV, Matthew 19:17 reads basically the same as Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19. Historically, scribes disliked when the Gospel records read differently, and so they “adjusted” the text so that they read the same way. Textual scholars refer to this tendency as “harmonization,” and it occurs a number of times in the over 5,700 manuscripts of the New Testament extant today, but in most cases, the change to a manuscript is caught before it ever gets into an English version. The scribes harmonized the text, sometimes on purpose, sometimes because they were copying from memory and simply mistakenly copied what they remembered from another place in the Bible. In any case, in this instance in Matthew, the textual evidence from the early manuscripts clearly points to the fact that the Greek text and the reading that is based upon it in the REV and almost all modern English versions is the reading of the original manuscript of Matthew.

**“life *in the age to come*.”** This refers to “everlasting life,” the life in the Age to Come, which is the future Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth. We know that from the previous verse, when the young man wanted to know what to do to have “life in the age to come.” See commentary on Luke 10:28.

**“keep the commandments.”** Before the Day of Pentecost and the start of the Christian Church, salvation was by faith that was demonstrated by works. There was an interplay between them that is hard to exactly know but it is clearly there. Comparing Acts 16:31 with the time before the Administration of Grace shows us the dramatic change that occurred when the Administration of the Law came to an end and the Administration of Grace began (this change occurred on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2). Under the Law, to be saved a person had to have faith, but that faith had to be expressed outwardly in the way the person lived. Under the Law, and until the Day of Pentecost, being “born again” was not yet available, neither was being sealed with holy spirit or being guaranteed salvation; God started those things in the Grace Administration. We can clearly see this when we compare Acts 16:30-31 with Matthew 19:16-17 (see commentary on Acts 16:31).

Mat 19:19

**“neighbor.”** On who is our neighbor, see commentary on Luke 10:27.

Mat 19:21

**“If you really want to reach the goal.”** The Greek word *teleios* (#5046 τέλειος, pronounced 'te-lay-os) refers to bringing something to an end, a finish; bringing to completeness, maturity, perfection, or to a goal. In this case, the word “perfect” can be misleading. The man wanted to have everlasting life, which Jesus said he could have by keeping the commandments (Matt. 19:17). However, when the man pressed in and asked if he lacked anything, Jesus took the conversation to a new level and said, if you really want to reach your goal, sell all you have and you will have treasure stored up in heaven (that treasure will actually be conferred when the Lord sets up his Millennial Kingdom on earth).

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 19:22

**“these words.”** The Greek is simply “the word,” meaning “the message,” or “word” can be understood to be a collective singular for “words.”

Mat 19:24

**“camel.”** Here, “camel” is a hyperbole, an exaggeration to make a point. Jesus’ illustration is not extreme given the fact that Jesus, and Orientals from that era in general, were fond of hyperbole (cf. Luke 6:41, a person having a “log” in his eye). As the “gnat” in Matthew 23:24 is a hyperbole, so also is the camel. For the idea of the needle’s eye being a gate, or the “camel” being a “rope,” see commentary on Luke 18:25.

Mat 19:26

**“for people...for God.”** See commentary on Mark 10:27.

Mat 19:27

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention (see commentary on Matthew 1:20). Here it is not spoken with great force, but to remind Jesus of the sacrifices the apostles had made. In this context, the meaning is close to “Look at what we have done. We have left everything and followed you.”

**“…so what will we have?”** Peter’s question is a good one, and one that all of us should be asking more. All of us are either like the rich man in Matt. 19:16-22 who hold on to worldly things and lose out on heavenly things, or we are like Peter who has “left everything” and will have great reward in the kingdom.

Mat 19:28

**“New Beginning.”** The words New Beginning in Matthew 19:28 are from the Greek word *palingenesia* (#3824 παλιγγενεσία), a compound word that means “new origin” or “new birth.” It is comprised of *palin*, meaning “again,” and *genesis*, “origin” (the Greek word used for the book of “Genesis”). Here in Matthew 19:28 *palingenesia* is used as a technical term for the Messianic Age (the HCSB translates the word “Messianic Age”), which is why it is capitalized in the REV. The only other usage of *palingenesia* in Scripture is Titus 3:5, which uses the term in a totally different context, and refers to the new beginning (the New Birth) given to Christians when they are born again and receive holy spirit. By using *palingenesia*, Jesus describes the Age to come as a “new beginning,” or alternately, a “second genesis.” The coming Millennial Kingdom, Paradise, is like starting creation all over again, renewed.

The everlasting Kingdom of God and Christ on earth will come in two stages. The first stage is often referred to by theologians as Christ’s Millennial Kingdom because it lasts 1,000 years (Rev. 20:2-4) and is Christ’s Kingdom on earth (the term “Millennial Kingdom” is not in the Bible, but is a designation given that time by scholars). After the Millennial Kingdom will be a great war (Rev. 20:7-10), and then God will bring a heavenly city down to earth where the saved will live forever (Rev. 21:1-4).

After the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21, 29-30), Jesus will come back to earth, fight the battle of Armageddon, and set up a kingdom that fills the earth (e.g., Ps. 2:8; 72:8-11; Dan. 2:35, 44; 7:14; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10). The name “Armageddon” comes from Rev. 16:16, the place where the enemy kings are gathered). Jesus’ Kingdom on earth is so different from our current fallen world and this present evil age that the Bible calls it a new beginning or new creation. Here in Matthew 19:28. Jesus calls it a *palingenesia*, a new beginning. Isaiah 65:17 says God will create a new heaven and earth (this is a different creation from the final heaven and earth of Rev. 21:1, which are also called a new heaven and earth). Peter called it the “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21). The Bible also calls this future earth “paradise,” and it is the earth that the meek will inherit when they are raised from the dead. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus is specifically speaking of what we know as the Millennial Kingdom, because it is during that time that the apostles will sit on thrones and judge the 12 tribes of Israel.

Sadly, the wonderful teaching of the new earth that saved people will enjoy is almost completely unknown by Christians due to the unbiblical teaching that “heaven” is the eternal home of those who are saved. But the Bible is clear that Jesus comes back to earth, and when he does, the saved will be where he is.

[For more information on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the chronology of the End Times, see the commentary on Matt. 25:32]

**“you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”** Jesus’ prophecy that the 12 Apostles would sit on thrones in his Kingdom is also in Luke 22:30. According to the Old Testament prophecies, in the Millennial Kingdom, Jesus Christ will live in a palace on the south slope of Mount Zion, and the Temple of God will be on the top of Mount Zion. Jesus will be king over the earth (cf. Ps. 2:8; 72:8-11; Dan. 2:35; 7:14; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10; Rev. 2:8; 19:11-21). Furthermore, Jesus will set up rulers who will help him rule, and they will be righteous people who have been faithful to him in their lives on earth (cf. Jer. 23:4, also Jer. 3:15; 33:26; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 2:26-27).

Mat 19:29

**“will receive a hundredfold.”** Not everyone who is saved and receives everlasting life will receive the same reward on the Day of Judgment. Those people who have obeyed God’s commands, and done more for Christ, will receive more (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil”).

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come” for commentary on this phrase.]

**Matthew Chapter 20**

Mat 20:1

**“a man, a head of a house.”** In this parable, the man, the head of the house, represents God, who will grant salvation to those who come to Him, no matter if they have been believers for all their life or if they become a genuine believer at the end of their life.

Mat 20:3

**“third hour.”** About our 9 a.m. The original workers had likely started about 6 a.m., the start of the day, and when hired for a day were expected to work until 6 p.m.; 12 hours.

Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m. The start of the Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost, marked by the outpouring of the gift of holy spirit, occurred at the third hour of the day (cf. Acts 2:15).

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

Mat 20:5

**“sixth hour; ninth hour.”** The sixth hour is our noon, and the ninth hour is our 3 p.m. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

Mat 20:6

**“eleventh *hour*.”** The eleventh hour is roughly 5 p.m. The workers were hired at the eleventh hour, and were expected to work until 6 p.m.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

Mat 20:8

**“evening having come.”** This is defined in Matt. 20:12 as 6 p.m. The last workers started at the eleventh hour, 5 p.m., and worked only one hour.

Mat 20:15

**“is your eye evil.”** Meaning, are you greedy for more, covetous of what the others received? The “evil eye” was idiomatic in Semitic languages for someone who was greedy, covetous, and stingy. In Western cultures, the “evil eye” was a look or glance that meant harm and brought harm, but there is no evidence it was used that way in the Bible. See commentary on Matthew 6:22.

[For more on the idiom of the good eye, see commentary on Prov. 22:9. For more on the idiom of the evil eye, see commentary on Prov. 28:22.]

Mat 20:16

**“So the last will be first, and the first last.”** This sentence was spoken by Christ, not the landowner in the parable who had been speaking. Different scholars have put forth theories as to exactly what Christ meant by the sentence. We can pretty well rule out the idea that Christ is teaching that those who came early and worked hard would be “last” and those who came late and worked little would be first. That would contradict all the verses that teach about the great value of faithfulness.

This sentence is the original reading of Matthew 20:16 according to the oldest and best Greek manuscripts. A few manuscripts add “For many are called but few are chosen,” at the end, but that is almost certainly a scribal addition from Matthew 22:14. Older English versions, such as the King James (1611) and the Geneva Bible (1599) have the additional sentence, and the New King James Version, which was translated from the same manuscripts as the King James. But almost without exception, all modern Bibles omit the phrase. In the last couple of centuries, literally thousands of Greek manuscripts have been found, and there are now over 5,700 Greek manuscripts, almost all of them incomplete but still very helpful, from which scholars can work to get back to the original God-given text.

Mat 20:17

**“And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem.”** Jesus knew he had to die in Jerusalem (Luke 13:33) and he knew he had to die as the true Passover Lamb (cf. John 1:29). The Jews in Jerusalem had been looking for a way to kill Jesus for months. Ever since Jesus had healed a lame man on the Sabbath at the Pool of Bethesda the Jews had been trying to kill him (John 5:16-18). That desire to kill Jesus only intensified as his ministry continued—e.g., when he came to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1, 14, 19-25); then at the Feast of Dedication (John 10:39); then when he raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:53).

There was a bit of a cat-and-mouse game going on between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem because Jesus knew he had to die as the Passover Lamb, but how could he ensure that would happen at exactly the right time? So he would go to Jerusalem, stir up the religious leaders, then leave, then come back and things would get stirred up again. So for example, he came to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22), but after that, he left and went east of the Jordan River (John 10:40). Then he came back to the Jerusalem area when he raised Lazarus but he did not go into Jerusalem on that trip, he left the area after raising Lazarus (John 11:54). It was a genuine interplay between God and the forces of evil that eventually resulted in Jesus dying on the cross at exactly the right time, the same time as the Passover Lamb was killed in the Temple.

**“he took the twelve disciples aside privately and said to them.”** This record of Jesus telling the twelve apostles that he would be arrested and killed is in Matthew 20:17-19, Mark 10:32-34, and Luke 18:31-34.

Mat 20:18

**“Pay attention!”** The Greek word translated “pay attention” is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 20:20

**“the mother of the sons of Zebedee.”** This record also occurs in Mark 10:35-45 (see commentary on Mark 10:35). The mother of James and John and the wife of Zebedee was named “Salome” (“Peaceful”). This can be determined by comparing Matthew 27:56 with Mark 15:40; 16:1-2. She witnessed the crucifixion (Mark 15:40) and was one of the women who brought spices on Sunday morning to anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:1). Many infer from John 19:25 that Salome was the sister of Mary, and that is likely true. We should note that the grammar of John 19:25 would allow for the possibility that Mary the wife of Clopas was Mary’s sister, but it seems that would not have been very likely because it is somewhat doubtful that parents would name two different daughters “Mary.”

**“bowing down.”** For more on bowing down, see commentary on Matthew 2:2.

Mat 20:22

**“drink the cup.”** “Drinking the cup” was a common idiom meaning to experience, whether that experience was good (cf. Ps. 16:5; 23:5; 116:13; Jer. 16:7) or bad (cf. Ps. 11:6; 75:8; Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15). Jesus spoke of the cup of his sufferings (Matt. 26:39, 42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42).

Mat 20:24

**“angry.”** The Greek word is *aganakteō* (#23 ἀγανακτέω), and it refers to being angry or displeased at a situation that is perceived to be unjust.

Mat 20:28

**“life.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This verse is evidence that the soul does not continue on after the body dies. Jesus gave up his soul and died so that others could have life.

We must realize that Jesus gave up his soul, his life, as a ransom for many, meaning that his soul died. It had to. If Jesus did not really die, then he never actually paid the price for our sin, which is death. When God raised Jesus from the dead, his body was no longer powered by soul, but by spirit. There are many verses in the Bible that refer to the “soul” dying or being dead, although often *psuchē* is translated “life” in those verses, with the result that people reading the English Bible cannot see that the soul dies (cf. John 10:11, 15, 17; 13:37, 38; Acts 20:24; 27:10; 1 John 3:16; Rev. 8:9; 12:11; 16:3).

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’” For more on why Jesus, a human, could die for the sins of humankind, see commentary on Matt. 27:50.]

**“ransom.”** The Greek word is *lutron* (#3083 λύτρον, pronounced 'loo-tron). In Greek literature, the *lutron*, “ransom” was the price paid for the release of a slave or prisoner of war. See commentary on Mark 10:45.

Mat 20:29

**“going out of Jericho.”** This record occurs in Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43. The timing of the event in Matthew and Mark seems to contradict Luke 18:35-39, but they actually do not (see commentary on Luke 18:35).

Mat 20:30

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Son of David.”** A messianic title. It is not known how these men came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but they did. God reveals the truth to people who are humble and hungry for truth (see commentary on Matt. 1:1).

**Matthew Chapter 21**

Mat 21:1

**“came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives.”** Bethphage is on the east side of the Mount of Olives.

Mat 21:3

**“The Lord has need of them.”** Jesus needed them to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 (cf. Matt. 21:5)

**“and he will immediately send them *back here*.”** See commentary on Mark 11:3.

Mat 21:5

**“Daughter Zion.”** The phrase “daughter of Zion” is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem, and occurs many times in the Old Testament (see commentary on Isa. 1:8). Translating the Greek literally as “daughter of Zion” is confusing, because a “daughter of Zion” is a female descendant of Zion, whereas the idiomatic phrase refers to Zion as the daughter. Thus, the translation “Daughter Zion” more accurately communicates the meaning of the text. A number of modern versions use “Daughter Zion” (or “daughter Zion) (cf. CEB, CSB, NAB, NIV2011). When the 1984 NIV was updated in 2011, the translators changed the wording from “daughter of Zion” to “Daughter Zion.”

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 21:7

**“the donkey and *her* colt.”** Much has been written about this, and some scholars have tried to make this into one animal, but the text clearly indicates two; a donkey and a colt. Piecing together the Gospel records indicates that Jesus sat on the colt, and it was so young that no one had ever ridden on it before (Mark 11:2). In the case of an animal that had never been ridden, it is wise to make sure that the animal will be as calm as possible, and that explains the second animal, the donkey. It seems the disciples, who lived in a culture in which it was common to ride donkeys, understood to bring the mother along with the colt, and Jesus sat on the colt, as Mark indicates.

**“he sat on them.”** Jesus sat on the garments, not on the two animals.

Mat 21:9

**“Hosanna.”** The people who were shouting praises to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem were for the most part not the same group as the group that shouted, “Crucify him” only a few days later. See commentary on Luke 23:21.

**“Son of David.”** A messianic title. These people assumed and asserted that Jesus was the Messiah and the true king of Israel (John 12:13) and the Messiah, the “Son of David,” (see commentary on Matt. 1:1).

**“the Lord.”** For more information on “the Lord” see commentary on Matthew 3:3.

Mat 21:12

**“And Jesus went into the Temple.”** The Greek manuscript evidence is divided between manuscripts that read “the temple of God,” and those that just read “the temple,” but the earlier manuscripts are shorter. Also, it seems that it would be much more likely that a scribe would add “of God” than delete the phrase if it were original. Thus it is most likely that the phrase “of God” was added by copyists. Also, the Hebrew gospel of Matthew reads, “the house of Yahweh,” using a scribal notation for the name Yahweh, and saying “house,” which was the standard Old Testament word for the Temple.

**“and overturned the tables of the money changers.”** The Gospel of Mark reveals that the overturning of the tables was the day after Jesus’ triumphal entry (cf. Mark 11:7-12). The Gospel of Matthew collapses the time in this account.

**“doves.”** See commentary on Mark 11:15.

Mat 21:15

**“angry.”** The Greek word is *aganakteō* (#23 ἀγανακτέω), and it refers to being angry or displeased at a situation that is perceived to be unjust.

Mat 21:16

**“Out of the mouth of little children and nursing children you have brought forth praise.”** In our modern world, “nursing children” are normally too young to praise God, but in the biblical world, it was common for a mother to nurse a baby until three years old or even older, and so nursing children could praise God. For the meaning “brought forth,” see Louw-Nida, and also the *EDNT*.

Mat 21:19

**“a lone fig tree by the path.”** This is an important addition because it tells us that the fig tree was not owned by anyone, but was public property. Jesus did not destroy private property.

**“And immediately the fig tree withered.”** The fig tree was a symbol of Israel, and the fact that Jesus cursed it was a foreshadowing of Israel’s eventual destruction (see commentary on Mark 11:20).

Mat 21:21

**“trust.”** To properly understand “trust” in this verse, see the commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:9, “trust.”

**“this mountain.”** Jesus was on the Mount of Olives, where both Bethany and Bethphage were.

**“lifted up.”** The Greek is *airō* (#142 αἴρω, pronounced 'eye-ro), and it is passive voice, imperative mood. Although it would be very literal to say, “Be taken up,” the imperative mood combined with the context, moving a mountain at your command, gives the sense that the mountain is being snatched up out of its place and thrown into the ocean.

**“doubt.”** See commentary on Mark 11:23.

Mat 21:25

**“discussed it among themselves.”** The Jewish rulers were lying to Jesus, and he knew it (cf. Matt. 21:32). John 2:25 says that Jesus knew what was in people. The Jews believed that John’s baptism was from man and had no divine authority whatsoever, but they would not say so publicly. This kind of thing goes on all the time in religion, business, and politics. People lie to get an advantage. That is why we have to be “wise as serpents” and walk by revelation if we are going to do well in the world.

Jesus did not want to answer the question that the Jews asked about where he got his authority. He knew they would only use the information against him. He also knew that if he asked them the right question, in this case about John, he could stop their attack, which is exactly what happened. We have to follow Jesus’ example and realize that many people will use what we say against us, so we have to rely on God to know what is really going on in the hearts of people and what we should or should not say.

Mat 21:27

**“Then I will not tell you.”** Jesus was not fooled by the Jews saying they did not know. They knew exactly what they believed, but those hypocrites and cowards were afraid to say it. Jesus had said if they would tell him about John’s baptism, he would tell them about the source of his authority. Since they would not tell him, he kept his word and would not tell them.

Mat 21:29

**“changed his mind.”** The Greek is *metamelomai* (#3338 μεταμέλομαι); but it is sometimes spelled with two “L”s and it has two distinct meanings in the NT: 1) to change one’s mind; and to regret; be ashamed over; feel remorse for, or 2) to reproach oneself for what one has done. It occurs six times in the NT: Matthew 21:29, 32; 27:3; 2 Corinthians 7:8 (twice); and Hebrews 7:21.

Mat 21:31

**“and the prostitutes.”** The prostitute Rahab (Josh. 2:1) is a wonderful example of a prostitute who had faith in God and eventually married into Israel.

Mat 21:33

**“Listen to another parable.”** This parable of the Greedy Farmers is in Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12, and Luke 20:9-19. This parable is a clear reference to the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7, except in Isaiah the vineyard is itself Israel, and is wicked, while in Jesus’ parable the vineyard is God’s and it is the people who are hired to tend it who are evil. Jesus was using thinly veiled language to speak of the leaders of the Jews, who had been entrusted by God to take care of His vineyard, i.e., His people, but were evil. The Jews got his point (Matt. 21:45), and wanted to arrest him but were afraid of the people.

**“and put a wall around it.”** Farmers would surround their plots and vineyards with a short stone wall. Stones were abundant in Israel whereas wood and fence material was scarce and expensive to work into a proper fence. So culturally the man would have built a low stone wall around his vineyard (cf. Prov. 24:30-31).

Mat 21:42

“**the cornerstone.”** The quotation comes from Psalm 118:22. The Greek text literally reads, “the head of the corner,” not “the cornerstone.” However, the stone that is “the head of the corner” can be the cornerstone. However, the phrase “the head of the corner,” can refer to two different stones, the cornerstone and the capstone, and there is some discussion about what is meant. “The phrase ‘head of the corner’ can indicate one of the large stones near the foundations of a building which by their sheer size bind together two or more rows of stones,” or it can “refer to the final stone which completes an arch or is laid at the top corner of a building.”[[166]](#footnote-25358)

There is some scholarly discussion about which stone is meant, and it is even possible that Christ is thinking of both stones, because when he says, “the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but on whomever it falls it will grind to powder” (Matt. 21:44; cf. Luke 20:18), he seems to be referring to both stones. A person would fall on or stumble over the “cornerstone,” but the stone that could fall on someone and grind them to powder would be the capstone. Both the cornerstone and the capstone are important to the building and thus the analogy is that Christ, who was rejected, has become of supreme value. Translators can only pick one of the two words for their translation, and like most English versions, the REV has chosen “cornerstone” to be in the text.[[167]](#footnote-19196)

Psalm 118:22 is very important in identifying Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and it is quoted or referred to six times in the New Testament (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:4 and 2:7).

**“the Lord.”** The Shem Tov Hebrew manuscript has “Yahweh,” the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh (see commentary on Matt. 3:3).

**Matthew Chapter 22**

Mat 22:2

**“a wedding feast for his son.”** This is a parable, but it is very accurate in its details and fits well with the Jewish expectation of a great feast, based on Isaiah 25:6. The king is God. The servants who go out and proclaim the coming feast are God’s servants, most specifically in the context of the Old Testament, God’s prophets. Those who had been specifically invited, in the context of the parable, are the Jews. The sumptuousness of the feast, including the oxen and fatted cattle, fits with the Old Testament prophecy that there would be the best of meat and the finest of wine (Isa. 25:6 NIV). That those who had been invited ignored the invitation and even abused the king’s servants fits exactly with how Israel responded to the prophets’ calls for repentance and obedience. That the king then kills those who had been invited fits with the fate of the wicked—destruction in the Lake of Fire, and that the king would invite and accept any who would come fits with the invitation of God that anyone can be saved if they will humble themselves and obey Him, which today means accepting Jesus Christ, the King’s Son, as Lord (Rom. 10:9).

[For more on the “king,” “landowner,” “ruler,” or “man” in Christ’s parables being God, see commentary on Luke 15:11. For more on Christ ruling the earth in the future, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the feast in the Messianic Kingdom, see commentary on Matt. 8:11.]

Mat 22:4

**“Look”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 22:10

**“both wicked and good.”** Although the use of “wicked” can be general and some of the people who respond to God’s call to be saved are not society’s best people, in the context of the king (God) inviting the Jews to His banquet and them refusing, He invited the Gentiles. The Gentiles were considered unclean and wicked by the Jews because they had many practices, like eating meat with blood in it, or eating pork, or many of the sexual practices in Roman society that were considered “wicked.” Yet we learn from Jesus’ teaching that many people will come from the north and south and east and west—the Gentiles—and eat at the banquet with Abraham, and the Jews, the “sons of the kingdom,” will not be allowed in (cf. Matt. 8:11-12; Luke 13:22-30).

Mat 22:11

**“had not been clothed.”** In this case, it is important to translate the text in a way that brings out the force of the verb and provides the best understanding of the parable that Jesus is telling. The verb is a passive perfect participle. Although the form of the Greek verb is such that it can be read as either middle voice or passive voice, in this context it is best understood as a passive voice verb, showing that the man had not let himself be clothed in wedding clothes by the king’s attendant.[[168]](#footnote-22482)

The parable is about the Kingdom of Heaven and being clothed with “wedding clothes,” that is, garments appropriate for being saved and being at the wedding banquet of the Lamb. But no one can clothe themselves with righteousness or salvation to the end that they have everlasting life. To have everlasting life and be at the wedding banquet of the Lamb, each person must let themselves be clothed by God in the garments of righteousness and salvation that He provides.

Mat 22:12

**“Friend.”** The Greek word translated “friend” is *hetairos* (#2083 ἑταῖρος), and although it means “friend, companion, mate, partner,” that is not really its meaning in this context. The king did not know the man; *hetairos* is “a general form of address to someone whose name one does not know.”[[169]](#footnote-22074) So by addressing the man as *hetairos* (“friend”), the king was being polite and friendly, instead of saying something much more crass such as “Hey you!”

**“without wedding clothes.”** The man at the king’s banquet did not have a wedding garment, but how could he be expected to have one? The king’s servants had gone out and rounded up people—“both wicked and good”—who happened to be out on the roads, (Matt. 22:10). Some commentators suggest that the people had time to go home and change clothes, but generally the kind of people who were on the street did not have nice clothing (cf. Matt. 11:8). Many people in the biblical culture were poor, and it was common for them to only own one set of clothing (cf. Deut. 24:10-12).

The answer to the problem of the man not having wedding clothing is partially given in Matthew 22:11: the man had refused to be clothed in wedding garments by the king’s attendants when he entered the wedding—he had not allowed himself to be clothed (see commentary on Matt. 22:11). The man had the opportunity to be clothed in wedding garments but had refused them, and that is why he was speechless when the king questioned him. He had no excuse other than his own pride and his arrogant belief that what he was wearing was good enough for the banquet.

Commentators often point out that there is no verse that says the attendants were offering wedding garments to guests, but things that were common in the culture or obvious in the context are often not mentioned in the biblical record. There are many reasons for believing that the king would have provided wedding clothes to his guests. Matthew 22:11 indicates the people were offered clothing. The man had no excuse for not having a wedding garment. Most of the people the king invited did not have clothing suitable for a king’s wedding, so the garments would have had to have been provided. The king expected the people present to be wearing wedding clothing. Also, the parable illustrates salvation, and it is King God who by grace provides the “clothing,” the righteousness and salvation, that enables believers to have everlasting life.

Also, there are verses in the Bible that indicate that proper clothing was provided for special occasions (2 Kings 10:22; Isa. 61:10; Rev. 19:7-8). Furthermore, there is some external evidence from ancient historical records that monarchs sometimes gave clothing to wear to people whom they had invited to their events.

The most important evidence that the king provided the wedding garments for the guests is the fact that the wedding garments were part of a parable that Jesus was telling about the Kingdom of Heaven. When Jesus told parables, he was careful to include things from the culture that would make the parable effective. If kings and nobles did not occasionally provide garments for their guests, then that part of his parable would have been so removed from reality that the parable would have lost much of its effectiveness because his listeners would have been confused about what Jesus was trying to tell them.

When it comes to entering the Kingdom—which means having everlasting life—no one can enter it on their own merits, “clothed in their own righteousness.” No one is righteous enough to enter without the grace of God covering them with a robe of righteousness and garments of salvation (Isa. 61:10).

In Jesus’ parable, the king who threw the banquet is God. The wedding banquet is the banquet that will occur in Christ’s future kingdom on earth (Isa. 25:6; Matt. 8:11; Rev. 19:9). The wedding garments are the righteousness and salvation that God provides by grace to everyone who will accept them. The ones who were initially invited to the wedding feast but would not come are God’s chosen people, the Jews. The slaves who went out to invite the guests were the prophets and others who brought the good news of salvation to the people. The ones who are gathered in from off the street are the Gentiles, who the Jews thought of as unclean and unworthy of everlasting life (cf. Matt. 8:11-12). The man who was not wearing a wedding garment and thought he could enter the banquet without it represents those who think they are worthy of everlasting life on their own merits and arrogantly reject God’s righteousness. The darkness outside the banquet is the darkness of the Lake of Fire and death, which is where everyone not found worthy of everlasting life is thrown (Rev. 20:11-15).

Jesus’ parable is about God’s grace and people’s personal responsibility. God graciously offers a great banquet and everlasting life to anyone who will humbly accept them. Then people individually choose whether or not to accept God’s invitation. Those who accept are granted everlasting life, while those who do not accept have no excuse except their own pride, and will come to a dark end. Sadly, when the people who have rejected God realize they have chosen death over life, they will sob and gnash their teeth, but to no avail; they made their choice and God will honor it.

[For more about the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 22:13

**“sobbing and gnashing of teeth**.**”** The mention of sobbing and gnashing of teeth occurs seven times in the Bible (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). All of these occurrences are in the Gospels. There is only one future Messianic Kingdom, and it fills the whole earth. The unsaved are not part of that Kingdom but are thrown into the Lake of Fire where there is sobbing and gnashing of teeth (Rev. 20:13-15).

[For a more complete explanation of the sobbing and gnashing of teeth, see commentary on Matt. 8:12.]

Mat 22:14

**“For many are called, but few are chosen.”** This verse is quoted as if God was the one who did the choosing, but in fact, it is solid evidence that God chooses those who first choose Him. We cannot ignore the parable and just interpret the conclusion like we want to. In the parable, the king invited people to the feast, but the first people who were invited “did not want to come” (Matt. 22:3). Then the king sent more people to invite them again, but they “paid no attention” (Matt. 22:5). Worse, they not only declined the king’s invitation, they mistreated the servants who were sent to invite them (Matt. 22:6). So the king invited others and they came to the feast (Matt. 22:10). Thus it is clear that the “chosen” are “chosen” because, as well as God choosing them, they chose God.

Mat 22:15

**“to entrap him in *his* words.”** The record of the trap about paying taxes is recorded in Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17, and Luke 20:20-25.

Mat 22:16

**“because you do not show favoritism.”** The Greek text is idiomatic, see commentary on Mark 12:14.

Mat 22:17

**“census tax.”** The Greek word is *kēnsos* (#2778 κῆνσος). In the NT it referred to the tax or tribute levied on individuals, and it was to be paid yearly. See commentary on Mark 12:14.

Mat 22:19

**“census tax.”** The Greek word is *kēnsos* (#2778 κῆνσος). In the NT it referred to the tax or tribute levied on individuals, and it was to be paid yearly. See commentary on Mark 12:14.

Mat 22:23

**“who say that there is no resurrection.”** At the time of Christ, the High Priest and the majority of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council in Jerusalem, were Sadducees. The Sadducees denied the legitimacy of the “oral law,” and for the most part saw themselves as drawing their beliefs directly from the Torah, the five books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy). On that basis, they denied the resurrection from the dead, and believed that both the body and soul of a person died and were gone forever. For the Sadducees, there was no Messianic Hope promised by God. There is evidence that because the Sadducees believed that they had no life but their one life, they tried to capitalize on every advantage they could in this life, which, as one can imagine, led to stretching moral boundaries to the breaking point. Thus the Roman guard could tell the priests that an angel had rolled back the stone of Jesus’ tomb and that Jesus had risen from the dead, and the priests, rather than say they were wrong about Jesus and jeopardize their position of power, bribed the guards to say Jesus’ disciples stole his body. The Old Testament has a number of verses about God raising the dead in the future (cf. Deut. 32:39; Job. 19:25-27; Ps. 71:20; Isa. 26:19; 66:14; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2, 13; and Hos. 13:14).

Mat 22:25

**“Now there were with us seven brothers.”** The Sadducees cite this as if it were a real case, and it probably was. Jesus did not try to refute their example. If there was one woman married to two brothers, that would have been good enough to make their case, but the Sadducees had a more involved example, so they used it.

Mat 22:29

**“You are in error.”** You are mistaken. Lenski asserts that the verb may be taken in a middle sense, “you are deceiving yourselves,” and he may be right.[[170]](#footnote-27938)

**“because you do not know the Scriptures.”** The word “know” is a participle in the Greek, *eidotes* (#1492 *εἰδότες*, knowing) and in this context has a causal sense: “because you do not know” (cf. CEB, HCSB, NAB, NET, NIV, NRSV). To make their argument, the Sadducees were unknowingly misusing Moses’ teaching on what came to be called the “Levirate Law;” that if a man died, his brother would marry the widow and have children by her to preserve the name of the brother (Deut. 25:5-10). There is no reason to assume conditions on earth in the resurrection will be the same as they are in this life. Moses certainly did not teach that they were, so the Sadducees were taking a liberty with the text that had no foundation in truth. Furthermore, the Scriptures clearly teach a resurrection from the dead (Matt. 22:30-32). Even though the Sadducees only take the Torah (Genesis-Deut.) as authoritative, there is certainly an afterlife implied in the Torah. Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead, for example. Moses knew there was a book of life (Exod. 32:32). Furthermore, Job, who lived around the time of Abraham, certainly knew about it (Job 19:25ff). Besides, the Sadducees were in error in rejecting the Word of God spoken through the prophets, saying it was not Scripture.

**“or the power of God.”** In denying the resurrection from the dead, the Sadducees denied the power of God. Furthermore, God is not only able to raise dead people to the state they were before, i.e., living, it is in His power to raise them such that they will be different from how they were on earth. On earth, we have a need for children and families, but that may not be the case in the next life. Our fleshly bodies will change. “…the doctrine of the future state was there [in the Scripture], and the Sadducees should have believed it as it was, and not have added the absurd doctrine to it that men must live there as they do here. The way in which the enemies of the truth often attempt to make a doctrine of the Bible ridiculous is by adding to it, and then calling it absurd.”[[171]](#footnote-26285)

Mat 22:30

**“neither marry nor are given in marriage.”** This phrase exactly represents the biblical culture. Men marry, while women are “given in marriage.”

**“but are as the angels in heaven.”** The assumption is that angels do not marry and have families. That will be the case with us in the next life. There are some important things to pay attention to in this verse. One is that Jesus said we will be like the angels, not that we become angels. There are people who believe when a believer dies, he or she goes to heaven and becomes an angel. That is not the case. Dead believers do not become angels. The context of this section is marriage, and when it comes to marriage, resurrected believers will be like angels in that they do not marry.

Also, this verse comes as close as any to addressing the question about whether or not there will be sexual intercourse in the next life, but it does not settle the issue completely. It is possible but unlikely that angels have sexual intercourse. There is no indication in Scripture that angels participate in sexual intercourse with each other, even though there are both male and female spirit beings in the Bible (cf. Zech. 5:9). The most likely case is that human sexual drive was given by God to ensure the future of the race, and that there will be no sexual drive in our new bodies. Without any sexual drive or desire, there would be little point to sexual intercourse. It is true that sexual intercourse is exciting and fulfilling here on earth, but again, that is most likely God’s design for life here and now so that the human race would continue.

Many people ask about the nature of personal relationships in the next life: for example, will people in a wonderful marriage still be friends even if they are not married? In the next life, we will know the people we knew in this life. Just as Jesus came back from the dead in his new body and knew everyone he had known on earth, we are promised that in our new bodies, “I will know fully just as also I was fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12).

However, the kind of relationships people who were married on earth will have in the future is not answered in the Bible beyond it simply saying that people who are married on earth will not be married in the next life. One likely reason for that is that relationships are complex. For example, the woman the Sadducees were using as an example had been married to seven different men (Matt. 22:25-28). It is probable that she liked or even loved some of them, and just as probable that she did not like others but married them out of duty to the Mosaic Law (Deut. 25:5-10).

Marriages on earth are very complex: some are wonderful relationships; some are a continual battle, often including adultery and even occasionally murdering the spouse; some people marry multiple times; and there are many other permutations of the marriage relationship. Some people would love for their marriage to continue as a friendship in the next life while other people would not even want to be friends with the person they had been married to. Given all that, we can see why God does not give us a better glimpse of the next life—it would just lead to more questions. On the other hand, the Bible does promise happiness and joy in the next life, so there is some reason to believe that people who have had horrible relationships will be delivered from those, while people who have been in wonderful relationships might well have those relationships continue. Thankfully, because God is a Father and a God who loves family, and because He does promise joy in the next life, no matter what our relationships are on earth, we can look forward to joyful ones in the next life.

Mat 22:32

**“I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**.” Jesus uses this verse to show that the Torah teaches a resurrection from the dead. God did not say that He “had been” the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but rather that He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That is, He was still their God, and would actively be so when they were raised from the dead. Some would say that the present tense of the verb proves that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive in heaven at that time (and now), but the context is clearly “the resurrection,” (used four times in the context: Matt. 22:23, 28, 30, 31).

**“God is not *the God* of the dead, but of the living.”** The Greek word translated “living” is a participle, and in this context, the participle is not defining a current state of being, but rather a state of being that has occurred or will occur at some point in time. In this case, the dead people are not “living” now, but because God is the God of the living, He is saying that the people will be alive in the future. In the future, at the resurrection of the dead, dead people will hear the voice of the Son of God and be resurrected in a physical body just like Christ had a physical body (John 5:25-29; Luke 24:39; 1 John 3:2; Phil. 3:21). Jesus used the example of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to prove that God would raise the dead because if those men were dead and gone forever, God would not say He was their God, He would say He had been their God.

The noted New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright, wrote about this record of Jesus and the Sadducees discussing resurrection, which occurs in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Concerning what Christ taught, Wright wrote, “People are easily confused here. I frequently hear ‘resurrection’ used to mean simply ‘life after death’; and since many imagine life after death taking place in a disembodied state called ‘heaven’ where (among other things) angels may be found, they understand a passage like this to be saying after death you will go to heaven, and be a disembodied spirit like an angel—and that will be resurrection. That is precisely what this passage, and the New Testament teaching about resurrection in general, does *not* mean. The whole point of the Jewish doctrine of resurrection was that it meant a new embodied life, a life that would be given at some future date…. Saying that the resurrected dead will be ‘like angels in heaven’ does *not* mean they will be like them in all respects, including disembodiment. They are like angels in this respect only: that they will not marry. This is Jesus’ first point: resurrection, which he affirms, will not simply reproduce every aspect of our present humanity. It will be a recognizable and reembodied human existence…. Second, Jesus finds a passage at the heart of the Pentateuch, acknowledged by the Sadducees as authoritative, which, he claims, demonstrates that the dead will indeed be raised. When God meets Moses at the burning bush, he introduces himself as Abraham’s God, Isaac’s God and Jacob’s God. If this is how God chooses to reveal himself, argues Jesus, it cannot be the case that the patriarchs are dead and gone for ever. This again can be misunderstood. Jesus is not simply saying that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still alive in the presence of God, and that their present afterlife is what is meant by ‘resurrection’. Everybody knew that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had *not* yet been raised from the dead. The point is precisely that they are ‘dead’ at present, but that since God desires to be known as their God he must be intending to raise them from death in the future. ‘Resurrection’, in other words, is not another, somewhat nicer, description of ‘being dead’. It is the reversal of death, the gift of a new body to enjoy life in God’s new world.”[[172]](#footnote-13733)

[For more about dead people being dead in every respect and not alive until the resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Mat 22:35

**“testing him.”** The Greek word translated “testing” is *peirazō* (#3985 πειράζω, pronounced pay-'ra-zō), which can mean to tempt or to test. In this case, “test” is better. Behind this question by the Pharisee was a swirling undercurrent of group rivalry coupled with suspicion about Jesus. The Sadducees and Pharisees differed greatly about what were the commandments in the Law. The Sadducees only accepted commandments in the five books of Moses, while the Pharisees thought there were many more. Thus, when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they were looking for even more ammunition against them, and would have been happy to have more to hold against Jesus as well. Thus they wanted to see what this young Rabbi from the Galilee could add to the ongoing debate about the commandments.

Mat 22:37

**“Love.”** This is an instance of the verb “love,” *agapaō*, (#25 ἀγαπάω) being in the future tense and the indicative mood but being used idiomatically as a present imperative.[[173]](#footnote-20694) Given the imperative mood of “love,” it would be quite correct to translate this verse: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (cf. this command in Mark 12:30 and see commentary on Mark 12:30).

**“the Lord.”** The Hebrew text reads “Yahweh,” which is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh (see commentary on Matt. 3:3).

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here *psuchē* is used very broadly, but certainly includes the attitude, feelings, and emotions of the person himself.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Mat 22:38

**“most important.”** In this context, “most important” is literally “first” but means “first place” not “first in order.” See commentary on Mark 12:28.

Mat 22:39

**“neighbor.”** On who is our neighbor, see commentary on Luke 10:27.

Mat 22:40

**“hang.”** After speaking about love, Jesus said, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:40 KJV). An essential part of every biblical household were the pegs in the walls and posts from which things could be hung. Even tents sometimes had pegs in the tent poles, or at least some kind of hook tied to the tent poles so that clothes and other items could be kept in order and off the ground.

It was important that pegs for hanging things were made of good solid wood so that they would be sturdy and not break off. Wood from vines, for example, was not good for pegs, as we learn in Ezekiel. God asked Ezekiel, “Is wood ever taken from it [a vine] to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on?” (Ezek. 15:3 NIV). The expected answer was “No, they do not.” A peg made from the wood of a vine would break when something heavy was hung from it. In Isaiah 22, God said He would remove Shebna, the steward in charge of Hezekiah’s palace, and replace him with Eliakim. Shebna had been a disappointment, but God said that He would make Eliakim like a firm peg, so firm that all the glory of his family could hang from him. “I will fasten him [Eliakim] like a peg in a sure place. He will be for a throne of glory to his father’s house. They will hang on him all the glory of his father’s house, the offspring and the issue, every small vessel from the cups even to all the pitchers.” (Isa. 22:23-24).

Sadly, Eliakim was human, and eventually was not able to perform his duties, and even though he had once been a firm peg, he was broken off and what he supported was destroyed. “…the peg that was driven into a firm place [Eliakim] will give way, be cut off, and fall, and the load on it will be destroyed” (Isa. 22:25 HCSB). The word “destroyed” is accurate because many different things were hung from pegs, and it was common that when a peg broke holding a clay jar, or a skin of wine or milk, the load was destroyed.

Psalms speaks of a wineskin being hung from a peg. People hung their wineskins from pegs to keep them from being accidentally kicked, and also because they were less likely to spill when hung. “Though I am like a wineskin in the smoke, I do not forget your decrees” (Psalm 119:83 NIV). The wineskin was “in the smoke” because in the biblical era common houses did not have chimneys. If a fire was built in a house, for warmth and/or to cook, it was usually built in the middle of the room. The room would fill with smoke, but since people sat, ate, and slept on the floor, the really thick smoke usually stayed above them. In contrast, the poor wineskin was hung on a peg up in the thick smoke. What a wonderful Psalm! The psalmist says that even if he feels like a wineskin in the smoke, neglected, and in a difficult situation, he would not forget God’s decrees and laws.

Wall pegs were vital to ancient living. They gave order and organization to the ancient household and held clothes, water jars, and other things that were essential to life. Thus it is not surprising that one of the many names of Jesus Christ is “the tent peg.” Zechariah 10:4 has three of the names of Jesus, the “cornerstone,” the “tent peg,” and the “battle bow.” “From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler” (Zechariah 10:4 NIV). Calling Jesus Christ “the tent peg” shows how essential he is to the organization of our lives. He does much more than give us everlasting life. He organizes our lives in a meaningful way, does a lot to keep us out of the dirt of life, and helps keep us from some of the kicks and bumps of life. In return, we should realize that we are hung up for all to see, and like a nice piece of clothing on a peg reflects the wealth and value of the household, we can reflect the glory of Christ to those around us.

In Matthew 22:40 Jesus is using a very familiar scene in every home, and even in tents, of a peg or nail from which were hung wineskins and many other valuable things. In a very real sense, as a wineskin or article of clothing hangs from a peg and depends on the peg to keep it orderly and effective, the laws and commandments depend on love for God and love for mankind to be truly orderly and effective. It helps us understand how love is the peg that keeps the commandments orderly if we remember that the Hebrew word “*torah*” does not mean “law,” but “instruction.” Most of the “laws” in the Law of Moses are individual commands, certainly, but more than that, they are examples that serve as guides for us from which to build godly rules and laws to govern our society. For example, the Law tells us what to do if a person’s ox gores a person (Exod. 21:28-32), but does not tell us what to do about other animals that might be dangerous. We are to understand that the rules about oxen are “instruction” that we then use to build other, similar righteous rules and laws.

One of Jesus’ complaints about the rules the religious leaders had put in place was that they did not properly apply the instruction of the Torah when making up their rules. So, for example, they realized a person could pull an animal out of a ditch on the Sabbath, but believed that healing a human being on the Sabbath was breaking the Sabbath (Luke 13:14; 14:3-6). Similarly, the Jews wrongly thought that the message of Torah was to withdraw from sinners, while Jesus properly understood Torah and spent time with them. When questioned about it, he said to them, “Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’”

With the above background about tent pegs, we are now able to see the wonderful point Jesus was making when he spoke of the law and commandments hanging from love. He was speaking to the Pharisees, who were trying to trap him in his words (Matt. 22:15). One of them asked him which was the greatest commandment in the Law, to which he answered, love God with all your heart, soul, and mind; and love your neighbor like yourself. Then Jesus added, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:40 KJV). Jesus was making the point that loving God and loving our neighbor are like a great peg in God’s house that give order and meaning to the rest of His commandments. Without love, the commandments lie broken, or in a disorganized heap, on the muddy floor, not able to profit us or others. Without love, the commandments are just heartless demands, but with love, they become the godly fabric upon which a godly society can be built. This should have been a huge lesson to the Pharisees, who were very particular about keeping the fine points of the Law, but often did so without love. Let us not be like the Pharisees, but instead let us understand the point that Jesus was making, that love is the essential peg from which every commandment hangs, and that gives order and meaning to the commandments.

As a final comment, we should point out that the REV and the King James Version give us the correct and literal rendering of the Greek text by using the word “hang.” However, most Christians do not understand the common illustration that Jesus was making by comparing love to a great wall peg, so modern versions such as the HCSB, ESV, NASB, NET, and NIV, say “depend” instead of “hang.” While “depend” gets the general sense of “hang,” some of the depth of what Jesus was saying is lost.

Mat 22:42

**“*The son* of David.”** “The Son of David” was a messianic title, as we see here (see commentary on Matt. 1:1).

Mat 22:43

**“spirit.”** It is very hard to tell whether it is more proper to say “Spirit” referring to God, or “spirit” referring to God’s gift of holy spirit when translating this verse. The Greek had no such problem because every letter was either capital (in uncial manuscripts) or lowercase (in minuscule manuscripts). God works seamlessly with people through the agency of His gift of holy spirit, which He puts upon people (and now is born and sealed inside people; Eph. 1:13-14). It was God who originated the words David spoke, but like any prophet, he spoke them because he was energized by way of the gift of holy spirit that was upon him (cf. 1 Sam. 16:13). We used “spirit” here, knowing that the English “spirit” limits what actually transpired to the gift of holy spirit upon David energizing him, but knowing that the educated Christian knows that the gift of holy spirit never acts on its own, but is energized by God. (Cf. Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; 4:25, which are the other times when David is said to speak by spirit).

It seems in keeping with the flow of the context and standard OT usage that Jesus is saying that David was speaking “by” (or “in association with”) the gift of God. In other words, it seems more likely that Jesus is saying David is speaking by the spirit of God (i.e., not on his own) than saying that he was speaking, being directed by God Himself, although it may well be that is indeed the emphasis here; it is very hard to tell, and it bears repeating that the original text did not make a difference between spirit and Spirit. Also adding weight to the fact that this is likely a reference to the gift, not the Giver (God) is the fact that ἐν πνεύματι is clearly used of the gift of God in other places (cf. Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; 11:13; John 1:33; Acts 11:16; Rom. 9:1; 14:17; 15:16; 1 Cor. 12:3; 1 Thess. 1:5; Jude 1:20), but not once clearly used with God Himself.

The Old Testament context of speaking out in prophecy because a person has the spirit of God upon them is well established (and “upon,” as per the KJV, is a good rendition of the Hebrew and very accurate, in contrast to some modern versions). Many people spoke or acted prophetically when the spirit came upon them (cf. Num. 11:17, 24, 25; 24:2; Judg. 3:10; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 15:1; 24:20). That would make this verse in Matthew similar, and show David to be following in that prophetic pattern.

The REV has “by *the* spirit,” adding the word “the” even though the Greek text does not have it. The Greek reads *en pneuma* (“in spirit;” ἐν πνεύματι), but the definite article is not needed in prepositional phrases to make the noun definite. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite. ...This is recognized by most grammarians.”[[174]](#footnote-14552) Thus, when prepositions such as *en*, *dia*, or *hupo* are used before the noun *pneuma*, as occurs here in Matthew, the noun can either be definite (i.e., “the *pneuma*”) or indefinite (i.e., “*pneuma*”) depending on the context or what reads most smoothly in English, because sometimes “the” just refers to “the” spirit in the context or the spirit that is commonly known.

Mat 22:44

**“The Lord said to my Lord.”** This is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36, and Luke 20:42-43. The Hebrew text reads, “*Yahweh* said to *adōni* [translated “my lord], “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

This is a very important verse showing that Jesus Christ is not God, but a fully human servant of God. To see that, however, we must understand the use of “Lord” in this verse. Trinitarian commentators sometimes argue that “my Lord” in this verse is another name for God, and is, therefore, proof of the divinity of the Messiah. However, that is incorrect. Actually, this verse is one of the great proofs of the complete humanity of the promised Messiah.

In all languages, words are built from root words, and the meaning of the inflected word can sometimes be quite different from the meaning of the root. Psalm 110:1 is an example of the root word, which means “lord,” taking on a more specific meaning when it is inflected, and we need to understand that meaning to understand this verse.

The root word of the word “lord” in Psalm 110:1 is *adōn*, which means “Lord or lord,” and can refer to a human lord or God (#0113 אָדוֹן, pronounced ah-'dōn, and sometimes shortened to אָדֹן). When the root word *adōn* is inflected to *adōnay*, it refers to God. (#0136 אֲדֹנָי, usually spelled out as *adōnay* or *adōnai* and usually pronounced either ah-doe-'nay or ah-doe-'nigh).

In stark contrast, however, when the root word *adōn* is inflected to *adōni*, it refers to a human or angelic lord (#0113 אֲדֹנִי, pronounced ah-doe-'nee). The “i” ending is possessive in Hebrew, and thus is usually translated “my.” Some examples will help us understand this: El is a name of God, so Eli (pronounced El-'ee) is “my God” (cf. Matt. 27:46). *Ab* or *abba* is “Father,” so *abi* (ab-eeˈ) is “my father.” The name Abimelech (pronounced Ab-ee-'mel-ek) is a compound word from abi, “my father” and *melek*, king, and meant, “my father is king” (cf. Judg. 8:31). Similarly then, *adōn* is “Lord,” and *adōni* is “my Lord,” and that designation was never used of God; instead, the Hebrew uses *adōnay* for God.

What people who study the Bible must understand is that most Hebrew-English concordances and lexicons, for example, *Young’s Concordance* or *Strong’s Concordance*, give only root words, not the word that actually occurs in the Hebrew text. Even most computer-based research programs give the root word when you mouse over “lord” in Psalm 110:1. The roots can be confusing, and we have sometimes discovered that even the same research tools assign different Strong’s numbers for these words, making exacting study using English resources sometimes quite difficult. This is one reason why biblical research done by people using only tools such as a *Strong’s Concordance* is limited, and people who genuinely want to do serious research into the text of Scripture must understand, not just the root words, but the inflected forms of the words and the impact those infections have on the translation of the Bible.

*Adōni* is always used in Scripture to describe human masters and lords, but *never* God. Buzzard and Hunting write:

Psalm 110:1 provides a major key to understanding who Jesus is. The Hebrew Bible carefully distinguishes the divine title, *adōnai*, the Supreme Lord, from adōni, the form of address appropriate to human and angelic superiors. Adōni, “my lord,” “my master,” on no occasion refers to the deity. *Adonai*, on the other hand is the special form of adōn, lord, reserved for address to the One God only.[[175]](#footnote-13060)

The difference between *adōn* (the root word), *adōni* (“lord,” always used of men or angels), and *adōnai* (which is almost always used of God) is critical to the understanding of Psalm 110:1. The *Dictionary of Old Testament Words* by Aaron Pick makes a difference between *adōnay* and *adōni*, saying that *adōni* was “applied to man.”[[176]](#footnote-32496) The Hebrew Lexicon by Brown, Driver, and Briggs (BDB), considered by many to be the best available, makes the distinction between these words, and says that *adōni* “refers to human superiors.” The BDB lexicon points out that the following people were among those called “lord.” A *master* (Exod. 21:5); a *husband* (Gen. 18:12); a *prophet* (1 Kings 18:7 and 18:13); a *prince* (Gen. 42:10; 43:20); a *king* (1 Sam. 22:12); a *father* (Gen. 31:35); *Moses* (Num. 11:28; 12:11); a *priest* (1 Sam. 1:15 and 1:26); a *theophanic angel* (i.e., an angel representing God; Josh. 5:14; Judg. 6:13); a *captain* (2 Sam. 11:11); and *adōni* was used for general recognition of superiority: Genesis 24:18; Ruth 2:13.

The fact that the Hebrew text uses the word *adōni* of the Messiah in Psalm 110 is very strong proof that he is not God. If the Messiah was to be God, then the word *adōnai* would have been used.

Psalm 110 is a Messianic and prophetic psalm in which God gave David a vision of the future, when God and the Messiah speak about what the Messiah will accomplish. The fact that David does not call both God and the Messiah his “Lord,” but carefully words what he says such that Yahweh maintains His elevated position while the Messiah, God’s “right-hand man,” is seen as David’s “lord.” If God and Christ were both God and were co-equal and co-eternal, as the Trinity states, then Psalm 110:1 fails to recognize that equality, or even that Yahweh and the Messiah are both God. Quite the opposite! The Messiah, David’s *adōni*, is seen to be distinct from, and lesser than, Yahweh.

[For more information, see Word Study: “Lord.”]

One of the clearest proofs that there is no Trinity is that neither Jesus nor the apostles ever taught it. Psalm 110:1 is just one of many verses that were reasons the Jews were expecting a human Messiah. The ancient Jews had a lot of expectations about their Messiah that were based on Scripture. The Jews worshiped one God (Deut. 6:4), and never considered there to be a Trinity. Similarly, the Messiah the Jews were expecting was to be a real human, not a God-man. He was to be a descendant of Eve (Gen. 3:15), a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 22:18), from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10); and a descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12, 13; Isa. 11:1). He was to be a “lord” under Yahweh (Ps. 110:1) and a servant of Yahweh (Isa. 42:1-7), but he was to be able to draw near to Yahweh (Jer. 30:21). He was to be a Jew, “one of their own” (Jer. 30:21), and he was to be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2).

Since the Jews were expecting a human Messiah and did not think of “the Holy Spirit” as a “Person,” if the doctrine of the Trinity was true and was to be believed, someone, ostensibly the Messiah himself, had to teach it. But he never did. While there are a few verses where Jesus said things that modern Trinitarians say mean he was God, each of those can also be interpreted from the perspective that Jesus was not God, and many biblical Unitarian scholars have demonstrated that in their writings. Meanwhile, the vast preponderance of New Testament verses are Jesus or the New Testament authors showing that Jesus was sent by God and did God’s will, not his own. Jesus quoted the Shema (Deut. 6:4), that there was only one God, to Jews who would have taken what he said at face value. Jesus did not take the opportunity—ever!—to teach what modern Trinitarians say is the foundation of the Christian Faith: that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and together the three Persons make One God. Why not? The most logical explanation is that there is no Trinity

[For more information see, *One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith*, by Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit.]

**“Yahweh.”** “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, however, there is debate about the fidelity of the Hebrew text of Matthew, and since the rest of Matthew in the REV is from the Greek text, the REV followed that construction here in Matthew as well. (see commentary on Matt. 3:3).

Mat 22:45

**“how is he his son?”** Jesus is the Son of David (cf. Matt. 1:1; 9:27; Luke 18:38-39, etc.), so this question is inviting a discussion on the subject.

**Matthew Chapter 23**

Mat 23:4

**“For they tie up burdens *that are* heavy and hard to carry.”** Matthew 23:4 is similar to what Jesus said in Luke 11:46: “For you load people with burdens *that are* hard to carry, and *yet* you yourselves do not touch the loads with one of your fingers.” The fact that Jesus would say basically the same thing in two different contexts to two different groups of people shows us that it is important. Religious people try to keep the letter of the law but miss the heart of the law, and they are so afraid of offending God that they heap up unbiblical regulations and try to force people to keep them. Christ said his “yoke,” i.e., the doctrines he propounded, were “kind” and the things he told people to do were “light” (Matt. 11:30). Religion is the opposite: many hard-to-carry regulations that keep people in failure and guilt.

Mat 23:5

**“phylacteries.”** A phylactery is a little leather box that contains Scripture. The very religious male Jews (today, the ultra-orthodox Jews) tie one on their arm and another on their forehead, especially when they are praying or in the morning service, although in ancient times some very religious men apparently wore them all day. The Pharisees and experts in the Law at the time of Christ loved to be recognized by the people, called “Rabbi,” and thought of as being very godly, so they did things that caught people’s attention, such as making their phylacteries large so they were especially noticeable.

The origin of phylacteries is debated, and just when people started wearing them is unknown, but apparently, it predates the time of Christ. Justification for wearing the phylacteries came from verses such as Deuteronomy 6:8, which says to tie the commandments to your hand (or arm) and put them on your forehead (Exod. 13:9, 16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18 are the verses generally used to support the wearing of phylacteries). However, God never meant for people to literally tie Scripture to themselves. For one thing, the nature of daily life in ancient Israel would not accommodate it, and also, God’s command was for every Israelite, men and women, but in ancient times, and still today, only the men wear phylacteries.

When God said to bind the commandments to the head and hand, He was emphasizing that the Word of God should be near our thoughts (head) and in what we do (hands). The pure nature of God’s command to keep His Word as the center of our thoughts and actions was perverted by religious superstition, as we can see by the very word “phylactery,” which comes from the Greek word *phulassō* (#5442 φυλάσσω) which means to guard, to keep watch, to protect you from a person or thing, to keep safe. “The only instance of the name ‘phylacteries’ in ancient times occurs once in the Greek New Testament (Matt. 23:5) whence it has passed into the languages of Europe. ‘Phylacteries’ derives from the Greek *phulaktērion - φυλακτήριον*, ‘defences,’ and in late Greek, ‘amulets’ or ‘charms.’ …The choice of this particular Greek equivalent to render the Heb. *Tefillin* bears witness to the ancient functional interpretation of the said device as a kind of an amulet.”[[177]](#footnote-25795)

So the very thing that God said to assure that people would keep His Word occasionally became an object of superstition, complete with all the rules and regulations about exactly how to tie it on, when and where to wear it, etc. Many Jews would insist the phylactery was only worn in obedience to God and so people would keep God’s commands in mind, but there is evidence that the Jews did indeed consider the phylacteries to be protective in nature, if only to secure God’s blessings. “…the early Rabbinic sources furnish more or less explicit examples of the apotropaic qualities of tefillin [“apotropaic” means having the power to ward off evil]. For instance, Bamidbar R. 12:3 presents tefillin as capable of defeating “a thousand demons” emerging on “the left side,” rabbis Yohanan and Nahman used their sets [of phylacteries] to repel the fiends inhabiting privies in BT Berakhot 23a-b, whereas Elisha the Winged, who was scrupulous in performing this mitzvah, was miraculously saved from the Roman persecution in BT Shabbat 49a. Also, tefillin are believed to possess life-lengthening qualities, as suggested in BT Menahot 36b, 44a-b and in BT Shabbat 13a-b and they are often listed in one breath among various items which are considered amuletic in nature, as is the case in M Kelim 23:1, M Eruvin 10:1 or BT Eruvin 96b-97a.[[178]](#footnote-16259)

**“lengthen the tassels *on their clothes*.”** The Law of Moses commanded that all Jews wear tassels with a blue cord on the outside of their outer garment (Num. 15:37-40). God commanded the tassels be worn after a man broke the Sabbath and gathered sticks on the Sabbath and was stoned for it (Num. 15:32-36). The tassels were to remind people of all the commandments of God. The tassel was only to have a cord of blue that could be seen; it was not commanded that the entire tassel be blue.

At the time of Jesus, the religious leaders made a show of how “religious” they were by making the tassels with the blue cord especially long in order to be sure that everyone would notice them. This outward show was not only unnecessary, it was hypocritical because while the tassel with the blue strand was supposed to remind people to keep the Law, the religious leaders broke the law by their traditions (Matt. 15:1-9; 23:16-34 Mark 7:1-13). Today, modern Jews have tassels on their prayer shawls, and each tassel has a blue strand in it.

Mat 23:6

**“like.”** The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). See commentary on John 21:15.

Mat 23:13

**“how terrible.”** The Greek word is *ouai* (#3759 οὐαί, pronounced ooh-'eye). For an explanation of the meaning of “how terrible,” see commentary on Matthew 11:21. In this context, *ouai* is an expression of warning of the grief and disaster that is coming to the experts in the Law and Pharisees if they do not repent and change their ways.

Mat 23:14

Matthew 23:14 is omitted in the earliest and best Greek manuscripts of the Western, Alexandrian, and Caesarean text families. Furthermore, when it is included in some Greek manuscripts, different manuscripts have it in different places, which is a clear indication it was added as a harmonization taken from Mark 12:40 or Luke 20:47. If a verse is original, and gets deleted from the manuscripts for some reason, it is always deleted from the same place. However, if a verse is added, sometimes different scribes add it in different places, and that is the case here. Thus, the evidence in the Greek manuscripts supports that Matthew 23:14 is not original in Matthew, so we put the verse in double brackets to show it is almost certainly not original.

Mat 23:15

**“How terrible.”** See commentary on Matthew 23:13.

**“Gehenna.”** See commentary on Matthew 5:22.

[For information on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Mat 23:16

**“How terrible.”** See commentary on Matthew 23:13.

**“it is nothing.”** The practices regarding oaths reveals the blindness and dishonesty of the religious leaders. Of course, they had a “reason” for their view that an oath made by the gold of the sanctuary or the gift on the altar was binding, but an oath made by the sanctuary or altar itself was not binding. It seems that they reasoned that the binding nature of the oath was determined by the value of what the person swore by, and because neither the Temple nor the altar was for sale, an oath by those things was not binding.[[179]](#footnote-22191) Of course, the priests could use this to their advantage, because they could very sincerely swear an oath by the Temple to someone who did not know their customs, knowing full well that they were deceiving the person, and just shrug off their oath if it was not convenient to keep it, saying that “it is nothing,” that is, it is not binding. They were so blind and self-righteous that they did not think God would judge such behavior. No wonder Jesus called them “fools,” and “blind,” and said “woe” to them, referring to great distress and disaster.

Mat 23:21

**“and by the one who dwells in it.”** That is the One God; He lives in the Temple in the Holy of Holies.

Mat 23:23

**“how terrible.”** The Greek word is *ouai* (#3759 οὐαί, pronounced ooh-'eye). For an explanation of the meaning of “how terrible,” see commentary on Matthew 11:21. In this context, *ouai* is an expression of warning of the grief and disaster that is coming to the experts in the Law and Pharisees if they do not repent and change their ways.

**“faithfulness.”** “Faithfulness” is a much better translation of the Greek word *pistis* (#4102 πίστις) in this context than “trust.” Faithfulness to God and the covenant Israel made with God was one of the most important things in the Law. God was a “faithful” God (Deut. 7:9; 32:4), and God’s people were to be faithful to Him (Ps. 31:23; 101:6; Isa. 1:21, 26). Indeed, faithfulness is a fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22). But the religious leaders at the time of Christ were not being faithful to God or to the Law and covenant, and Jesus pointed that out to them in clear language.

Mat 23:24

**“gnat ... camel.”** The illustration combines the figures hyperbole (exaggeration) and hypocatastasis (comparison by implication; see commentary on Rev. 20:2). The “gnat” is the small things, while the “camel” represents the big things. The illustration was made more emotionally graphic to the Jews because the camel was an unclean animal and could not be eaten at all. For Jesus to imply that the Jews swallowed a camel would have been extremely offensive to them.

Mat 23:27

**“How terrible.”** The Greek word is *ouai* (#3759 οὐαί, pronounced ooh-'eye). For an explanation of the meaning of “how terrible,” see commentary on Matthew 11:21. In this context, *ouai* is an expression of warning of the grief and disaster that is coming to the experts in the Law and Pharisees if they do not repent and change their ways.

Mat 23:28

**“lawlessness.”** Although many people think of lawlessness as in early America’s Wild West when there were no laws and no effective way of enforcing laws, actually, much lawlessness occurs when there are plenty of well-defined laws but the authorities refuse to enforce them, and also when the authorities make all kinds of oppressive and demonic laws that go against the way God would rule.

[For more on lawlessness, see commentary on Matt. 24:12.]

Mat 23:29

**“How terrible.”** The Greek word is *ouai* (#3759 οὐαί, pronounced ooh-'eye). For an explanation of the meaning of “how terrible,” see commentary on Matthew 11:21. In this context, *ouai* is an expression of warning of the grief and disaster that is coming to the experts in the Law and Pharisees if they do not repent and change their ways.

Mat 23:33

**“You offspring of vipers!”** Jesus called the religious leaders a generation of vipers (Matt. 12:34; 23:33). John did too (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7).

**“Gehenna.”** In this context, Gehenna is the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14-15).

[For more on Gehenna and how it came to represent the Lake of Fire, see commentary on Matt. 5:22. For information on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Mat 23:34

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 23:35

**“so that on you will come all the righteous blood shed on the earth**​**.”** Matthew 23:35 is similar to what Jesus said in Luke 11:50, but it was spoken at a different time and with a different primary emphasis. Matthew uses the preposition *hopōs* (#3704 ὅπως) instead of *hina* at the beginning of the verse, which puts a greater emphasis on the purpose and plan of God, whereas the *hina* in Luke puts more emphasis on the result than the purpose. Both purpose and result are important, and the two different Gospel records and the two different words make that point very well.

[For more information on the conjunction *hina* and how Luke 11:50 puts more emphasis on result than purpose, see commentary on Luke 11:50.]

This is the second time in Jesus’ ministry that he pronounced woes on the Pharisees and said there would be a generation that would experience God’s wrath for all the bloodshed on earth. The first time was at a Pharisee’s house (Luke 11:37-52), and this second time, recorded in Matthew 23:13-36, occurred in the Temple during the week before Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion.

God has always had a plan to rid the world of evil and bring about justice on earth, and it is a harsh reality that in order for evil to show itself there must be an opportunity for it to do so, and innocent people get hurt as a result. The situation is this: in the beginning, God created wonderful, innocent people (Adam and Eve), and gave them free will so they could serve Him from their heart and establish their relationship with Him on the basis of love, not fear. Sadly, they decided not to obey God, but followed their own desires. More sadly, the progeny of Adam and Eve, the people of earth, have in large part rejected God and there has been war, slavery, abuse, and pain on earth for millennia as a result. In any society when people serve their own interests and disobey God, other people get hurt, and that has been the situation on earth since Eden.

What God needed was a plan to rescue those people who loved Him and desired to serve Him (but fell short due to sin nature), while justly ridding the earth of selfish and evil people who have no intention of serving God, but desire to serve only themselves. The way to bring that plan to pass was to send prophets and wise, righteous people—who accepted the assignment willingly—to bring the message of salvation to the world. Of course, God knew that sending those messengers into the world put them in a dangerous position, because if no one listened to them they would be persecuted and killed (which is what happened and is still happening today), but presenting the world a message of redemption from the lips and lives of righteous people was the only way to really tell who would serve God and who would reject Him. Those who rejected Him would be “condemned to Gehenna” (Matt. 23:33), where they would burn up and be annihilated. Those who accepted Him would be granted everlasting life in the Messiah’s kingdom.

Given the purposes of God and His plan to accomplish those purposes, He sent prophets into the world so that He could bring the guilt of the world on evil people. Also, however, He sent them “with the result” that His wrath could be poured out upon the earth and the earth cleansed of evil. Robert H. Mounce writes: “Prophets and wise men and teachers (leaders of the early church) will be sent to them, but they, like their forefathers, will persecute and kill the messengers of God. As a result, the guilt for all the innocent blood shed on earth will fall on them.”[[180]](#footnote-23099)

Matthew 23:35 and Luke 11:50 are also supporting evidence for a pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Christian Church. God is righteous, and it does not seem fair of God to punish one generation of people for all the sin that happened from Adam until their generation—about 6,000 years of sin—without giving them a way to escape that punishment. After all, all that unfortunate generation did was be born at the wrong time and be the generation of the Great Tribulation. But God planned for the Christian Church and the Rapture before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), and so He saw, but kept the Church Age a secret (Eph. 3:1-5).

The Rapture will end the Church Age, the Administration of Grace, and at that time everyone who believed in the Lord and got born again will be taken into heaven. That will mean that no believers will be left on earth, only unbelievers. So God planned for, but kept secret, a way to make sure that before the Great Tribulation every righteous person who believed would escape that terrible time on earth.

[For more verses in which Jesus says that his return would be soon, see commentary on Matt. 16:28. For more information about the Eden-like Messianic Kingdom that will be on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more information about why, historically, “that generation” did not experience the wrath Jesus spoke about, and why the Rapture is a righteous act of God, see commentary on Luke 11:50. For more on the Rapture, see commentary on 1 Thess. 4:17. For more information on annihilation in Gehenna, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more information on suffering for doing good, see 1 Pet. 2:20, 3:14, 17; 4:16, 19.]

**“will come.”** The verb *erchomai* (#2064 ἔρχομαι) is in the subjunctive mood, but that is due to the conjunction *hopōs* at the beginning of the verse. Therefore, the verb must be translated from the context, which is future (cf. HCSB, NET).

**“Zechariah.”** The “Zechariah” that Jesus speaks of is almost certainly Zechariah the priest who was unjustly murdered in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22, the last book of the Hebrew Bible. (Unlike modern Christian Bibles, the last book of the Hebrew Bible, then and today, is 2 Chronicles.) Thus, Zechariah would be one of whom the religious leaders would have said, “If we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partners with them in the blood of the prophets” (Matt. 23:30) but actually they would have. The religious leaders could not deny that Zechariah was unjustly murdered, because it is in the Old Testament. As Zechariah was dying from being stoned to death, he said, “May Yahweh see this and repay it” (2 Chron. 24:22), and Yahweh will repay the people of earth for their evil in the Great Tribulation, which Jesus speaks about in Matthew 24 (cf. Mark 13 and Luke 21).

Mat 23:37

**“she.”** The definite article is feminine and agrees with the pronoun “her” at the end of the phrase.

**“keeps on killing.”** The Greek word *apokteinō* (#615 ἀποκτείνω), kill, is a present participle. She kills and keeps on killing. The translation, “is killing” would be appropriate in some contexts, but not here. The point is that she has killed the prophets and keeps on killing them, something that was about to be fulfilled in Jesus himself in just a few days.

Mat 23:38

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 23:39

**“Blessed *is* he...”** The Hebrew text of Matthew is different from the standard quotation from the Old Testament. It simply reads, “Blessed is our savior.” See commentaries on Matthew 21:9 and 3:3. Since the Hebrew text did not have Yahweh, the REV followed the reading of the Greek text.

**Matthew Chapter 24**

Mat 24:1

**“his disciples came to him to draw his attention to the buildings of the Temple.”** To fully understand what is happening in Matthew 24:1-2, we must connect them with Jesus’ teaching in the Temple in Matthew 21-23. In fact, Matthew 24:1-2 are perhaps easier to understand if they are thought of as the last two verses in Matthew 23 rather than the first two verses in Matthew 24.

In Matthew chapter 21, Jesus enters the Temple and disrupts the crooked buying and selling, saying that the leaders have made God’s house into a den of thieves (Matt. 21:12-17). The next day Jesus has a pointed discourse with the leaders (Matt. 21:23-27) and speaks a number of parables about them (Matt. 21:28-46; 22:1-14). The leaders, in return, try to trap Jesus with questions about taxes, the resurrection, and the Law (Matt. 22:15-40). Jesus asked them a question they could not answer (Matt. 22:41-46), then spoke to the crowd about the leaders (Matt. 23:1-12) and pronounced woes over the leaders themselves (Matt. 23:13-36). Then Jesus made what must have been a very disturbing statement to his disciples and others who were around him: “Look!, your house is left to you desolate. For I say to you, you will absolutely not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matt. 23:38-39).

After hearing that statement by Jesus, we can see why the disciples wanted to draw Jesus’ attention to the magnificent buildings of the Temple, which were also likely filled with excited worshipers who were there for Passover. To the disciples, it certainly did not look like the House of Yahweh was desolate. In fact, since many of the disciples were from Galilee and did not see the Temple very often, they themselves were likely excited and proud of this wonderful national treasure. So it would be natural for them to try to draw Jesus’ attention to the magnificent buildings there. But Jesus, looking at the future and not being attached to the things of this life no matter how magnificent, spoke of the future of the Temple—this den of thieves—that it was desolate and would be completely destroyed (Matt. 23:38, 24:2).

Jesus’ attitude and his awareness of the future is an example that every believer should follow. It is hard not to get attached to the things of this world when we put so much time and effort into making them nice for ourselves and others, but no one knows when this age will end and the earth will be devastated by wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes, and more. The right way to live is to obey God, enjoy the work of our hands (Eccl. 2:24), be helpful and thankful, and not be overly attached to the things of this life.

**“to draw his attention to.”** The Greek word *epideiknumi* (#1925 ἐπιδείκνυμι) means “show” or “point out,” and in this context, “call his attention to” catches the meaning very well (cf. CJB, CSB, NIV, NJB).

**“Temple.”** Properly understanding this verse requires an understanding of the Temple complex during the time of Jesus. The “Temple” that Jesus was going out of in the first part of Matthew 24:1 is the Temple proper, into which only Jews were allowed to enter. Once a person left the Temple proper, he was in the Temple courts. The courts were an approximately 40-acre area enclosed by walls. On the south end were tall buildings that were used as marketplaces, etc. On the north end was the Antonia Fortress, the Roman fortress that allowed the Romans to control mobs in the Temple (cf. Acts 21:34, etc., “castle” KJV).

Jesus left the “Temple,” the Temple proper, called the “sanctuary” in some versions, but in doing so was in the presence of the huge buildings on the south end of the Temple Mount enclosure. The disciples, mostly Galileans who did not have anything in Galilee like the Temple structure, were amazed by the buildings, even though they had seen them before, and pointed them out to Jesus. Jesus answered them in a way that should have kept them grounded in the truth that we are not to get too attached to the things of this life, for they are all temporary. Jesus said that not one stone of all those great buildings would be left standing on top of another. True to Jesus’ teaching, there is now not one single stone of those buildings left standing. The disciples, rightly believing they were speaking with the Messiah, but wrongly thinking that very soon he was going to come into Jerusalem and conquer it and set up his kingdom, then asked him the question in Matt. 24:3, “What will be the sign of your coming and end of the age?”

Mat 24:3

**“And as he was sitting on the Mount of Olives.”** The Mount of Olives is across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem and the Temple, and gives a wonderful view of both. Matthew 24:3 begins a new discourse and Matthew 24:1-2 are perhaps better understood as the end of Matthew 23 than the beginning of Matthew 24 (see commentary on Matt. 24:1).

**“the disciples came to him privately.”** Mark 13:3 identifies these disciples as Peter, James, John, and Andrew.

**“Tell us, when will these things be.”** This question elicited a long answer from Jesus, in fact, Jesus’ answer is the rest of Matthew 24 and all of Matthew 25. It is unfortunate that the scribes put in a chapter break (chapter 25) and broke Jesus’ answer into two chapters because the disciples asked one question and Jesus’ answer is long and quite complex, covering a lot of material. Furthermore, his answer is only partially answered in each Gospel. Each Gospel has material that the other two Gospels do not have, so to get Jesus’ complete answer (at least as complete as is included in the Bible), a person must read the question and answer in the three Gospels that cover it, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

This discussion between Jesus and his disciples is extremely important and would have taken a lot of time, much more time than it would take to read what is said about it in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Even the opening question asked by the disciples, which is different in all three Gospels, shows us that there was not just one question, but a number of disciples speaking up and asking Jesus about the end after he told them that not one stone would be left upon another. Thus, Matthew has, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what *will be* the sign of your coming and end of the age?” Mark has, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what *will be* the sign when these things are all about to be accomplished?” And Luke has, “Teacher, so when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign when these things are about to come to pass?” The Gospels do not contradict each other but instead, show that Jesus’ statements provoked an intense interest among the disciples with lots of them speaking up and asking questions that differed somewhat.

**“what *will be* the sign of your coming.”** This question of the disciples was prompted by Jesus saying that not one stone in all the buildings around them would be left upon another (Matt. 24:2). The “coming” of Christ that the disciples asked about in this verse is misunderstood by most Christians. As we study the verse, we will see that the apostles were not speaking of Jesus “coming” from heaven to earth, but were talking about him simply coming into Jerusalem and conquering it.

It is important to properly understand both the apostles’ question and Jesus’ answer. It helps if we remember that the apostles asked this question during the last week of Jesus’ life here on earth, and even though they had been with him for a long time, there was a lot they did not understand. For example, the apostles did not think of Jesus’ “coming” the way we do today. Therefore, we must be careful not to read our understanding of the coming of Christ back into the minds of the apostles and disciples.

The apostles did not think of Jesus’ “coming” as “coming from heaven.” To fully understand this, it is helpful to know that the word translated “coming” is *parousia* (#3952 παρουσία, pronounced par-oo-'see-ah), a fairly common Greek word with several different meanings, including to refer to a king or official “coming,” “arriving,” the “presence” of the person after he arrived, or a “visit,” in the biblical sense of visiting in blessing or judgment. The visit of a king, for example, was referred to as a *parousia*.

*Parousia* was “the official term for a visit of a person of high rank, esp. of kings and emperors visiting a province.”[[181]](#footnote-26855) Robert Mounce writes that *parousia* “is widely used in nonbiblical texts for the arrival of a person of high status.”[[182]](#footnote-17138) Ann Nyland writes that Emperor Nero wanted as many people present as possible at his *parousia* to Corinth.[[183]](#footnote-31141) Visits by dignitaries were expensive, so the cost of the “visit” was often paid for by special taxes that were levied, making the *parousia* of a high-ranking official a burdensome event for many people. A *parousia* was a public event because kings and dignitaries arrived with great pomp and pageantry. So when the apostles asked Jesus about his *parousia*, they understood that when he came in judgment and to set up his kingdom it would be something everyone would see. It was not going to be an event that was private or hidden from public view.

Even after Christians started using *parousia* as a technical term for the “coming” of Christ from heaven, which they did after Jesus ascended into heaven, it still never lost its ordinary meaning of the arrival or personal presence of someone important. So, for example, Paul refers to the “coming” (*parousia*) of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:17) and the “coming” (*parousia*) of Titus (2 Cor. 7:6-7). Paul also uses *parousia* to refer to his own “coming” to visit people (Phil. 1:26; 2:12), and in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, he refers to the “coming” (*parousia*) of the antichrist. Then Paul uses another meaning of *parousia*, “personal presence,” in 2 Corinthians 10:10.

Knowing the many meanings of *parousia* helps us understand that just because the apostles asked, “what *will be* the sign of your coming,” that does not mean that they knew he was going to come down from heaven. They did not even know he was going to die, so they certainly did not understand the things that were going to happen to him after his death; i.e., his resurrection, ascension into heaven, and his coming back to earth from heaven.

The apostles could not have known about Jesus’ coming from heaven when they asked him about it as recorded in Matthew 24:3 because they did not know about it a couple days later at the Last Supper (almost one-quarter of the Gospel of John is taken up by the Last Supper; chapters 13-17). At that final meal before his arrest, in a lengthy teaching and prayer, Jesus told the apostles he was going away to the Father. But the apostles did not understand what he was saying to them. They said among themselves, “We do not know what he is saying” (John 16:18; see commentary on John 16:31).

Since the apostles did not know Jesus was going to die, be raised, ascend, or return to earth from heaven, what did they mean by the question, “What will be the sign of your coming…”? To answer that question it is vital to remember that Jesus had been speaking of the city of Jerusalem and that it would be destroyed (Matt. 24:1-2). Although Jerusalem was controlled by the Romans, the apostles knew that it was going to be conquered by the Messiah and that he would rule the earth from there (Isa. 2:1-3; Jer. 3:17; Mic. 4:1-2; Zech. 2:12). So when Jesus spoke of the destruction of the Temple, it was natural for the apostles to ask when it would happen.

Jesus was going to “come” to Jerusalem, bring the “present evil age” to an end, and start the new age. The New Jerusalem, the new Temple, and the division of the land of Israel when Jesus rules the earth are described in Ezekiel chapters 40-48. The essence of the apostles’ question was, “Tell us when you are going to come to Jerusalem in judgment and end this age?” It is possible that the apostles thought that Jesus was going to go back to Galilee for a while before he came in judgment. Or, since Isaiah said that the Messiah would come from Edom, splattered in blood (Isa. 63:1-4), they may have thought he needed to leave Jerusalem and start his conquest of the earth from another place.

What the apostles were asking was, “When are you going to come to Jerusalem to conquer and judge it, and end this present evil age?” Roger Hahn writes, “The fact that they connected the coming of the Messiah and the end of the age reflected their acceptance of the general Jewish understandings of eschatology. Most Jews believed human history was divided into two great ages: the present, evil age and the glorious age to come. …The ages overlapped during the lifetime of the Messiah.”[[184]](#footnote-25980) Sadly, the preconceived notion held by the apostles from their Jewish upbringing, that when the Messiah came the present age would end and the new age would begin, was the main thing that kept them from understanding what Jesus had been clearly telling them for months about his death and resurrection. That teaching did not fit with what they had been taught, and so they did not understand it. Similarly, they could not grasp that Jesus would go away into heaven without ushering in the Messianic Age. They had been taught since they were children that when the Messiah came he would bring in the Messianic Age, but that erroneous teaching was why, at the Last Supper, they did not understand what Jesus was talking about when he told them he was going to the Father (John 14-16).

Jesus did not try to directly correct the apostles’ misunderstanding about his *parousia*. W. C. Allen correctly observes that Jesus “overlooks the fact that the disciples, according to the Gospel narrative, did not have the requisite understanding of the future for a question about Christ’s coming.”[[185]](#footnote-25549) Instead, he answered the apostles’ question in a straightforward way, realizing that they would later be able to remember and understand those things that they did not understand right then. After Jesus’ ascension into heaven, the nature of his *parousia* became clear, just as what Jesus had said about his death and resurrection became clear after his resurrection. Hindsight is always 20/20, especially if we remember that people told us beforehand what would happen.

The book of Acts gives us more proof that the apostles did not understand about Jesus ascending to heaven until when it occurred. In the days between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the disciples asked him, “Lord, is it at this time you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Their question was logical because Jesus had just spoken to them about the coming holy spirit (Acts 1:5), and the disciples knew that the Old Testament prophecies connected the giving of the gift of holy spirit with the Messianic Age (cf. Isa. 32:15-18; Joel 2:28-3:17). So when Jesus told them that the gift of holy spirit was going to be poured out, it was natural for them to assume that the Messianic Kingdom was at hand. But for them to think that Jesus could restore the Kingdom to Israel right then meant they did not expect him to go to heaven and spend time there. Had the disciples known that Jesus was going to ascend into heaven and be there for a while, they would have never asked him if he was going to restore the Kingdom to Israel at that time (see commentary on Acts 1:6).

We now shift our focus from the “coming” of Christ to the purpose of the Gospel of Matthew, and study the word *parousia* from that perspective. Each of the Four Gospels presents a different picture of the Messiah. Matthew shows Jesus as the King, Mark as the servant, Luke as a man, and John as the Son of God (see commentary on Mark 1:1; “the good news of Jesus Christ”). In light of that, it is noteworthy that the only Gospel that uses the word *parousia* is Matthew (Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39), the Gospel portraying Christ as a King. In Matthew, the “coming” of Christ is a *parousia*. In contrast, Jesus’ “coming” in Mark is the word *erchomai* (#2064 ἔρχομαι), the standard Greek word for coming or going, used over 600 times in the New Testament. Since Mark portrays Christ as a servant, it makes sense that Mark does not use the word *parousia*. Similarly, Luke portrays Jesus as a man, a human being, and Luke also uses the word *erchomai* for Christ’s coming. Kings got a *parousia*, servants and “men” did not. The Gospel of John, which portrays Jesus as the Son of God, could appropriately use *parousia* for the coming of Jesus, but does not contain Jesus’ teaching on the end of the age that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, do. So from a study of the Four Gospels and an understanding of the word *parousia*, we can see that the use of *parousia* in Matthew supports its specific portrayal of Jesus as the King.

**“and end of the age.”** One thing we can see from the Greek text is that the disciples thought of Jesus’ “coming” and the end of the age as one event, not two. Although most translations have something such as, “the sign of your coming and **the** end of the age,” in the Greek text the sentence has only one definite article (“the”), thus connecting the “coming and end of the age.” We know that when Jesus comes from heaven and fights the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21), he will end this present evil age and start the new Messianic Age. The apostles did not know anything about the Rapture of the Christian Church, which is part of the Administration of the Sacred Secret, so they did not mention it (see commentary on Eph. 3:2).

Mat 24:4

**“Watch out, so that no one leads you astray.”** The Greek word translated “lead … astray” is *planaō* (#4105 πλανάω, pronounced plan-'ah-ō). It means to cause to stray or to lead astray, lead aside from the right way; to go astray, wander, roam around. We get the English word “planet” from *planaō* because, unlike the fixed stars, the planets “wandered about” in the night sky. *Planaō* was used metaphorically for “to lead away from the truth, to lead into error, to deceive.”

It is a powerful truth that when the disciples asked Jesus about the end of the age, the very first thing he told them was to make sure they were not being misled and deceived. There will be much deception in the End Times, and deception figures prominently in Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 24. There will be general deception (Matt. 24:4) and deception concerning the Messiah (Matt. 24:5). Also, Jesus said that many false prophets will arise and deceive many (Matt. 24:11), and there will be false prophets and false Messiahs who even do lying signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24). It is important that we take the time to understand Jesus’ teaching about false prophets. In today’s world, a “false prophet” is not some wild-eyed person who is dressed in some kind of long robe and is predicting the end of the world, although there will no doubt be some of those. A false prophet is someone who claims to have heard from God or ascertained some spiritual truth that supposedly is from God. They may be well-educated, clean-cut, and soft-spoken, but their doctrine is of the Devil. Like the beast from the earth in Revelation 13:11, they may have the outward appearance of a lamb, but they speak like a dragon. These people will be very effective in deceiving people, and it will be due, at least in part, to the fact that they are “of the fold.” In our case, they will be, or say that they are, Christians.

When Jesus told the apostles to beware of false prophets, he was not warning them to be wary of pagan prophets. The prophets, oracles, and spiritualists from the Greco-Roman culture that surrounded the Jews would not have misled the apostles or many other Jews for that matter. The false prophets that would be able to mislead the Jews were Jewish false prophets. That same truth applies today. Most Christians are not in danger of being misled by a Muslim Imam or a Buddhist holy man, but they are in danger of being misled by a well-educated, soft-spoken, “man of God” who teaches about “God’s love” and under that guise contradicts the basic truths of Scripture. For example, a modern false prophet might say that God loves everyone, but then misinterpret that and teach that God would never be so restrictive as to say that salvation only came through belief in Christ. Or that God understands human faults and failures so He would never condemn anyone to the Lake of Fire but will ensure that everyone is saved and lives forever. Or that God is too compassionate to say that the only acceptable sexual relation is between a man and a woman inside a marriage relationship; that God promotes love, and as long as two people love each other and their relationship is a free will choice, God is okay with it. Or that, the Bible is a very old book, and teachings that applied thousands of years ago do not apply today, we have to be guided by “goodness and love.” These are all hollow and sinful teachings, but they sound good and logical to someone who does not know the Bible.

But how are we to know who is a false prophet? The fact that Jesus told us to see to it we are not deceived tells us that there is a way we can know a false prophet from a true one. The key to not being deceived is to know the Bible, and know it well. We cannot trust our heart and follow our own human logic and wisdom: “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Prov. 28:26 KJV), and “The heart is deceitful above all things, and is incurable” (Jer. 17:9). We only get one life to live, and then comes Judgment Day. Is it really wise to ignore what God has said and had written down, and bet that God did not really mean what He said, but would instead relent and ignore His own words on that Day? Hebrews 4:12 says it is the Word of God that is sharper than any two-edged sword and is able to judge the considerations and intentions of the heart. Revelation 20:12 says that on Judgment Day “the books” (the scrolls) will be opened and people will be judged “out of the things that were written in the books.” Wise people learn and live the Bible and biblical principles.

Mat 24:5

**“in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah’”** There are three aspects to this statement, and they seem to be in conflict, but actually they add depth to one another. The first is that Jesus said that many will come “in my name.” A quick perusal of the many uses of the phrase “in my name” in the Bible shows that it refers to representing someone or the authority of someone. For example, prophets who prophesy “in my [God’s] name,” speak as God’s representatives or with His authority. Those who pray “in the name” of the Lord call upon his authority.

There are no examples in the Bible of someone coming “in the name of” God who is passing himself off as God, or anyone praying in the name of Jesus who is claiming to be Jesus. So here in Matthew 24:5 (cf. Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8), the fact that the person comes “in my name” suggests that he is not claiming to be the Messiah himself, but rather is coming as a representative of the Messiah or in the power and authority of the Messiah. However, the second part of the phrase seems to be saying that the person who comes is saying, “I am the Messiah,” and thus claiming to be the Messiah—the anointed one or savior—or even Jesus Christ himself.

How do we reconcile these seemingly contradictory statements? One thing we should do is recognize that all three things are true: there will be people who claim to come in the authority of Jesus or to have special revelation from him but who are deceivers (even if they are deceived themselves), there will be people who will actually claim to be the Messiah, the anointed savior, and there will even be some people who will claim to be Jesus Christ himself. Thus, this verse is not speaking about only one particular type of person, but three.

To more fully understand Jesus’ statement, we must have the same concept of “Messiah” as the people in biblical times. If we translate the verse as it appears in most English versions, “I am the Christ,” most Christians will get the wrong idea about the verse: they will think that many people will actually claim to be Jesus Christ. Although there may be people who will make that claim, that is not the primary meaning of the verse. In Greek, the word *christos* (#5547 Χριστός) meant “anointed” or “anointed one.” It was a translation of the Hebrew word *mashiyach* (#04899 מָשִׁיחַ), which gets transliterated into English as “Messiah,” but which means “anointed” or “anointed one.”

Linguistically, the Hebrew word *mashiyach* (Messiah) means the same as the Greek word *christos* (Christ), which is “anointed one.” But the term “anointed one” was widely used of different people. Throughout the Bible, many people were “anointed ones,” thus Messiahs or Christs. For example, Leviticus 4:5 mentions the priest that is “anointed,” which is *mashiyach* (Messiah) in the Hebrew text and *christos* (Christ) in the Septuagint. So the priest was a Messiah or Christ. (Lev. 4:16; 6:22). In 1 Samuel 2:10, the king is called a Messiah or Christ (1 Sam. 12:3, 5). In 1 Samuel 16:6, when Samuel saw Jesse’s son Eliab, he thought he was the Messiah, the Christ (i.e., the next king). In 1 Samuel 24:6 (and other verses as well), David refers to King Saul as God’s Messiah, or Christ. In 2 Samuel 19:21, Abishai called David the Messiah, or Christ. The Bible even says the pagan Persian king Cyrus is a Messiah, a Christ, because he did God’s work (Isa. 45:1).

Nobody thought that these different Messiahs or Christs were THE Messiah or Christ that God promised who would bring salvation to the world. The people who lived in the biblical culture and spoke the biblical languages understood that God anointed many different people for many different tasks. That is why when the angels appeared to the shepherds at Jesus’ birth, they made themselves clear by saying this baby was “Savior,” “Christ” and “Lord,” not just “Christ.”

The average Christian does not know that priests, kings, and people commissioned to do God’s work were called “Messiah” or “Christ” because when *mashiyach* (Messiah) appears in the Hebrew Old Testament (and *christos* in the Septuagint) those words are not transliterated as “Messiah” or “Christ,” but are instead are typically translated as “anointed” or “anointed one.” That means that the average Christian never sees that there are many Messiahs (or “Christs”), in the Bible. However, once we know that there were many “Messiahs” in the Bible, we are in a better position to understand what Christ was saying, which in its fullness was that as we approach the final days, many deceivers will come. Some will say they represent Christ or have his authority. Others will say they are anointed by God (“I am the anointed one”) and demand that people follow them. And still others will actually claim to be Christ himself.

Mark and Luke record the same basic statements as Matthew does (Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8). Just like in Matthew, both Mark and Luke say deceivers will come “in my [Jesus’] name.” However, instead of then saying, “I am the Messiah,” like Matthew does, they have, “I am the one” or “I am he.” But in the culture, the phrases “I am the Anointed One” and “I am the one” can be equivalent. It is likely that when Jesus was speaking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives, he made the statement both ways to be sure they understood him, and Matthew records one way Jesus said it while Mark and Luke record the other way. Just like “I am the Messiah,” the phrase “I am the one,” could mean someone was claiming to come in the authority of Jesus Christ with a special revelation, or that he was claiming to be an “anointed one” and people should follow him, or that he was actually Jesus Christ.

The REV translation uses “Messiah” rather than “Christ” for clarity, although it could have used “Anointed One.”[[186]](#footnote-23236) The REV used “Messiah” for the Greek *christos* in several other places, so that pattern was continued in Matthew 24:5 as well.

Although some scholars assert that Jesus is only speaking of people who are claiming to be a Messiah, other scholars do not make that claim. For example, Grant Osborne writes, “‘In my name’ has a twofold thrust—they will come using Jesus’ personal name and also his ‘name’ or office as Messiah. In terms of the latter, there were many false messiahs in the first century, several named in Acts (Theudas, Acts 5:36; Judas the Galilean, Acts 5:37; the Egyptian, Acts 21:38) and more in Josephus. …Jesus is also predicting the rise of Christian false teachers, as in 1 John 2:18, ‘even now many antichrists have come.’ Instead of proclaiming truth they will ‘deceive many,’ (exactly what Jesus warns against in verse 4).[[187]](#footnote-16475) R. T. France notes: “A Christian reader…might think that those who will come in Jesus’ name claiming to be the Messiah are claiming actually to be Jesus…[But] He would be coming in Jesus name not because he is impersonating Jesus but because he is claiming the role and title which properly belong to Jesus.”[[188]](#footnote-11071)

What believers must learn from Matthew, Mark, and Luke is that in the Last Days there will be liars and deceivers who will try to get believers to follow them instead of the true Messiah who brings salvation to the world. Some will claim to come with authority and revelation from the Messiah, others will come claiming to be a Messiah, and still others will actually claim to be Jesus Christ (Jesus “the Messiah”). The believer’s best defense against these false Messiahs and prophets is to know the Word and train ourselves to hear God’s still, small voice. Jesus Christ knew the Word and heard God’s voice, and in cases when he could have been misled, he said, “It is written.” We need to do the same.

Mat 24:6

**“you will hear wars *nearby* and reports of wars *far away*.”** This phrase is traditionally translated as “wars and rumors of wars.” But that can be misleading even though some of the “reports” may in fact turn out to be rumors. We should keep in mind that this statement of Jesus is a prophecy of the Last Days. In our modern time, worldwide communication and reporting are both more immediate and more accurate than they were years ago. In our common English, a “rumor” is a report that is most likely false, and that is not the meaning of the Greek here. In this verse, the “reports” are reports of war, not false or unsubstantiated reports of war. The Greek word usually translated “rumors” is simply *akoē* (#189 ἀκοή, pronounced ah-ko-'ā), a noun, and it means the ear (the organ of hearing), or what is heard by the ear, in this case, a report.

In the first part of the sentence, “you will hear wars *nearby*,” the word “hear” is a verb, *akouō* (#191 ἀκούω, pronounced ä-'koo-ō), and it means “hear.” The verb “hear” is followed by the noun “wars,” and the whole phrase is usually translated as, “you will hear of wars,” as if the word “wars” was in the genitive case, but it is not. The word “wars” is accusative, the direct object of “hear,” meaning the people will “hear wars.” To understand what Jesus is saying we must remember that the Bible is Israel-centered. So in the first part of the sentence, Jesus is saying that as the times of the end approach, the people in Israel will be able to hear wars going on (which they may themselves be involved in). Then, the second part of the sentence tells us that people will also hear “reports” (or “news”) of wars that they cannot hear themselves; wars far away.

B. Newman and P. Stein write: “The word ‘rumors’ in English is usually used for news about things that may or may not have happened, but it is important to note that the sense here is that there will be wars everywhere. The TEV rendering [given below] is thus a good model to follow.”[[189]](#footnote-26418) Also, H. Meyer notes that Jesus is speaking “with reference to wars near at hand, the din and tumult of which are actually heard, and to wars at a distance, of which nothing is known except from the reports that are brought home.”[[190]](#footnote-24878)[[191]](#footnote-30587)

Today’s English Version (TEV) translates the sentence as “you will hear the noise of battle close by and the news of battles far away.” The New English Bible is very similar to that, saying, “near at hand” instead of “close by.” *The Source New Testament* has, “You will hear wars nearby and you will hear reports of wars.” Other versions that have a similar translation include the *Complete Jewish Bible* and the *Concordant Literal New Testament*.

Mat 24:7

**“group will rise against group.”** The Greek word translated as “group” is *ethnos* (#1484 ἔθνος), which has a large number of different meanings. These include the meaning that we feel fits the best in this context: a group of people united by kinship, culture, or traditions. The other meanings of *ethnos* include: a group or multitude (of people or animals) that is living together or closely associated; the whole human race (thus “people”); a race; a nation; a company, troop, or mass of people; a group of the same nature or ancestry; the unbelievers in contrast to God’s chosen people; also, in the New Testament *ethnos* is sometimes used for Gentile Christians in contrast to Jewish Christians.

The exact meaning of *ethnos* has to be determined by the context in which it is used. In this case, Jesus is speaking of the End Times and saying that *ethnos* will rise and fight against *ethnos*, and the meaning that fits best is people groups that are united by kinship, culture, traditions, and belief systems. Lenski basically agrees and says the term refers here to “a body of people that is held together by the same customs.”[[192]](#footnote-11416) Although *ethnos* has been traditionally translated “nation,” that is not its best use in this context. One reason for that is today most of what we call “nations” would be called “kingdoms” in the biblical culture, even though they are not strictly ruled by a “king,” and thus would be included in the next phrase, “kingdom against kingdom.” That leaves the phrase *ethnos* against *ethnos* to refer to smaller people groups.

What we see in the world around us is “group against group” and “kingdom against kingdom” (more properly, “nation against nation”). While it is true that nations (kingdoms) are fighting each other, such as North versus South Korea, or Russia versus the Ukraine, the greater fighting seems to be group against group. In the USA, gangs are fighting other gangs, and there is also much racial violence. All over Europe, anti-Jewish groups are rising up and terrorizing Jews. In the Muslim world, Shiites are fighting Sunnis. It seems to be group versus group all over the world. These “groups” are people groups that are united by kinship, culture, traditions, and belief systems, and the “group versus group” mentality is intensifying around the world.

It is decidedly difficult to translate the word *ethnos* as it is used in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 into English. A few modern translations are getting away from the word “nation,” which is misleading, and translating *ethnos* as “people” or “peoples” (cf. CJB, MGI). While “people” is certainly better than “nation,” the reader may misunderstand and think that Jesus was speaking of general violence between individuals. While there will certainly be violence by individuals in the End Times, that is not what the verse is referring to. On the other hand, we must understand “group” as referring to a group that is connected by lineage, race, creed, tradition, or belief, and not just a gathering at the local store. Each member of the group is definitely connected to the group. Perhaps 50 years ago, “tribe” would have communicated the meaning well, but today “tribe” is more exclusively used of native tribes. Other words that come close are “sect,” but that puts too much emphasis on belief, and “ethnic group,” but that puts too much emphasis on race. Jesus was referring to the fact that as we approach the end, groups will rise up against each other: racial and ethnic groups, religious groups, socio-economic groups, and so forth. The concept of *ethnos* as a connected group of people was much easier to understand in the ancient world, when governments were often adversarial to people and families, and families were both big and the foundation of the culture. In the ancient world much more than today there was “safety in a multitude,” and people grouped based on family, ancestry, and creed.

Mat 24:8

**“the beginning of birth pains.”** The Bible foretells a period of seven years of tribulation for the people of earth (Dan. 9:27). This period of tribulation is described in some detail in the book of Revelation. Especially for people who come to believe in Christ during this tribulation period, the first half of this tribulation period is the “beginning” of the birth pains. The really intense “birth pains” for believers and unbelievers alike but especially for believers, are the last half of the Tribulation period—the last three and a half years of it, when the Antichrist comes to full power and has authority over the believers and persecutes, tortures, and kills them (Dan. 7:21, 25; Rev. 13:7).

Events that occur in this beginning-of-birth-pains time period include false Messiahs (Matt. 24:5; Mark 13:5-6; Luke 21:8), wars and group-on-group conflicts (Matt. 24:6-7; Mark 13:7-8; Luke 21:9-10), “famines” (Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11), “earthquakes” (Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11) “plagues” (Luke 21:11) and “terrifying events and great signs from heaven” (Luke 21:11).

If we put the teaching of Jesus about the “beginnings of birth pains” together with the seal judgments in the book of Revelation, we can see that what Jesus referred to as the “beginning of birth pains” is the seal judgments of Revelation 6 and the first half of the “week” in Daniel 9:27). There are false Messiahs (Rev. 6:2; Matt. 24:5; Mark 13:5-6; Luke 21:8), wars (Rev. 6:3-4; Matt. 24:6-7; Mark 13:7-8; Luke 21:9-10), “famines” (Rev. 6:5-6; Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11) all kinds of lethal things including “death,” that is, “plagues” (Rev. 6:7-8; Luke 21:11) earthquakes (Rev. 6:12; Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11), and “terrifying events and great signs from heaven” (Rev. 6:12-14; Luke 21:11).

Mat 24:9

**“Then they will hand you over.”** Jesus will speak of this terrible time during the Great Tribulation again at the Last Supper (John 16:2).

**“tortured.”** The Greek is *thlipsis* (#2347 θλῖψις), and it refers to outward trouble that inflicts distress; oppression; affliction; tribulation; and also the inward experience of distress, affliction, or trouble.[[193]](#footnote-31728) It was common practice to torture prisoners in the first century, and in this case, the fact that believers would be handed over to *thlipsis* clearly means torture. Two thousand years after Matthew was written, we humans have not become any more civilized, and torture is common practice all over the world. It will be even worse after the Rapture, which is why Revelation 14:13 says that those who die in the Lord (i.e., without remaining unconverted or renouncing the Faith) will be blessed.

**“you will be hated by all the nations.”** The Greek word translated as “nations” is *ethnos* (#1484 ἔθνος), and it is translated as “group” in Matthew 24:7, and it arguably should be translated that way here. In the Last Days, believers will be hated by everyone. There will be such widespread ungodliness and wickedness that every different group will have a reason to hate believers. Although “nations” has more the meaning “group” in this context than what is today referred to as a “nation,” it should be recognized that it often referred to the Gentiles in exclusion of the Jews. Thus the emphasis here in Matthew is that in the End Times believers will be hated by everyone, with more emphasis placed on the Gentiles.

Mat 24:11

**“false prophets.”** One of the most important things we need to be aware of about these false prophets is that they will arise from among the believers. While there will certainly be people who are not believers who will say many erroneous things about God, Christ, the Word, Christians and Jews, etc., these are not “false prophets” in the most common sense of the Word. In the Old Testament, the false prophets who got the most attention were prophets from among the Jews who left the true faith and followed other gods or spoke lies to the Jews.

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 says there will be prophets who try to lead the Jews into the worship of other gods. Jeremiah 28 records the conflict between Jeremiah and the prophet Hananiah, who turned out to be a false prophet. Ezekiel 13:1-12 is about the false prophets in Israel who “see false visions and speak lying divinations. They claim, ‘This is the LORD’s declaration,’ when the LORD did not send them” (Ezek. 13:6 HCSB). Jeremiah 27:14-15 and Jeremiah 29:8-9 record God saying that He did not send many of the prophets who were speaking in His name. Thus, they were prophesying lies (Jer. 23:26). In fact, Jeremiah 29:8 (HCSB) says, “Don’t let your prophets who are living among you…deceive you.”

Many of the false prophets in the Old Testament were living among the Jews because they were Jews. It will be the same today. Many of the false prophets will be believers—which at this time means Christians—who will be claiming to speak by revelation or what they know from the Word, but what they will be saying will not be true. We hear many of those voices today already (although they don’t necessarily agree with each other): “There is no everlasting punishment for the unsaved; people can get saved without believing in Jesus Christ; sexual sin is not a sin after all; diligently obeying the Word is ‘legalism,’” and so much more. The wise believer knows the Word of God and diligently works to separate truth from error so he is not misled. In Matthew 24:4, Jesus said to watch out that we are not misled, and it is up to each believer to take the time to learn the truth about God and the Word so he or she is not misled.

Mat 24:12

**“And because of the increase in lawlessness.”** There are many ways that lawlessness will increase in the Last Days. Although many people think of lawlessness as in early America’s Wild West when there were no laws and no effective way of enforcing laws, actually, much lawlessness occurs when there are plenty of well-defined laws but the authorities refuse to enforce them. Also, lawlessness can occur when the authorities make all kinds of oppressive and demonic laws that go against the way God would rule.

“Lawlessness” is generally defined as contempt for, and violation of, the law. But whose law? People might be deceived into thinking that lawlessness is breaking man’s laws, and in certain contexts that may be true, but the greater truth is that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth and the earth belongs to Him (Ps. 24:1; 1 Cor. 10:26), and He is the lawgiver, not any human being (Isa. 33:22; James 4:12). Any human law that contradicts a written or unwritten law of God is “lawless.” Jesus Christ made it clear that any laws that the religious leaders put in place that contradicted God’s laws were not valid (Matt. 15:4-9; Mark. 7:5-13). The religious leaders made the laws for Israel, yet Jesus Christ called them lawless people because they broke God’s laws, which are the only valid laws, by their evil laws (Matt. 7:23, 29). Isaiah 10:1-3 makes it clear that the human laws have to be in line with God’s laws to be righteous. Isaiah says, “Woe to those who enact unrighteous laws, and to the writers who write oppressive regulations, to deprive the needy of justice and to rob the poor among my people of their rights, so that widows may be their spoil, and so that they may make the fatherless their prey!” (Isa. 10:1-2).

When there is lawlessness, life becomes unpredictable and frightening, and often good or righteous acts only bring persecution and trouble. In those conditions, people keep to themselves and try to stay safe and not draw attention to themselves, and thus their love to reach out and help others grows cold because there is no way to tell how trying to help someone will really turn out. Proverbs 28:12 says, “when the wicked rise up, people conceal themselves.”

Mat 24:13

**“the one who.”** Salvation is an individual thing. No one is saved and granted everlasting life based on being a part of a group.

Mat 24:14

**“good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed.**” In this context, the “good news of the kingdom” refers to the coming of the reign of Jesus Christ as king on the earth (the Millennial Kingdom), and the fact that Jesus, John the Baptist, and Jesus’ disciples all taught that it was near (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:15). The coming kingdom, called the “Kingdom of God” and “the Kingdom of Heaven” was the primary subject of Christ’s teaching. Although some people say that the Kingdom of God was the time that Jesus was on earth, Matthew 24:14 (and Luke 21:31) shows that cannot be the case. In the time when Matthew 24:14 applies, Jesus will have already ascended into heaven and will not be on earth any longer, but Christ’s kingdom on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, will still need to be a major subject of preaching and teaching.

Jesus foretold that the Good News of the kingdom would be preached to the whole world, and then the end would come. But a study of the Tribulation period shows how difficult preaching the Good News will be because the Antichrist and evil people will pretty much control the world. But the prophecy of Jesus will be fulfilled by an angel flying high in the sky and proclaiming the Good News to the people of earth (Rev. 14:6). Everyone on earth will have a chance to hear the Good News and believe. Furthermore, soon after the angel proclaims the Good News, the end will come. The seven last plagues, the bowl judgments, come upon the earth (Rev. 16:1-21), then Jesus comes from heaven and conquers it and defeats the army of the enemy (Rev. 19:11-21), and then Jesus sets up his Millennial Kingdom on earth.

[For more on Jesus’ Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 24:15

**“when you see the abomination of desolation.”** The people of Jerusalem would go to the Temple regularly, and would very likely literally “see” the abomination of desolation in the Temple—although we are not even certain what the abomination is. Also, there were inside parts of the Temple that could be seen from the top of the Mount of Olives. Also, because the word translated as “you see” is plural and refers to the people in and around Jerusalem who lived in the houses there, it does not mean each and every person has to see, but that some of the collective body of people would see it and could then report to others. Thus the “you see” is general and does not mean “each of you see.”

**“Holy Place”** is a designation of the Temple.

**“Place”** is the Greek *topos* (#5117 τόπος). The word “place” can refer to any place specifically mentioned; however, it was also one of the designations of the Temple in Jerusalem, which it is here in Matthew 24:15 and other places in the New Testament as well (cf. Matt. 24:15; John 4:20, 11:48, 19:20; Acts 6:13-14, 21:28).[[194]](#footnote-29717)

Mat 24:17

**“not go down.”** How could a person on the roof leave town without coming down from the roof? It was often possible to get quite close to the edge of town without going down into a house. In biblical times, houses had flat roofs, and the Mosaic Law commanded that a railing be built around the roof so people would not fall off (Deut. 22:8). People would spend time on the roof when the weather was nice, which is why Peter went up on the rooftop to pray (Acts 10:9).

The houses were built close together, often even having common walls, and were generally close enough to get from one roof to another. The streets between the houses were usually very narrow. That meant that getting to the outside of town by traveling from rooftop to rooftop was usually quicker than using the narrow streets through town. Moving from roof to roof was known as “the road of the roofs,” and that was why Jesus said that when people saw the signs of the End Times they should flee town without going back down into their houses (Matt. 24:17; Mark 13:15; Luke 17:31). In contrast to the flat roofs, the narrow and often winding roads between the houses were not a good way to travel quickly through town because they would clog up so quickly.

[For more on houses, see commentaries on Isa. 22:1 and Prov. 17:19].

Mat 24:19

**“But how terrible.”** This warning is also in Mark 13:17.

**“how terrible.”** The Greek word is *ouai* (#3759 οὐαί, pronounced ooh-'eye). For an explanation of the meaning of “how terrible,” see commentary on Matthew 11:21.In this context, *ouai* is an expression of grief because of the distress, hardship, and divine retribution that is coming in the future (1 Cor. 9:16; Rev. 9:12). People who cannot easily travel or who have to take care of others will have a very hard time in the Great Tribulation.

Mat 24:21

**“great tribulation.”** Jesus would have learned a lot about the Tribulation period from the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah 13:9-13; 24:1-23; 34:1-8; 63:1-6; Jeremiah. 30:6-7; Daniel 12:1; Joel 1:15; 2:1-11; 3:14-16; Amos 5:16-20; 8:8-14; Obadiah 1:15-16; Micah 5:10-15; Zephaniah 1:7-18; Zechariah 12:1-9; 14:1-6; and Malachi 4:1-3. It is a terrible time on earth in which most people will be killed.

Those who survive the Tribulation and Armageddon are divided by Jesus into two groups: the sheep and the goats, and the sheep will be allowed into Christ’s kingdom, while the goats will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:31-46).

[For more on the terrible time during the Great Tribulation, see commentaries on Isa. 13:9 and Dan. 12:1. For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the chronology of the events in the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32.]

Mat 24:22

**“no flesh would have been saved.”** The Tribulation and Armageddon are so horrific that compared to the number of people alive on earth today, only “very few” are left.

[For more information on very few people surviving the Tribulation and Armageddon, see commentary on Isa. 24:6.]

Mat 24:23

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Messiah.”** See commentary on Matthew 24:5.

Mat 24:24

**“Messiahs.”** See commentary on Matthew 24:5.

Mat 24:25

**“Pay attention!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 24:26

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“inner rooms.”** A reference to the inner rooms of the Temple. It would have been a sin for an ordinary Israelite to enter into the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies of the Temple, so it was safe to say the Messiah was in there when no one would check to see if the report was true.

Mat 24:30

**“Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven.”** Jesus’ coming in the clouds is a reference to Daniel 7:13. This is the “Second Coming” of Christ. Jesus spoke of his Second Coming and the events that surround it quite often. Some of these include, Matthew 16:27 (cf. Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26); Matthew 24:30-44 (Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27); Matthew 25:31-46; 26:64 (Mark 14:62); Mark 8:38; Luke 12:40; 17:24-30; John 14:3, 18; 21:22). See commentary on Matthew 16:27.

Mat 24:31

**“they will gather together his chosen ones.”** In this context, the “chosen ones” are the sheep of the Sheep and Goat Judgment, and also likely the people of the first resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous, who come up out of the graves and are brought back to the land of Israel (Ezek. 37:12-14).

In the future, there will be a time of great tribulation; a time of terrible destruction and death. The Old Testament prophets spoke of it often (see commentary on Dan. 12:1), Jesus Christ taught about it (Matt. 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) and it is described in some detail in the book of Revelation, which says there will be seal judgments, trumpet judgments, thunder judgments, and bowl judgments. That time of great tribulation will end when Jesus Christ comes down to earth and fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth (Rev. 19:11-21). Then Jesus will set up his 1,000-year kingdom on earth. Christ’s kingdom on earth will include Christians, who were in the Rapture, the people who are in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:1-5), and the “sheep” of the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46).

When Christ conquers the earth he will send out his angels who will gather the people who survived the Tribulation and Armageddon. Those survivors will be divided into two groups, the “sheep” and the “goats,” and the sheep will be allowed to enter the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ (the “sheep” of Matt. 25:31-46 are also the “wheat” of Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). The “sheep” who are gathered are part of the “chosen” who are gathered in Matthew 24:31. Also, however, the Old Testament says that when the people get up from the grave in the first resurrection, they have to be brought back to Israel, so it is likely that here in Matthew 24:13, the “chosen” who are gathered also include both the “sheep” and the righteous people who are in the resurrection of the righteous, the first resurrection. Other scriptures also speak of Jesus coming with his angels when he comes to earth (Matt. 13:41; 16:27; 24:31; 25:31; Mark 8:38; 13:27; Luke 9:26).

[For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment, see commentaries on Matt. 25:32 and 25:33. For more about Jesus’ future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 24:33

**“door.”** The Greek text is actually “doors” or “gates.” “Doors” (or “gates”) made more sense in the biblical world than it does to us today because double doors, and certainly double gates, were much more common then than now. The word “door” carries the sense of the situation much better in modern English than “doors” does, and it avoids the confusion that there may be more than one door that Jesus has to go through to get to us. Or “gates” would be a good translation if the reader thought of Jesus approaching the cities and being right at the gates of the city.

Mat 24:34

**“this generation will absolutely not pass away.”** Matthew 24:34 is part of the very long two-chapter answer—Matthew 24:4-25:46—that Jesus gave to the disciples when they asked when the End of the Age would be: “Tell us, when will these things be, and what *will be* the sign of your coming and end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3).

The disciples wanted this present evil Age to end and the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom to be real, so they asked Jesus about when the End of the Age would come. Jesus answered their question, and part of what he said was, “this generation will absolutely not pass away until all these things come to pass.” The straightforward meaning of Jesus’ multi-verse answer is simple: he told the disciples that their generation would not pass away until the things he had just mentioned had occurred, which no doubt gave the apostles much energy and hope. After all, how would any of us feel if we found out Jesus would return in our generation?

As it has turned out, what Jesus said was historically inaccurate. That generation passed away and what Jesus said would happen did not happen. In that sense, Jesus followed in the footsteps of many prophets before him who prophesied that the End was coming soon but then God delayed it for His own purposes (see commentary on Matt. 16:28).

We will better understand how to properly interpret Jesus’ statement if we review what he said would happen in “this generation.” Gleaning information from the records in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we see that there will be “many” false prophets and false Messiahs who will mislead many people. There will be wars, famines, earthquakes, plagues, and “terrifying events and great signs from heaven” (Luke 21:11). A great persecution of the believers will occur, and many believers will turn from the faith and betray one another, and people’s love will grow cold. Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20). The “abomination that causes desolation” that Daniel wrote about will stand in the holy place, the Temple, and there will be great tribulation, which will be so great that if the time was not shortened by God, no one would survive (Matt. 24:22). The sun and moon will be darkened, stars will fall from the sky, and the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. He will come with “power and great glory,” and seeing this, all the nations will mourn (Matt. 24:30). Then his angels will go out with a loud trumpet blast and gather the elect from the ends of the earth.

As we read these words of Jesus, we can see that these events of which he spoke are still future. No events in past history have fulfilled these prophetic words of Jesus, but the Great Tribulation, written about by Old Testament prophets and described in some detail in the book of Revelation, will fulfill every prophecy. However, the fact that these prophecies have not been fulfilled has caused a problem for Bible commentators because Jesus said, “this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened,” and yet “this generation” has indeed passed away but the signs he spoke of have not yet happened.

Theologians have set forth a number of theories to avoid the natural conclusion people would get from a straightforward reading of Matthew 24:34, which is that what Jesus said did not happen as he said it would. Some of these explanations are below, and all of them fall short of explaining what Jesus said.

1. Jesus was referring to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.
2. The word “generation” refers to the “race” of Israel, the Jewish race.
3. The word “generation” refers to the “kind” of people (i.e., wicked).
4. The word *genetai*, “happened” can be taken as an ingressive aorist and can mean “will have started to take place.”
5. The word “this” in “this generation” refers to the generation at the time, not the one Christ was talking to.
6. The prophecy, like others, is capable of multiple fulfillments, some of which have occurred, and some have not yet.

These explanations that have been posited by various theologians need to be examined one at a time. As to possibility number 1, that Jesus was referring to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, the fact is that the events mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24 did not occur in AD 70. Anyone reading the list of signs in Matthew 24:4-31 will see that most of the signs Jesus spoke about were not fulfilled. Furthermore, the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 does not answer the question Jesus’ disciples asked him. The disciples wanted to know when the Second Coming and end of this present evil age would come, and neither of those things happened in AD 70.

Explanation number 2, that the word “generation” should be translated as “race” and refers to the “race” of Israel, the Jewish race, does not explain what Jesus said. Frankly, the word “generation” does not refer to “race.” If it did, then that would make Jesus say that the Jewish race would not pass away until the signs he spoke of had happened. But that would not answer the disciples’ question or tell us when Jesus would come. The Jews were on earth long before Jesus was born, and the Jewish race will continue through the Tribulation and on into the Messianic Kingdom.

When the disciples asked Jesus for signs about the timing of his coming and the end of the age, what if Jesus had said, “God will still be God.” Well, that would be true, for God will still be God when Christ comes, but is that a sign of his coming? No, it is not. Similarly, since the prophecies indicate that the race of Israel would always continue, Jesus saying that the race of Jews would not pass away would not have been a sign of his coming. Beyond that, however, the wording Jesus used shows that “generation” cannot mean “race.” If Jesus had said, “this race will not pass away **until**...,” then he would have been saying that after the signs he spoke of occurred, then the Jewish race would pass away. But that will not happen. The Bible says that the Jewish race would continue and be a part of Christ’s kingdom on earth. So Jesus could not have said “This ‘race’ will not pass away until…” because it is untrue and because it does not answer the apostle’s question. If, however, Jesus said that “this generation,” *i.e.*, the one he was speaking to, would not pass away, then that would be a very important sign that his coming was close, which is exactly what the disciples were asking about.

Explanation number three, that the word “generation” refers to the “kind” of people (i.e., wicked) not passing away until the signs are fulfilled, falls short on the same basic grounds that trying to make the word “generation” mean “race” does. Many prophecies in the Old Testament speak of how wicked the earth is when the Messiah comes to conquer it, and even by the end of Christ’s kingdom on earth there will still be wicked people on earth (Rev. 20:7-9). Unbelieving people will not “pass away” when Jesus sets up his kingdom. So Jesus would not be answering the disciple’s question and giving a sign of the timing of his Second Coming by saying that wicked people would not be gone from the earth until his prophecies were fulfilled.

One of the major works arguing that the word “generation” refers to the “kind” of people was done by Neil Nelson, Jr., and published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no. 3 (September 1996). However, to make this idea work, Nelson asserts that the first part of Jesus’ answer (Matt. 24:4-14) refers to an “interadvent age” a period of “indefinite duration” that perhaps starts with the destruction of the Temple (and thus is now some 2,000 years long), and only Matthew 24:15-28 refer to the End Times. However, there is no reason to split Jesus’ explanation like that, and the fact that Jesus is speaking to his disciples and saying “you” throughout the teaching argues strongly against it (Matt. 24:4, 6, 9, 15, 20, 23, 25). Even if Jesus’ teaching were divided, the explanation still does not work because it does not answer the apostle’s questions. Jesus clearly said that even the appearance of false messiahs, wars, famines, and earthquakes were “the beginning of birth pains” (Matt. 24:8), but how is that helpful to show the sign of the Second Coming if those birth pains last some 2,000 years? Nelson then states that the only specific answer to when the close of the age will come is Jesus’ statement that “of that day and hour no one knows,” but that explanation turns Jesus’ 32-verse answer into a non-answer. If Jesus did not know the time or any sure signs of it, then he should have simply said so in Matthew 24:34 and ended the conversation. Saying that there would be some 2,000 years of non-signs before the Second Coming only clouds his answer. The only reason that Nelson and others go to great lengths to try to explain what Jesus was saying instead of taking it at face value is that the apostle’s generation is dead and what Jesus said did not come to pass.

Explanation number four, that the word *genetai*, “happened” should be taken as an ingressive aorist and read to mean “will have started to take place,” is rejected by most theologians, and for good reason. First and foremost, it is a “forced” translation. It would have never been posited as an explanation if people were not uncomfortable with the plain meaning of Scripture. Secondly, if the signs of the Second Coming started while the apostles were still alive, then we have been seeing the signs of his coming for the last 2,000 years! Thus, those “signs” would not be helpful in pointing to the timing of the Second Coming and would not answer the disciple’s questions. If on the other hand, the signs Jesus mentioned as signs of his Second Coming were to occur in one generation, as the text says when properly translated, then there are indeed some very specific signs to pay attention to.

As to explanation number five, that “this generation” refers to the generation the events were to happen to, not the generation that was listening to Jesus, falls short for a few different reasons. While that explanation does admit that all the signs will occur in one generation, grammatically the explanation is untenable, and it is fair to point out that we know of no scholar familiar with the Greek text who takes that position. The word “this” in “this generation” refers to the generation Christ was actually speaking to at the time, which is why scholars attempt to make “generation” become “race” or “kind.” Jesus was speaking to disciples alive at the time, and he told them to be careful that no one “misleads **you**,” and he continued speaking to them as “you” throughout his teaching (Matt. 24:4, 6, 9, 15, 20, 23, 25). Furthermore, the explanation that “this generation” can refer to any future generation does not answer the question the disciples asked. The disciples asked Jesus for a sign of his coming, and if he said, “Well, there will be a future generation that will experience great tribulation,” that would not be helpful because they already knew that from the Old Testament prophecies (see commentary on Dan. 12:1). The disciples asked Jesus for a sign of his coming and the End of the Age and he told them what would happen, but then God delayed his Second Coming, something Jesus had no way of knowing or anticipating.

As to explanation number six, some people have postulated that Christ’s prophecy in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 is capable of multiple fulfillments, part having been fulfilled during the life of the apostles, and part not having been fulfilled. While it is true that some prophecies have multiple fulfillments, the evidence is that is not the case here. Jesus’ teaching was a single long answer to the disciple’s question, and Jesus’ use of “you,” speaking to the disciples, shows that he expected them to go through every event. Also, the nature of many of the signs Jesus mentioned is such that they will only happen one time, not two times. Also, the disciples wanted to know the timing of the Second Coming and the end of the age, and if Jesus answered them by speaking about signs that were going to be fulfilled more than once, then he did not answer them at all. How were they to know which signs to look for? Also, the double fulfillment explanation fails to explain what Christ actually meant when he said “This generation will not pass away until all these things be fulfilled.” That generation is dead and gone but all those signs were not fulfilled. The fact is that all of Christ’s prophecies in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21 will be fulfilled in one generation, but God delayed the timing of the Second Coming so that fulfillment is still future.

F. F. Bruce writes, “When we are faced with the problem of understanding a hard saying, it is always a safe procedure to ask, ‘What would it have meant to the people who first heard it?’ And there can be but one answer to this question in relation to the present hard saying. Jesus’ hearers could have understood him to mean only that ‘all these things’ would take place within *their* generation. Not only does ‘generation’ in the phrase ‘this generation’ always mean the people alive at one particular time, the phrase itself always means ‘the generation now living.’ Jesus spoke of ‘this generation’ in this sense several times, and generally in no flattering terms.”[[195]](#footnote-15113) In saying that, F. F. Bruce is correct. The simple and straightforward meaning of what Jesus said was that that generation, the generation that he and his disciples lived in, would not pass away until all the signs he spoke of were fulfilled. The only difficulty is that the generation died and the signs were not fulfilled; the Second Coming did not occur and the age did not end. But God has the authority to delay the Second Coming, and He did. Jesus only spoke what God revealed to him, and he also had very good scriptural reason to believe that the Tribulation would come very shortly after his death and resurrection, certainly within his generation.

[For more on Jesus speaking about his Second Coming occurring soon, see commentary on Matt. 16:28. For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 24:35

**“Heaven and earth will pass away.”** The Greek text of this sentence is almost exactly the same in Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, and Luke 21:33.

Mat 24:36

**“But no one knows about that day and hour.”** Many attempts have been made to determine when Jesus will Rapture the Church, then later come to earth, fight the Battle of Armageddon, and set up his Millennial Kingdom. Usually, people who try to determine the dates for the events of the End take the phrase “day and hour” in a Western, literal way, and say that we may not know the day and hour, but we can know the year. This misses the simple point of the way the vocabulary was used at the time of Christ and in the Bible. Although they could be used specifically for a 24-hour “day” and a 60-minute “hour,” there is no reason to think “day” or “hour” were used that way here.

In the Bible and in the Greco-Roman world, both “day” and “hour” were often used generally. In fact, the word “day” was sometimes used to describe a quality, such as in the phrase, “children of the day” (1 Thess. 5:5), and “day” was also used to describe a period of time (cf. Eph. 6:13, the evil day). Similarly, although “hour” is sometimes used of just an hour or a short period of time, it is also used of a specifically appointed time, such as the hour of the incense offering (Luke 1:10), or the dinner hour (Luke 14:17). Remember, in this teaching, Jesus is trying to tell people what they do not know, and making the point that these future times are unknown; he was not trying to tease people and get them to guess the “year” by saying they did not know the “day” or “hour.” In this context, the phrase seems to best refer to the fact that people do not know the time period (including the duration) or appointed time of the return, and in fact, we do not. We do not know how long the Battle of Armageddon will take, for example.

This understanding of the verse is augmented by the way Matthew 24:36 reads. It does not say that only the Father knows the day and hour. It says that only the Father knows “about” or “concerning” (the Greek is the preposition *peri*; “about” or “concerning”) that day and hour. This is a subtle but important point to understand, because since the Father works with people, it is possible that even He does not know the exact time He will send Jesus back to earth, but will adjust it depending on what people do, just as He did with many other events in history, such as the death of Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:1-6); the destruction of Ahab (1 Kings 21:20-29).

**“nor the Son.”** This is also stated in Mark 13:32. This verse is part of the biblical evidence that shows that Jesus was not God, but only knew what God showed him. Although there are Greek texts that omit the phrase “nor the Son,” textual scholars are quite convinced that the phrase was in the original text of Matthew. Roger Omanson writes, “The best representatives of the Alexandrian and the Western text-types contain the words *oude ho huios* [“nor the Son”], and the syntax of the sentence suggests that these three words are original. …Copyists omitted these words because of the doctrinal difficulty of saying that the Son did not know when the Son of Man would come.”[[196]](#footnote-12528) Omanson goes on to say that it is very unlikely that “nor the Son” was not in the original texts but was added by scribes so Matthew would then agree with Mark 13:32, which has “nor the Son.” Even if the words, “nor the Son” were not in the original text of Matthew, the textual evidence is clear that they are in the original text of Mark 13:32.

Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 are problematic for Trinitarians, who are forced to say that Jesus’ human side had limited knowledge and did not know the time of the events of the End, but his God nature had unlimited knowledge and did know the time. But there are huge problems with that assertion. One is that the Bible never says it was only Jesus’ human nature that did not know but his God nature did know. That is only assumed because it makes Trinitarian doctrine work. Furthermore, it cannot be explained how Jesus could have had both limited and unlimited knowledge at the same time. Theologians refer to it as co*mmunicatio idiomatum*, but that is just Latin for “the communication of the properties,” and it does not explain how Jesus’ two natures could co-exist; it just assumes they do.

Trinitarians also assert that the two natures, God and man, existing simultaneously is a mystery, but again, the Bible never even says the two natures exist in Christ, much less that it is a mystery. About mysteries, Roger Olson wrote: “We must point out here the difference between mystery and contradiction; the former is something that cannot be fully explained to or comprehended by the human mind, whereas the latter is just nonsense—two concepts that cancel each other out and together make an absurdity.”[[197]](#footnote-23189) Although Olson wrote about the mysteries of Calvinism, his comment about mysteries applies equally to the “mysteries” created by the doctrine of the Trinity. We assert that it is a clear contradiction that Jesus is both 100% God and 100% man.

Jesus got knowledge from God throughout his ministry. For example, John 5:20 says that the Father was showing Jesus what He was doing, and also Jesus said that his teaching was not his own, but came from God (John 7:16-17). Even after His resurrection Jesus still receives knowledge from God. The information in the book of Revelation was given by God to Jesus Christ: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him” (Rev. 1:1). The simple and straightforward explanation for why Jesus did not know the timing of the events of the End is that he was not “God in the flesh” as the Trinitarian doctrine stated, but “a man pointed out to you by God” as Peter so plainly stated (Acts 2:22).

[For more information on Jesus not being God in the flesh, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” Also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Mat 24:37

**“For as in the days of Noah…”** For an explanation of why Jesus used the days of Noah as a comparison to his Sheep and Goat Judgment, see commentary on Matthew 24:40.

Mat 24:40

**“one is taken, and one is left.”** This verse describes the harsh reality of what happens when Jesus Christ comes down from heaven and sets up his kingdom on earth—some people will be allowed into the Messianic Kingdom on earth and some will be destroyed in the flames of Gehenna. Jesus describes this event in different terms about 50 verses later in his explanation of what is known as “The Sheep and Goat Judgment” (Matt. 25:31-46). The people who are “taken” are the goats, and they are taken away to Gehenna. The ones who are “left” are the sheep, and they are allowed to enter the Messianic Kingdom, the “Kingdom of Heaven.” It helps to understand this section of Scripture if we keep in mind that Matthew 24:3-25:46 is all an answer to the question Jesus was asked in Matthew 24:3.

The apostles knew some general facts about the end of the Age. For example, they knew about the Tribulation period from the many references to it in the Old Testament (Isa. 13:9-13; 24:1-6; Dan. 12:1; Amos 5:18-20; cf. Matt. 24:21). They also knew that the Tribulation would be followed by Jesus setting up his kingdom on earth (cf. Dan. 2:44; 7:13, 14; Ezek. 40-48), and that the Messiah’s kingdom would be inhabited by resurrected believers (Ezek. 37:11-14; Dan. 12:2; cf. John 5:25-29). Of course, there were things the apostles did not understand—such as that the Messiah would have to die, be resurrected from the dead, and then ascend into heaven for a time before setting up his kingdom on earth.

The apostles were anxious for the Kingdom to come, so in Matthew 24:3 they asked Jesus about when his kingdom would come. Matthew 24-25 are Jesus’ answer to their question. In the first part of Matthew 24, Jesus describes some events of the Great Tribulation, which occurs after the Rapture of the Christian Church and precedes his coming from heaven (Rev. 19:11ff). Matthew 24:30 begins to describe Jesus coming to earth and gathering the elect, who are the ones who will be allowed into the Kingdom. Jesus described the Judgment that will follow his arrival on earth in a way they could all understand it: the Flood of Noah. In the Flood, evil people were “taken” away, while Noah and his family were “left” on earth and repopulated the earth.

After comparing the Judgment to Noah’s Flood, Jesus tells the disciples to watch and be ready, and tells the “Parable of the Ten Virgins” (Matt. 25:1-13) about staying ready in order to be able to enter the Kingdom, and he also tells the “Parable of the Talents” about getting into the Kingdom and being rewarded by the Master (Matt. 25:14-30). Then Jesus returns to his teaching about the events of the Tribulation and Judgment. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus tells about how, when he comes to earth, he will gather everyone who is left alive after the Great Tribulation (“all the nations”). He will have them brought before his throne and he will judge them, dividing the people into two categories: the “sheep” (righteous) and the “goats” (unrighteous). Jesus will let the sheep into his kingdom and they will live on the earth. In contrast, the “goats” will be taken away to destruction. Although it was never stated in the Old Testament or Gospels, we learn from the book of Revelation that the first part of Jesus’ Kingdom on earth lasts 1,000 years (Rev. 20:2-5).

It is sometimes wrongly taught by Christians that Matthew 24:37-41 is about the Rapture of the Church. But these verses in Matthew 24 cannot be wrested from their context, which is Jesus Christ’s Second Coming, when he comes to the earth in judgment and to reign as king (cf. Rev. 19:11-20:4). Matthew 24:30 says the nations will see the Messiah as he comes in power and glory, and that they will “mourn.” Then Matthew 25:31-33 speaks of the coming of the Messiah and notes that Christ will “sit on his glorious throne” and “all the nations will be gathered before him.” These things are not associated with the Rapture of the Christian Church. At the Rapture, the Church meets the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17). He never comes all the way to the earth. Those left on earth will be confused about the disappearance of the Christians. They will not know where the Christians went. Furthermore, at the Rapture the nations do not see Christ nor do they “mourn.” So the context shows that Matthew 24 and Luke 17 are speaking of the Second Coming of Christ to the earth to Israel when he fights at Armageddon, judges the people, and sets up his Kingdom.

The meaning of “one is taken, and one is left” is made clear by the words themselves, the context, and the scope of Scripture. The time of Christ’s coming in judgment will be similar to the time of the judgment in the days of Noah when the flood came and “took” people away. Note that Matthew 24:39 specifically says that the flood “took” the unrighteous, while the righteous—Noah and his family—were “left.” That is historically correct. The flood took all the unrighteous people away and left Noah and his family alive on earth. So too in Matthew, the ones who are “taken” are taken for judgment and then “taken” off the earth and sent to the “fire prepared for the Devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41 NIV). Being “taken” is not a blessing. At the Sheep and Goat Judgment, the unrighteous are “taken” to punishment in the flames (Matt. 25:41, 46), while the righteous are “left” on the earth and inherit the Kingdom. Spiros Zodhiates writes:

In Matt. 24:40-41; Luke 17:34-35, *paralambano* in the passive form is used as the opposite of *aphiemi*, “to let be.” In these verses, those who are taken are not to be misconstrued as those whom the Lord favors, as if they were the same saints spoken of in 1 Thess. 4:17 who will be raptured (*harpazō*, “to seize, catch away, as if by force”) to meet the Lord in the clouds. The verb *paralambano* in most cases indicates a demonstration in favor of the one taken, but not always. In Matt. 4:5, 8, it is used of Satan “taking” Jesus up to tempt him. In John 19:16 it is used of “taking” Jesus to lead him to the cross. It is used to refer to those in the days of Noah who were taken away, not being favored but being punished, while Noah and his family were “left” intact. Therefore, in this passage in Matthew and the parallel passage in Luke, *paralambano* must not be equated to the believers who are to be raptured at the coming of the Lord for his saints. It refers rather to those who, as in the days of Noah, are taken to destruction. The others are left alone (*aphiemi*) for the purpose of entering into the blessings of Christ’s kingdom (identified by some as the Millennium) and the righteous rule of Christ upon earth.[[198]](#footnote-15279)

Robert Mounce writes:

“The man working in the field (Matt. 24:40) and the woman grinding meal (Matt. 24:41) will be taken away in judgment (not to safety; cf. parallel in Matt. 24:39 with those ‘taken away’ by the flood).”[[199]](#footnote-27396)

Another way we know that Matthew 24:37-41 is not about the Rapture is by comparing it to its parallel Scripture in Luke 17:26-27. As in Matthew 24, in Luke 17 Jesus was asked when the Kingdom would come (Luke 17:20). Luke 17 gives a much shorter answer than Matthew 24, and includes different information, but it speaks of Noah’s Flood and says when the Flood came, it “destroyed them all” (Luke 17:27). Luke also then compared the coming of the Son of Man to the days of Lot, when fire fell on Sodom and Gomorrah and “destroyed them all.” This parallel teaching shows that Jesus was not teaching about the Rapture. In the Rapture, Christians will be taken from the earth, while the unrighteous who are left on earth will experience the Tribulation. The unbelievers will not be destroyed at the Rapture but will continue their lives.

People sometimes doubt that there will be the “Rapture” because Jesus did not mention it in this teaching about the End Times. Jesus did not teach about it because it is part of the “Sacred Secret,” of the Administration of God’s Grace (see commentary on Eph. 3:2). The Rapture is not found in the Old Testament or the Gospels but is part of the revelation of the Church Epistles. The revelation that is addressed specifically *to* the Christian Church is written in the seven Epistles (letters) of Paul to the Church, known theologically as the “Church Epistles.” The fact that these seven Epistles (Romans through Thessalonians) are especially important to the Christian Church is not often taught, yet it is of vital importance. Israel will not be Raptured but will be resurrected and then return to the land of Israel (Ezek. 37:11-14).

One last thing to cover is the objection of those Christians who say that the scholars quoted above are wrong and that “take” refers to those who are taken for a blessing in the Rapture while “left” refers to those who are left for judgment. Even though this interpretation ignores the context, there is another, more important point that needs to be made. The context of Matthew and Luke are crystal clear about the circumstances of Christ’s coming, such as the nations mourning and being gathered to the Judgment, and this is plainly his Second Coming and not the Rapture. Therefore, no matter which group is blessed and which group is judged, *neither group is Raptured*. One is blessed and left on earth to enter the Kingdom (Matt. 25:34) while the other is judged and taken away (Matt. 25:41).

[For more on Matthew 24:40 not being about the Rapture, see, John W. Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*, Chapter 3.]

Mat 24:41

**“Two *women*.”** Although the word “women” is supplied from the context and is not in the Greek text, it is correctly supplied on the basis of the biblical culture. The biblical culture was very segregated by sex: there were jobs men did that women just did not do, and jobs that women did that men would not do. Working in the fields was usually done by men, hence “men” is supplied in verse 40, and the grinding of the grain with a hand mill was always considered to be women’s work, just as carrying water was considered women’s work (thus it is a woman Jesus meets at Jacob’s well in John 4:7). It was also considered women’s work to set up and take down the family tent, which was why Jael was so confident in driving a tent stake through Sisera’s head (Judg. 4:21); she had driven many tent stakes in her lifetime.

Mat 24:43

**“allowed.”** This is the Greek word *eaō* (#1439 ἐάω) which means “1. to let, allow, permit; 2. to let alone, to allow to do as one wishes; 3. to let go, give up, leave.” The difference between “let,” “allow,” and “permit” can be very slight, but “allow” usually means no more than a lack of prohibition whereas “permit” implies a granting of express permission. Thus “allow” is the better choice for *eaō* in this verse.

**“his house to be broken into.”** Although thieves would often try to break into a house through the door when they thought no one was home (most houses had just one outer door), it was also common that a thief would try to dig through a wall. The walls of most houses were at least partly of mud brick, which was cheap, sturdy, and easy to repair, and generally lasted for years. However, it was also easy to dig through and thus gain entrance to a house. Thieves are also mentioned in Matthew 6:19 and Exodus 22:2.

Mat 24:51

**“sobbing and gnashing of teeth**.**”** The mention of sobbing and gnashing of teeth occurs seven times in the Bible (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). All of these occurrences are in the Gospels. There is only one future Messianic Kingdom, and it fills the whole earth. The unsaved are not part of that Kingdom but are thrown into the Lake of Fire where there is sobbing and gnashing of teeth (Rev. 20:13-15).

[For a more complete explanation of the sobbing and gnashing of teeth, see commentary on Matt. 8:12.]

**Matthew Chapter 25**

Mat 25:1

**“At that time.”** This is one of the times when chapter headings are not helpful, but actually hinder understanding the Bible. Matthew 25 continues Jesus’ teaching that he started in Matthew 24:4. From Matthew 24:4 all the way to the end of Matthew 25 (Matt. 25:46), is one long answer to the question asked to him by the apostles: “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age” (Matt. 24:3). Jesus gives a basic overall chronology of some major end-times events, such as the wars, earthquakes, tribulation, him coming in the clouds down to earth, then gathering all the nations before him and judging them at the sheep and goat judgment. But understanding the chronology of the End Times is “head knowledge.” It is nice to know, even important to know, but neither knowing it nor being ignorant of it will change it—the things Jesus spoke of will come to pass.

However, there are some very important facts we need to know and must keep in mind, and so in the middle of explaining to the apostles how some major end-times events will play out, Jesus adds some very pointed parables to drive home the fact that we must take this life very seriously.

The first parable is of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). The point of that parable is that there will be a time when the door to salvation will be closed and so “now is the day of salvation.” Now is a time to be prepared for the future (exemplified by the wise virgins), because when Jesus finally comes (exemplified by the bridegroom) the time of salvation is over. At that time the unsaved people will realize they have been foolish and want to get into the Kingdom (exemplified by the marriage feast) but they will not be able to get in; the door will be closed (Matt. 25:10-12). Those who have been obedient (Matt. 24:46) and wise (Matt. 25:2) will get to enter. The evil and foolish will be shut out, and “there will be sobbing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 24:51). The message of the parable is get saved now “because you do not know the day or the hour” when Judgment day comes, and when it does the invitation to be saved will no longer be offered; it will then be the time of judgment (Matt. 25:13). Jesus taught this same truth in Luke 13:22-30, but in Luke, he taught it plainly, without using a parable.

The second parable in Matthew 25 is the parable of the talents. The emphasis of the parable of the talents is that people will be rewarded according to their works. It is similar to the first in that there is a time to be wise and do what it takes to get saved and that time will come to an end. But the emphasis of the parable is that at some unknown point in the future, the Lord will come and judgment will begin, and people will be either rewarded or punished depending on how they lived their life. A major difference between the parable of the wise and foolish virgins and the parable of the talents is that in the parable of the talents, Jesus teaches that even the people who are saved will be judged (evaluated) and then rewarded according to their works.

In the parable of the virgins, the issue was salvation, and that a person was either allowed in the wedding feast or was closed out (in which case the Lake of Fire would be their end). In the parable of the talents, even the saved are judged, and they are then rewarded differently according to what they had done in their life. This is a huge lesson. Many people think that “being saved” is the goal, and as long as you are saved you have “made it.” That is far from the truth.

People will have different positions in the Kingdom: some will have charge of “many things” (Matt. 25:21-23), and some will not. There is no reason to have little in the future Kingdom of Jesus Christ. All he asks for is that we “seek first the Kingdom of God” and obey Him. We should all make his work and his agenda more important than our own. If we do that, we “will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11 NIV). If we do not, and are ashamed of him (as demonstrated by the way we behave), “the Son of Man also will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). It is our decision to be saved or not, and it is our decision to obey him or not. Let’s be like the wise virgins and the “good and faithful” servants, and get saved and be richly rewarded. It will be more than worth it.

**“will be like.”** Often parables have the phrase “is like” (Matt. 13:24, 31, 33, 44), but this parable is about a future event, so “will be like” is accurate.

**“virgins.”** The Greek word is *parthenos* (#3933 παρθένος), and it most properly means “virgin.” Since girls were usually married between 12 and 14 years of age, these girls were likely in their early teens. Scripture does not say how these ten were chosen, and there are a lot of things about marriages in that culture that we do not know today. One thing that is unstated but implied is that even people who are young by today’s standards are expected to both know and do what is right.

**“groom.”** In many English versions, the older term “bridegroom” is used, but it just means the groom.

Mat 25:2

**“foolish.”** The Greek word is *mōros* (#3474 μωρός), which means “foolish,” or “stupid,” but is also used for godless or impious. This is a good example of a place where the full meaning of the Greek word cannot be brought into the English translation unless it is expanded. The virgins were not just “foolish,” they were almost certainly “godless” as well, which is why they did not make the effort to be prepared for the bridegroom. The parable is about being ready for the coming of the Lord, and while those who do not prepare are indeed foolish, they are also godless.

**“sensible.”** The Greek word is *phronimos* (#5429 φρόνιμος), and it refers to using one’s thoughts, being prudent, thoughtful, sensible, or intelligent. This is in contrast to the word *sophos* (#4680 σοφός), the more common Greek word that generally means “wise.”

Mat 25:3

**“did not take oil with them.”** The lamps and the oil provide a real-life backdrop to the parable. Through the years many preachers and teachers have postulated what the oil might be related to, such as the Holy Spirit, but all that guesswork is unnecessary. There is no reason to make the oil anything other than oil, and it was foolish to not know when a night event was going to happen yet not bring extra oil in case things got delayed. One thing is certain, however, and that is that each girl was expected to be prepared. When it comes to the Day of Judgment and the Kingdom of God, each person stands before God and then enters (or not) on their own; no one can make an entrance for anyone else. We all enter due to our relationship with God and Christ.

Mat 25:5

**“groom.”** In many English versions, the older term “bridegroom” is used, but it just means the groom.

**“was a long time in coming.”** This phrase would have had more impact when the Gospel of Matthew was written and circulated than when Jesus spoke it to a limited number of people. Christ’s disciples thought that he would soon act as the conquering Messiah they expected—none of them expected Christ to die at this time before his arrest—and so it is likely that they did not even understand the fullness of the parable. But by the time the Gospel of Matthew was penned and circulated, the parable would have had much more meaning, and most, if not all, of the Christians would be asking themselves why Christ’s coming was being delayed.

Mat 25:6

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“groom.”** In many English versions, the older term “bridegroom” is used, but it just means the groom.

Mat 25:9

**“Go instead to the dealers and buy *some* for yourselves.”** This is one of the points in which the parable does not represent what would be normal in a village. An oil seller would not normally be awake and doing business at midnight.

Mat 25:10

**“groom.”** In many English versions, the older term “bridegroom” is used, but it just means the groom.

**“the marriage feast.”** Jesus is speaking a parable, but it is an important teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven and the marriage feast associated with it, and it is accurate in important details. There will be a huge feast, most likely at the beginning of Christ’s Millennial Kingdom. Isaiah 25:6 speaks of this feast, and Jesus taught about it. Revelation 19:9 calls it the “marriage banquet of the Lamb.” In this parable, Jesus makes it clear that entrance to this feast is not to be taken lightly, and at some time in the future, the door will be shut and people who have been foolish will be excluded.

[For more information on the feast, see commentary on Matt. 8:11. For more information about those people who are excluded from the feast, see commentary on Matt. 8:12.]

Mat 25:12

**“Truly I say to you, I do not know you.”** This is one of the places where the parable does not represent what would normally happen at a wedding in a village. Even late guests would be allowed into the house where a wedding was taking place, but in this parable, the “house” (or gated area) represented the Kingdom of God, and so the time to enter was limited and would come to an abrupt close.

Mat 25:13

**“stay alert.”** The Greek is *grēgoreō* (#1127 γρηγορέω, pronounced grey-gor-'eh-ō), which means “be awake” (sometimes used for being alive) “watch,” “be alert,” “pay attention.” However, in this context, it means more than just “watch”; it has the pregnant meaning of being alert and paying attention, in large part by doing what we are supposed to be doing. It does not mean, “sit back, relax, and just keep watch.” It means be doing what you are supposed to be doing until the Lord comes.

Mat 25:14

**“a man going on a journey.”** This is similar to the parable in Luke 19:12-27. The “man” in the parable represents God.

In the parable of the ten minas (Luke 19:11-27), each servant was given the same amount, one mina. One servant took his one mina and made ten more minas. Another servant took his one mina and made five more minas. But the wicked servant did not trade or invest his one mina but hid it in the earth and it did not even earn interest.

The parable of the talents here in Matthew 25:14-30 is different. One servant was given five talents and made five more talents with them; one servant was given two talents and made two more with them, and one servant hid his talent in the earth and did not invest it. The major lesson of both parables is the same: we were created by God with a purpose—we were created to do good works, His works (Eph. 2:10)—and people who do not invest their lives to enrich His kingdom are wicked in His sight.

[For more on the “king,” “landowner,” “ruler,” or “man” in Christ’s parables being God, see commentary on Luke 15:11. For more on Christ ruling the earth in the future, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 25:15

**“talents.”** In the New Testament, the “talent” is used once as a unit of weight (cf. Rev. 16:21), but otherwise, it was a unit of money. Different cultures had different talents, but most scholars believe Christ would have been referring to the Attic talent, which was equal to 6,000 denarii, or 6,000 days’ wages. At the time of Christ, one denarius (the plural is denarii) was a day’s wage for a field hand or a soldier, which would make a talent about 20 years’ wage for the average worker. To arrive at an idea of how much money is being referred to, if a low-wage worker made $8 per hour ($64 per day; just above minimum wage), then 1 talent was $384,000, and five talents would be 1,920,000 dollars (one million, nine hundred twenty thousand dollars), a huge sum to entrust to a slave.

In parables like this one in Matthew 25:14-30, in the mind of the Jews of the time, the wealthy man (some parables have a king, ruler, or landowner) was God, and the servants or workers were the people on earth, who are all God’s servants, whether they know it or not. In this parable, Christ is making the point that God has given humans great wealth, which we understand from Scripture is their life and all that they have, and each person has the obligation to use the wealth they have been given to benefit God. Many people acknowledge that what they have been given in life is from God, and they use their “talent” for His benefit. But many other people are like the fearful slave who does not use his talent in a way that benefits God, and God refers to those people as “wicked” and “lazy.”

This parable makes a number of important points. Certainly one of them is that each person has an obligation to use his or her “talent” for God’s benefit. In this particular case, there is what is sometimes referred to as a “happy coincidence” of language, where the Greek word “talent,” which is a unit of money, also makes sense, but in a different way, in English, where “talent” refers to the natural abilities of a person. Some people use their abilities in God’s service, others choose not to serve God, but “bury” their abilities when it comes to God’s service.

Another important point in the parable is that people have different “talents,” and God expects us to use what we have. Luke 12:48 makes it clear that much will be required from people who have been given much, and less will be required from people who have been given less. It is absolutely detrimental to try to compare what we do for God with what other people do for God, because we cannot know the true “talents” within them. Instead, each person should focus on using all their talents for God to the maximum degree.

Still another noteworthy point of the parable comes out of the mouth of the slave who buried his talent; he was afraid. Countless numbers of people do not do their best for God because they are afraid of something, and the list of things to be afraid of seems endless. The Bible tells us not to be afraid of people and what people can do, but to be afraid of the consequence of not serving God. Since the Devil is the god of this world, and has an army of godless people to support his causes, God’s people must learn to overcome personal fear so they can best serve God.

[For more information on the talent as a measure of money, see commentary on Matt. 18:24.]

Mat 25:16

**“five talents.”** At just above minimum wage, five talents would be $1,920,000 (see commentary on Matt. 25:15).

Mat 25:17

**“two talents.”** At just above minimum wage, two talents would be $768,000 (see commentary on Matt. 25:15).

Mat 25:19

**“Now after a long time.”** This parable in Matthew 25 is about the coming Kingdom of Heaven (cf. Matt. 25:1). The wealthy landowner who entrusted money to his slaves represents God, and the slaves to whom the property was entrusted represent Israel. This God-Israel relationship is common in the parables. God is compared to a landowner, rich person, or king in a number of the parables, although the relationship is not spoken but implied (cf. the parable of the unforgiving servant; Matt. 18:23-35. The parable of the workers in the field; Matt. 20:1-16. The parable of the man with two sons; Matt. 21:28-31. The parable of the evil tenants; Matt. 21:33-40; the parable of the wedding banquet; Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24).

God gave land and wealth a long time ago, but He will not settle accounts with people until Christ reigns as king on earth. Thus Jesus accurately represents that it is indeed a long time between when the slaves were entrusted wealth and when God settles accounts on the Day of Judgment.

[For more on the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth. For more on rewards in the future, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Mat 25:29

**“to everyone who has.”** At first reading, this verse is unclear and seems very unfair. It seems to say that if a person has something they will get more, while if a person does not have anything, they will lose even what they have. Of course, that would be unfair, and thankfully that is not what Jesus is teaching.

Jesus is teaching a very important lesson, and we can tell that because the Gospels record him teaching it five different times (Matt. 13:12; 25:29; Mark 4:25; Luke 8:18, 19:26). In the context of Jesus’ teachings, it is clear that the reason a person “has” is that he used his time and resources wisely, while a person who does “not have” is in that position because he made unwise choices and/or lived an ungodly life. That is certainly the case here in Matthew, because the servant who “had” and to whom more would be given had used his time and ability wisely, while the servant who did “not have” was lazy and wicked. The New Living Testament is more paraphrastic than literal, but it gets the sense of the verse in its translation: “To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away.”

It is also important to note that in all of the five times Jesus taught this lesson, he never explained what it was that anyone would “have.” Normally, we would think that Jesus would not just say, “to everyone who has…But from the one that does not have….” We ask, “has what? Does not have what?” But Jesus did not say, “to everyone who has money,” or “land,” or “servants,” or anything specific at all. Thus, Jesus left it open as to what a person could have. It could be money or material things, or it could be something immaterial such as “peace” or “joy.”

What is clear from the context and was clear in the culture of Jesus’ day, was that if a person “had” something it was almost always because of the good choices they had made. In contrast, if a person did not have, it was because of poor choices, and eventually, they would lose even what little they had.

In our modern world it is common to think that if anyone has anything, they should share it with those who do not have. And while there are people today who “have” due to unrighteous circumstances, there are many more people who “have” because they worked hard, took proper risks, lived a godly life, and were blessed. Similarly, although some people today who “have not” are the victims of unfortunate circumstances, there are many people today who “have not” because they are not diligent to work hard, control their desires, and make godly choices. Thus, in many circumstances, it is not right or godly to take from people who have and give to people who do not have. Yet the governments of the world do that all the time; and godly people should stand against that kind of taking and the mentality behind it as well. God did not design life so everyone would have the same things; He designed the earth to reward those people who work hard and make godly choices.

Jesus’ parable would upset many people today because Jesus does the opposite of what governments usually do: he takes from the lazy and ungodly person and gives to the diligent person. This parable of Jesus points out the way life really works when godly people are in charge, and the way it will be on the Day of Judgment. On that Day the injustice of the world will disappear, and the diligent and godly will be richly rewarded, while the lazy and ungodly will get what they deserve—whether it be loss of rewards (1 Cor. 3:12-15) or dying unsaved and being cast into the Lake of Fire and being annihilated (Rev. 20:11-15). Thus, this parable serves as a warning to lazy people who want to live off the work that others do. It is an encouragement to people who are diligent and godly: even if somehow things don’t work out well in this life, they will in the next. So keep on being godly and diligent; there is a reward for it.

Mat 25:30

**“the darkness outside.”** This is a reference to the darkness outside the Kingdom and the great banquet there, which is the darkness of the Lake of Fire.

[For more information on the banquet see commentary on Matt. 8:11, “recline *to eat at the feast*.” For more information on what happens to those people who are not included in the banquet, the unsaved, see commentary on Matt. 8:12. For more on the attributes of the Messianic Kingdom on earth see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more about the unsaved being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not being tortured forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more about the different resurrections—the Resurrection of the Righteous and the Resurrection of the Unrighteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

**“sobbing and gnashing of teeth**.**”** The mention of sobbing and gnashing of teeth occurs seven times in the Bible (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). All of these occurrences are in the Gospels. There is only one future Messianic Kingdom, and it fills the whole earth. The unsaved are not part of that Kingdom but are thrown into the Lake of Fire where there is sobbing and gnashing of teeth (Rev. 20:13-15).

[For a more complete explanation of the sobbing and gnashing of teeth, see commentary on Matt. 8:12.]

Mat 25:31

**“glorious throne.”** This is an example of the figure of speech antimereia (of the noun in regimen for an adjective).[[200]](#footnote-10448) The Greek literally reads “a throne of his glory.” “Glory” is moved by antimereia from an adjective to a noun to give it more emphasis. Unfortunately, in English, it makes the sentence hard to understand, so using the simple adjective makes sense.

Jesus will come in his glory at the Battle of Armageddon, at which point he will conquer the armies of the Antichrist, Satan will be imprisoned, and Jesus will rule over the earth (Rev. 19:11-20:3). For the Sheep and Goat Judgment, Jesus will set up his throne in the “wilderness of the people” which is between Egypt and Israel (see commentary on Matt. 25:32).

Mat 25:32

**“all the nations will be gathered before him.”** Matthew 25:31-46 describes the Sheep and Goat Judgment. In the End Times, there is horrible tribulation on earth, often described by Christians as “the Great Tribulation.” The Great Tribulation ends with the Battle of Armageddon when Jesus comes down from heaven with his army and conquers the earth (cf. Rev. 19:11-21). The great majority of people on earth will have been killed in the Tribulation and in the Battle of Armageddon (see commentary on Dan. 12:1 and Isa. 13:9), but there will be survivors. Given the huge number of people alive on earth today, even if the vast majority of them are killed in the Tribulation and Armageddon there could still be millions left alive, which explains why Joel 3:14 says, “Multitudes, multitudes in the Valley of Decision.”

After the Battle of Armageddon, Jesus will send out his angels and gather the survivors and will judge them, and that judgment is often referred to as “The Sheep and Goat Judgment.” Jesus will let the “sheep,” the good people, into his Millennial Kingdom, while the “goats,” the evil people, will be thrown into the flames of the Lake of Fire.

Separating the righteous people from the unrighteous people is also described in different ways in other places in the Gospels. For example, in the Parable of the Good and Bad Seed (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43), Jesus taught that both good and evil people live together on earth until the end of the age, at which point the angels gather up the bad people, called “darnel” in the parable, and throw them into the fire. Also, in Matthew 13:47-50, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of Heaven was like a net that gathered every kind of fish, and that is what will happen when Jesus comes and conquers the earth, every sort of person will be there. But then in his parable, Jesus explains that the fish will be sorted into “good” and “bad” and the “good” will be kept while the “bad” will be thrown into the fire. Jesus’ teachings build on each other and teach the same basic thing: good people and evil people live together here on earth until Christ comes and conquers the earth. Then everyone alive at that time will be gathered to “the Sheep and Goat Judgment.” The good people will be let into Christ’s kingdom and the evil people will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:31-46).

There is a good chance that many people who escape death during the Tribulation and Armageddon will do so by hiding, and although it is impossible to successfully hide from God and His angels, God emphasizes that no one will escape judgment. He says, “it will happen at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps” (Zeph. 1:12), so there will be no dark places to hide in. After Armageddon, everyone left alive on earth will be rounded up and judged.

The Sheep and Goat Judgment will not happen in Jerusalem, it will happen in the “wilderness of the people,” that is, the wilderness between Egypt and Israel, just as Ezekiel 20:35 says (cf. Ezek. 20:34-38). The wicked Israelites, the “goats,” will not get to enter the land of Israel (Ezek. 20:38), but will be destroyed (Ezek. 34:16).

**“as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”** After the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21), Jesus will gather together the people who survived Armageddon and will divide them into two groups, “sheep” (righteous people) and “goats” (unrighteous people), so theologians refer to this judgment as “The Sheep and Goat Judgment.” The sheep and goat judgment occurs at the start of Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth. It is possible that Jesus got the terminology of “sheep” and “goats” from Ezekiel 34:11-24, where God’s people are sheep but there are also male goats among them (Ezek. 34:17).

The Sheep and Goat Judgment is not well understood by Christians. It has been called a parable by some theologians, which it is not, and it has been called an illustration of the final judgment, and it is not that either. The Sheep and Goat judgment has been misunderstood for a number of reasons. One is that it happens on earth, but most Christians are taught that when a person dies he or she is immediately judged and is either granted entrance to heaven or is sent to “hell.” In that system there is no judgment on earth, nor is there a judgment of a large group of people at one time, as we see here in Matthew 25 when Christ judges the nations.

Another reason the sheep and goat judgment is misunderstood is that some Christians are taught that when Christ comes from heaven and fights the Battle of Armageddon, no one on earth survives. In that case, even though in Matthew 25 this judgment occurs after the Tribulation and Armageddon, supposedly there would be no one left on earth to judge. However, the Bible makes it clear that some people will survive the Tribulation and Armageddon. For example, Isaiah 13:12 and 24:6 show us there will be “very few” survivors, but given that there are more than seven billion people on earth, “very few” could easily mean a few million or more. Matthew 25:31-46 implies that there will be a significant number of people alive because the “nations” will be brought before Christ.

The record of the Sheep and Goat Judgment is also confusing to some people because it does not seem to be clearly connected to the other resurrections and judgments, so people have a hard time figuring out what it is and when it occurs. Actually, when we properly understand the Bible and the chronology it sets forth, the Sheep and Goat Judgment not only makes sense, it can be seen to be a necessity. To understand it, we must fit it into the general chronology of the book of Revelation. Thankfully, we can do that because Jesus taught about the end of this age and the tribulation period in some detail (Matt. 24, 25; Mark 13:5-31; Luke 21:5-36).

When fitting the sheep and goat judgment into the chronology of the End Times, it helps to keep in mind that Matthew 24:4-25:46 is Jesus’ very long but single answer to the question the apostles asked in Matthew 24:3: “Tell us, when will these things be, and what *will be* the sign of your coming and end of the age?” It would have helped us understand the End Times if Jesus’ teaching that is recorded in Matthew 24 and 25 had been kept as one chapter instead of broken into two because the overall flow of Matthew 24:4-25:46 is chronological: There will be tribulation on earth; then Jesus will come with his angels and the elect and nations will be gathered; then there will be the sheep and goat judgment when all those gathered will be judged. At that point, the righteous people will be allowed to enter the Millennial Kingdom, while the unrighteous people are sentenced to punishment and are cast into the Lake of Fire. The righteous people marry, have children, age, and die (Isa. 65:20-23). What we now know from the New Testament that no one knew until the New Testament was written was what happened to those natural people after they died. We now know that they will get up in the second resurrection, the Resurrection of the Unrighteous, which is at the end of the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom of Christ, and if they lived righteous lives they will have been written in the Book of Life and granted everlasting life (Rev. 20:4-6, 11-15).

Jesus’ teaching about the sheep and goat judgment comes near the end of his answer to the apostles’ question and connects that judgment to the Tribulation and the end of the Age. In fact, Jesus’ teaching shows us that the sheep and goat judgment comes after the Tribulation and his being on earth (Matt. 24:29-30; 25:31).

There is a lot of confusion and disagreement about how the details of the book of Revelation fit together, but this is in large part due to erroneous teaching. For example, in the Gospels and Revelation, Christ comes to earth, but orthodox Christianity teaches that Jesus stays in heaven, and this obviously confuses people. Or when the Bible says that Satan is bound in the Abyss-prison while people reign on earth 1,000 years, some denominations teach that those statements are just figures of speech—Satan is not literally bound and the 1,000 years are not a literal period of time but are a figure of speech—so again, people are confused. Or people are taught that the book of Revelation is not chronological, so they don’t look for it to set forth a timeline that can be followed.

But the “big picture” set forth in Revelation is indeed in chronological order. There will be a period of great tribulation; then the Battle of Armageddon will occur; then Satan will be bound for 1,000 years; then there will be the Sheep and Goat Judgment for people who lived through the Tribulation and Armageddon and the resurrection of the Righteous (the first resurrection) for those people who had died by the end of Armageddon; then there will be the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth; then Satan will be loosed and will gather an army and attack Jerusalem. That army will be defeated and Satan will be thrown into the Lake of Fire; then there will be the White Throne Judgment; then the New Jerusalem comes to earth and the righteous live forever in it. This “big picture” chronology can be seen if Revelation is read and believed literally. We give the following summary (events that are not mentioned in the book of Revelation but occur within the general timeframe of Revelation are in brackets):

1. [The Christian Church is Raptured into heaven (1 Thess. 4:15-18). The evidence is that the Rapture occurs before the Great Tribulation].
2. There is a time of great tribulation on earth. Jesus said, “at that time there will be great tribulation unlike anything that has happened since the beginning of the world” (Matt. 24:21). The events of the Tribulation are described in many places in the Old Testament (see commentary on Dan. 12:1 and Matt. 24:21), and Jesus described the Tribulation in Matthew 24 and 25. The description of the Tribulation events also takes up the majority of the book of Revelation (Rev. 6-19). For example, there are seal judgments, trumpet judgments, thunder judgments, and bowl judgments.
3. The Tribulation ends when Jesus rides down to earth with his armies (including Christians) and fights the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 14:19-20; 16:14-16; 19:11-21). The battle is not called “Armageddon” in Revelation 19, but it is in Revelation 16:16. In Revelation 19 it is called the “winepress,” and used in the phrase, “the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God.” The word “winepress” ties this huge battle back to the Old Testament, which also calls it the “winepress” of God (Isa. 63:2-6; cf. Rev. 14:19-20; 19:15). The name “winepress” is appropriate because in making wine a person became covered with red juice, and in fighting the Battle of Armageddon the people will be covered with blood (cf. Isa. 63:1-4). In fact, there will be so much blood that it will flow in streams, sometimes as deep as a horse’s bridle, for 180 miles or 290 km (Rev. 14:20).
4. The Battle of Armageddon results in the enemy army being killed, and the Antichrist (called the “beast”) and the false prophet being thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:20-21).
5. [God’s “unique day.” God restores the polluted and destroyed earth so that the water, soil, and air are fit for Christ’s kingdom on earth, and so the earth will be again called “Paradise” (Zech. 14:6-8, see commentary on Zech. 14:7].
6. During or just after the Battle of Armageddon, the Devil and his demons are chained and thrown into the Abyss-prison for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-3; Dan. 7:12; Isa. 24:21-22).
7. [Christ sets up his kingdom on earth, as was foretold in many scriptures in the Old Testament (cf. Ps. 2:8; Dan. 2:35; 7:13-14). This is not explicitly stated in Revelation 20, but Christ has to set up his kingdom in order for all the righteous people of the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the First Resurrection to have somewhere to live. This earthly kingdom is known as the “Millennial Kingdom” because it lasts 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-6). During this time the earth is referred to as “Paradise” because it will have been restored to an Eden-like state. Many Old Testament scriptures refer to this Eden-like time when the deserts will bloom, there will be plenty of food, no war, righteous rulers on earth, and Christ will be king and reign from Jerusalem. For more on this Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]
8. [The Sheep and Goat Judgment. Jesus will have fought the Battle of Armageddon and conquered the earth, and the people left alive on earth now have to be dealt with, so they are judged right then and there. The righteous “sheep” are allowed into the Millennial Kingdom, and the unrighteous “goats” are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41). Although the righteous people are allowed into Christ’s kingdom, they are still mortal—they have not died yet and they all have the sin nature humans inherit from Adam. Thus, they and their descendants are the ones who get old and die in the Millennial Kingdom (Isa. 65:20), and because of their sin nature and rebellious nature some of their descendants are the “natural people” who the Devil deceives after he is loosed from the Abyss at the end of the 1,000 years (Rev. 20:8)].
9. All the righteous people of the Old Testament get up in the “first resurrection” and live with Christ (Rev. 20:4-6). The first resurrection is called, “The first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5-6); “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29); and “the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15), and it is described in Ezekiel 37:12-14. These righteous people then reign with Christ 1,000 years on earth in his Millennial Kingdom. The Millennial Kingdom will be populated by the righteous people in the First Resurrection; the Christians who were Raptured into heaven but came back to earth with Christ; and the “sheep” of the sheep and goat judgment who are mortal. [For more on the resurrection of the righteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15].
10. After the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom, Satan and his demons are loosed from the Abyss, will deceive many of the “natural people” on earth, and attack Jerusalem (Rev. 20:7-8). Then there is a final war in which the Devil is defeated and thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:9-10). This final war is not well-known because orthodox Christianity teaches that Armageddon is the final war, but reading Revelation 19-20 shows that Armageddon is not the final war. Simply reading and believing Revelation chapters 19 and 20 will show that the real final war is at the end of the Millennial Kingdom, although it is not given a name in Scripture.
11. After the final war, there is the second resurrection and “White Throne Judgment” (Rev. 20:11-15). The second resurrection is called “the resurrection of “judgment” (John 5:29 ESV), and “the resurrection of the unrighteous” (Acts 24:15). All the unsaved people of all time get up in this resurrection, as well as a few righteous people such as those righteous “natural” people who died during the Millennial Kingdom, so the vast majority of the people being judged are unrighteous, hence the name, “resurrection of the unrighteous.” Those people who are judged to be unrighteous are thrown into the Lake of Fire, where they will eventually burn up and be annihilated. [For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”].
12. The New Jerusalem comes down from heaven with streets of gold, and the saved live in it forever (Rev. 21 and 22).

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the duration of the last half of the Tribulation, as well as the days of Judgment following Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:11. For more on the terrible death and destruction in the Great Tribulation and Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on the first and second resurrection, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1.]

**“goats.”** The typical goat of the ancient Middle East was black. This made separating the sheep from the goats an easy job and added to the differences between the sheep and goats in biblical metaphor. Second to man, goats have been the most severe destroyers of land in history. They will overgraze areas of vegetation, eating weeds, shrubs, and small trees, and stand on their hind legs to eat the twigs of larger trees (and will climb the trees if the branches are dense enough and eat twigs and small branches they can reach). They will usually stick with a flock, but are not averse to wandering off, and a couple of goats can quickly establish a feral flock that damages crops. The meat was eaten, but usually only of the young goat, or kid, and it was not valued as highly as the meat of the cow or sheep. Similarly, goat milk was used, but not valued as highly as cow milk, perhaps in part due to volume. Those things, added to the fact that the sheep were white, the color of righteousness and purity, and the goat was black, the color of evil and darkness, made the metaphor between the sheep (believers), and goats (unbelievers), a natural and good one.

A major reason for keeping goats was their hardiness and their hair. Usually, goat hair was long and black, and thus easily woven. It was woven into a rough cloth which was made into sacks for storing and carrying things, and thus this cloth was called “sackcloth” (cf. Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13; Rev. 6:12; 11:3). Another important use for goat hair was it was tightly woven into the cloth that tents were made from. The reason that goat hair was especially good for tents was that it swelled when wet, and shrank when dry. That meant that if it started to rain, the tent cloth would swell and naturally repel the rain, but when it was dry the tent hair shrank and let the air circulate so that the tent was comfortable.

The Beloved woman in Song of Songs said her skin was “dark like the tents of Kedar” (Song 1:5), because she worked out in the sun so her skin had become dark like goat hair. Her lover said to her: “Your hair is like a flock of goats that lie along the side of Gilead.” (Song 6:5), meaning she had black hair that waved and bounced from the top of her head over her shoulders, dark and shining and bouncing like a large flock of goats winding its way down the mountain.

The goat has been associated with evil for so long that when the association began is lost in ancient history. We could speculate that it is because the Devil and demons sometimes appear to people in the form of goats or goat people (people involved in witchcraft attest that still happens today), but no one is really sure. In Leviticus 16:8, the Hebrew word “Azazel” most likely means “Mighty Goat” and is a name for the Devil, and even the people of Israel occasionally worshiped goat demons (Lev. 17:7; 2 Chron. 11:15). Leaders, especially evil or unscrupulous and overbearing ones, were referred to as “he-goats” (Isa. 14:9; Zech. 10:3).

[For more on Azazel, see commentary on Lev. 16:8. For more on leaders being referred to as “he-goats,” see commentary on Isa. 14:9.]

Mat 25:33

**“right…left.”** Jesus taught that at the Sheep and Goat Judgment, the sheep will be placed on his right side and the goats on his left side. Everyone in that biblical culture immediately understood from Christ’s words that the sheep were blessed and the goats were cursed. In the biblical culture, people were taught to wipe themselves with their left hand after they went to the bathroom. In contrast, they were taught to eat, give gifts, touch another person, etc., with their right hand. Thus the left hand was known as the hand of cursing and the right hand as the hand of blessing. Meals were communal, and the food was served in communal dishes. We see an example of that at the Last Supper when Jesus said that the one who dipped his piece of bread in the dish with Jesus would betray him (Matt. 26:23; Mark 14:20). For anyone to eat with their left hand would be considered completely unacceptable and they would have been immediately expelled from the meal (this custom is still practiced in some places where people eat with their hands from communal dishes, such as some parts of India). When Christ put the goats on his left, he was clearly communicating that they were cursed, which we see play out later in the chapter when they are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41). In contrast, the sheep on his right hand were blessed and were allowed into Christ’s Millennial Kingdom.

Ecclesiastes 10:2 says, “A wise person’s heart *inclines him* toward his right hand, but a fool’s heart *inclines* toward his left.” In this case, the wise person’s heart leads to blessings, while a fool’s heart leads to bad things, including being cursed. In John 21:6, when the apostles had fished all night but not caught anything, Jesus said to cast the net “on the right side of the boat,” and the net was full of fish, which was a wonderful blessing, both as a testimony of God’s goodness and provision, and financially to those fishermen and their families, as well.

In Proverbs 3:16, Lady Wisdom has life in her right hand, and riches and glory in her left. In this case, the left hand is not a hand of cursing, but riches and glory are certainly less valuable than life and especially everlasting life. Riches and glory fade but everlasting life is forever.

Mat 25:34

**“inherit the kingdom.”** In this verse, the “sheep” get to enter the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. The “sheep” are the people who stayed righteous during the Tribulation period and did not die in the Tribulation or the Battle of Armageddon. Jesus lets them into his kingdom. So from Scripture, we learn that there are three “categories” or “types” of people in the Millennial Kingdom.

1. Christians raptured into the air at the close of the Church Age who then return to earth with Christ during his Second Coming to fight the battle of Armageddon. They will remain on earth and enter the Millennial Kingdom. Each Christian will have a glorious new body fashioned after Jesus’ resurrected body (Phil. 3:21).
2. Believers (both Jew and Gentile) who died before the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and believers who will die during the Tribulation. These believers will be resurrected and transformed into immortals during the First Resurrection, which occurs after the battle of Armageddon (Ezek. 37:12-14; Rev. 20:4-6). This category includes believers such as Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Joshua, Ruth, Samuel, David, Esther, Daniel, and those murdered during the Tribulation for their refusal to worship the Beast (Rev. 13:15).
3. “Natural” or mortal believers who survive the Tribulation and the battle of Armageddon and are judged “righteous” (Matt. 25:31-46). This category will include both Jews and Gentiles. The term “natural” is used to provide a distinction between these people, who are mortals, and the people who are no longer “natural” but immortal, namely, those in categories *a* and *b*. These “natural” people will experience the same life cycle as all mortals. They will grow, mature, marry, procreate, age, and die (Isa. 65:20-25).

There will be no war and plenty of food in the kingdom, so these mortal people will multiply rapidly and will repopulate the earth. In fact, they will multiply to such a degree that by the end of the 1,000 years, they will be as numerous “as the sand on the seashore” (Rev. 20:8). This growth in population should not be surprising. In the Old Testament, Israel entered Egypt as a group of 70 people (Gen. 46:27). When they came out they numbered about three million. This significant increase in population occurred under horrible conditions. Even if only a million or so natural people are allowed in at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom, imagine the growth potential when the prevailing conditions are peace and prosperity!

Prophecies of Christ ruling with an iron scepter are strong evidence that there will be a Millennial Kingdom populated at least in part by unsaved, mortal people. In addition, it should be obvious that these prophecies must apply to the future because they were not fulfilled during Christ’s first coming. In spite of the many clear verses on this subject, some people do not believe that the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth is *literal*, and others who do not believe the Kingdom is coming *in the future* (Some people erroneously believe that the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth is happening now in a “spiritual sense.”)[[201]](#footnote-26936) If either of these beliefs were correct, then the only people available for Christ to rule with an iron scepter would be the saved believers in the Everlasting Kingdom. Being ruled with an iron scepter is not how most Christians envision everlasting life. Thankfully, that is not how the Bible portrays it either. It is the unregenerate, “natural” people alive during the Millennial Kingdom who will need to be ruled with an iron scepter.

More evidence that there will be “natural,” mortal people in the Millennial Kingdom is that at the end of the 1,000 years, Satan is loosed from the Abyss and will be able to deceive the nations (Rev. 20:7-9). It is inconceivable that Satan could deceive people who had died and been resurrected to everlasting life—he has to deceive natural people who had not died yet.

The need for the iron scepter is in part due to the fact that these “natural people” still have a sin nature and are therefore prone to be selfish and sinful. Although they will live in Paradise and be surrounded by bounty, many of them will still find reasons to complain. That is not unusual. Both history and the Bible teach that there are many times when people who should be happy because they are healthy, well-fed, and financially secure are still unhappy and find reasons to complain constantly.

The presence of these “natural” people in the Millennial Kingdom explains in large part why there will be disputes in the Millennial Kingdom (Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3). The book of Zechariah says that if any nation selfishly decides not to go and worship in Jerusalem, then that nation will have no rain (Zech. 14:17). This is an example of the natural selfishness and “can’t be bothered” attitude prevalent among “natural” people. It is also an example of how Christ will wield the iron scepter.

Some Christians do not believe there will be two literal and distinct kingdoms in the future because, to them, it does not seem possible to have “natural” people (mortals), and immortals alive on the earth at the same time. So they take verses like those cited above and “spiritualize” them by saying they are figurative and not literal. There is no justification for handling these verses in that manner. They are written very clearly and do not have any of the aspects of figurative language. Just because something God says about the future is hard to believe or hard to understand does not mean it is not literal and true.

[For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the sheep and goat judgment, see commentary on Matt. 25:32.]

Mat 25:41

**“fire in the age *to come*.”** The Greek does not refer to “eternal fire,” as if the fire would last forever, but rather “the fire in the age *to come*,” that is, the fire associated with Christ’s kingdom on earth, when the wicked will be punished by being thrown into Gehenna. The Greek word *aiōnios* (αἰώνιος) in this context does not refer to how long the fire burns as to the fact that it is the fire that is spoken of that relates to the Day of Judgment associated with the Messianic Age, the Coming Age, the age to come.

Centuries before the New Testament was written, and still during New Testament times, the Rabbis taught about two Ages, the present one we live in and the future Messianic Age. This teaching of two ages can be seen throughout Scripture, and indeed, understanding them can really boost our understanding of Scripture. The age we live in today is referred to as the “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). In Luke 20:34-35, Jesus said the people of “this age” marry, but those people who are considered worthy to attain “that age” (the future Messianic Age) do not marry. Jesus also taught about a sin that would not be forgiven in “this age” or the coming one (Matt. 12:32). The Devil is called “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4) because he rules this age but not the next. Furthermore, his demons are called “the rulers of this age” (1 Cor. 2:6-8) because of the power they wield, and what they promote as wise is called “the wisdom of this age” (1 Cor. 2:6). The present evil age offers a lot of temporal satisfaction, so God warns those people who are rich in “this age” not to be haughty (1 Tim. 6:17), but Demas loved “this present age” and left Paul (2 Tim. 4:10). In fact, believers are strictly warned not be conformed to “this age” (Rom. 12:2), but in this “present age” are to live self-controlled, upright, godly lives (Titus 2:12).

Here in Matthew 25:41, depicting the Sheep and Goat Judgment, which is the Judgment Day for those people still alive on earth after the Battle of Armageddon, Scripture tells us that the goats will be put in the fire—the fire associated with judgment and the Messianic Age. This “fire” is the Lake of Fire into which the unrighteous are thrown on the Day of Judgment (Matt. 25:41, 46; Rev. 20:10, 14, 15).

There is no evidence that the Lake of Fire came into existence very long before Armageddon and the Day of Judgment. The first people thrown into it are the Antichrist and the false prophet (Rev. 19:20). Then, very shortly afterward, the “goats” (unbelievers; unrighteous) from the Sheep and Goat Judgment are thrown in (Matt. 25:41, 46).

[For more on the Greek word *aiōnios* and how it relates to the coming Messianic Age, see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.” For more on the possible origin of the Lake of Fire, see commentary on Dan. 7:10.]

**“prepared for the Devil and his angels.”** This is an important phrase because it shows that God never intended for people to die in the Lake of Fire. In this verse, Jesus sends the people who have fought against him into the Lake of Fire, but at the same time points out that it was never intended for them; it was intended for the Devil and his angels.

God prepared the Lake of Fire for the Devil and his angels because of their rebellion against Him, but He pleads with people to “choose life” (Deut. 30:19; cf. Ezek. 33:11). This verse shows that those Christians who teach that God predestines some people to everlasting life and others to torment in the Lake of Fire are wrong. If God predestined people to the Lake of Fire, and they never had the ability to choose to be saved, as Calvinists teach, then God did indeed prepare the Lake of Fire for those unsaved people.

That the Lake of Fire was prepared for the Devil and his angels, but not for humans, even though we know from Scripture that many humans do reject God and will die in the Lake of Fire, shows God’s continued love for mankind, and He wants “everyone to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Only when people reject God and thus choose death does God honor their free will choice and end their life in the Lake of Fire.

[For more on the Lake of Fire resulting in annihilation, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “the Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

**“his angels.”** What we refer to as “demons” (or “devils”) today are fallen angels, who joined Satan in his rebellion against God and became part of Satan’s demonic army of evil spirits, which is why demons are referred to as “his” angels.

The Bible never tells us the original God-given name of the spirit being we now know by names such as “Satan” and “the Devil.” We know he was a leader in God’s original creation but became filled with pride and rebelled against God (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:11-19). One-third of God’s created angels joined Satan in his rebellion (Rev. 12:4), and the Devil and his angel followers will eventually be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10; and clearly implied in Dan. 7:12).

[For more on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Mat 25:46

**“punishment in the age *to come*.”** This sheep and goat punishment is the punishment that is associated with the Judgment at the end of this age and the beginning of the next (i.e., the coming age). The punishment that will be rendered will take place at the start of “the age [to come],” i.e., at the very start of the Messianic Age. Thus, the adjective “age” (*aiōnion*) is best understood as referring to what will take place “in” that age.

[For the translation “life in the age *to come*,” see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

The simple understanding of this verse has been obscured by orthodox Christian tradition. The context and scope of Scripture support the translation and primary emphasis of the phrase as it is translated in the REV: “the punishment of *the* age *to come,*” and not “eternal punishment,” everlasting punishment,” or “age-long punishment,” all of which have an emphasis on duration. The primary emphasis of the punishment in this verse is that it will occur in the age to come when Jesus rules the earth. During that future age, the righteous will be rewarded and the unsaved will be punished.

People who have died are not being punished “in hell” now as is commonly taught. Right now, when a person dies, they are dead in the ground awaiting resurrection and judgment. Furthermore, the Bible never says how long an unsaved sinner will be in Gehenna before they are annihilated. While the Bible indicates that some people will be in torment for a long time, no verse says that is true for every unsaved person. In fact, there are reasons to believe that many or most will be consumed very quickly.

When Christ comes to earth and fights the Battle of Armageddon, he will throw the “beast” (the Antichrist) and the false prophet into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:20). Those two are the first two people who are thrown into the Lake of Fire. After Armageddon, Jesus will set up his Millennial Kingdom on earth. It is called his “Millennial Kingdom” because it lasts 1,000 years (Rev. 20:2-6).

When Jesus sits on his throne in his Millennial Kingdom, one of his first acts will be to gather before him all the people who have survived the Tribulation and Armageddon and judge them according to their works. This judgment is called by scholars, “the sheep and goat judgment,” because Jesus is said to separate the people into two categories, “sheep” (believers), and “goats” (unbelievers) (Matt. 25:32). The goats are then led off to their punishment.

Another misconception that must be cleared up about this verse is that it does not teach that people burn forever in the Lake of Fire. The “goats” are thrown into the fire and burned up; annihilated. The phrase that has caused the confusion is κόλασιν αἰώνιον, which usually gets translated, “eternal punishment” (*kolasis aiōnios* literally means, “age punishment,” because in Greek the adjective (*aiōnios*; age) usually is after the noun (κόλασιν; punishment)). As was stated above, because of the context of the verse, which is the start of Christ’s kingdom on earth, the evidence supports the conclusion that the primary emphasis of this verse is the time the punishment starts, which is the age to come, and not the duration of the punishment. However, the adjective *aiōnios* can refer to duration as well as a specific age, so there is a sense in which “everlasting punishment” can be a good translation if it is properly understood—that is, that the “punishment,” not the “punishing,” goes on forever.

The Greek word *kolasis*, “punishment,” is a noun, not a verb. The phrase is not “everlasting punishing,” as if the “punishing” went on forever and people writhed in pain forever. Instead, it is “everlasting punishment,” because the punishment, which is death, goes on forever. For those who are thrown into the Lake of Fire and experience the “second death” (Rev. 20:14), their punishment, which is death, will never end. They are never given life again; they are annihilated and thus gone from existence forever.

There are times when the noun “punishment” is used for the process of the act of being punished, so how do we know that this verse does not use “punishment” in the sense of “punishing”? The way to know that is from the scope of Scripture. Does the whole Bible, taken together, teach that the unsaved are annihilated in the fire, or survive in the fire and burn forever? The clear reading of Scripture is that mankind is given a choice between life and death. There is no verse that states that God gives people a choice between living forever in a good place or living forever in a bad place. John 3:16 gives the choice between “perish” or “everlasting life.” Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is “death,” but the gift of God is “life.” Jesus said the believer has passed from “death” to “life” (John 5:24). The orthodox teaching is that people burn “in hell” forever, but that mostly comes from the unbiblical idea of the “immortal soul,” a concept that does not exist in the Bible.

Here in Matthew 25:46, the Greek text does not have a definite article “the” before “punishment” but the REV includes the article. That is because the preposition *eis* is before the noun “punishment.” In Greek, if a preposition precedes a noun, the noun can be definite without specifically adding the definite article: the subject and context determine whether or not the article should be included, and sometimes it is added because that is the way we would say the phrase in English. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.”[[202]](#footnote-31367) A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use *ek*.[[203]](#footnote-31704) That the wicked would be punished and annihilated is taught throughout Scripture, so saying “the” punishment fits with the scope of Scripture.

[For the dead being dead now, and not alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on people being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not burning forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire. For the fact that there is no such thing as an “immortal soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“life in the age *to come.*”** That is, the life that people have in the Messianic Age.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

**Matthew Chapter 26**

Mat 26:3

**“the one called Caiaphas.”** The reason that Caiaphas had to be named was that Annas was also the High Priest. Annas should have been the only High Priest, since the High Priest served until death, but the Romans favored Caiaphas and made him the High Priest.

Mat 26:5

**“Not during the feast.”** The Feast of Passover was attended by hundreds of thousands of Jews from around the world, and there was great nationalistic fervor that accompanied it because of its historic roots associated with deliverance from Egypt. The Jews of Jesus’ day would have loved nothing better than deliverance from Rome, and would welcome a Messiah to do that for them. The Jews knew this and, as much as they wanted to arrest Jesus, did not want to risk a riot, but preferred to wait until after the feast when the crowds went home. Their plans were altered when one of Jesus’ closest men, Judas, offered to hand him over to them. Jesus himself, knowing that he was to die at the same time the Passover lamb was killed, prodded Judas to make his move quickly to turn Jesus over to the authorities (John 13:27).

Mat 26:6

**“Now when Jesus was in Bethany.”** This event about Jesus being anointed in Bethany is recorded in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-6. Judas Iscariot started the discontent and murmuring (John 12:4), and it spread to the others.

**“Simon the Leper.”** Simon had had a skin disease of some kind, but he was now cured or people would not have been in his house. Nevertheless, the name “Simon the Leper” stuck.

Mat 26:7

**“a woman came to him.”** John 12:3 identifies this woman as Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha (see commentary on John 12:3). This record of Mary pouring the oil on Jesus occurs in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 12:1-8, it is not included in Luke.

[For more information on this anointing and the controversy it stirred up, see commentary on John 12:4.]

**“perfume.”** The Greek word is *muron* (#3464 μύρον), and it is a general term for perfume, ointment, perfumed oil, or even a sweet-smelling substance. In the New Testament, the emphasis is on the way it smells, and thus “perfume” seems to be the best translation. It is not an “ointment,” per se, because that implies it would be being used for healing. Also, what Mary put on Jesus was likely not oily, so “perfumed oil” is perhaps not the best translation.

**“poured it on his head.”** The anointing of Jesus occurred in the house of Simon the Leper (Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3), which is why John specifically says Martha was serving. If the supper occurred at the house of Mary and Martha that would never be stated because it would be obvious and expected.

At first glance, there seems to be a contradiction between Matthew, Mark, and John, because Matthew and Mark say the ointment was poured on Jesus’ head, while John says the feet. The key is to realize that a flask of oil worth a year’s salary would be quite large, and covered both his head and feet. That is why Jesus said that the woman “poured this perfume on my body” (Matt. 26:12).

Mat 26:8

**“the disciples became angry.”** The Greek word translated “angry” is *aganakteō* (#23 ἀγανακτέω), and it refers to being angry or displeased at a situation that is perceived to be unjust. This grumbling of the apostles started with Judas, who was in charge of the money that people gave to Jesus and stole from it. Judas saw the woman pouring expensive ointment on Jesus as a lost opportunity to enrich himself and started to grumble about the “waste” of money. The other apostles, not knowing Judas’ motive, picked up his cause and also started grumbling, which is what we read in Matthew and Mark. To see the cause of the grumbling, see commentary on John 12:4.

Mat 26:12

**“she did it to prepare me for burial.”** The perfume was very expensive and therefore likely quite strong, so it is possible that there could have been a faint smell of it even days later when Jesus was buried. It is impossible to know what the disciples thought Jesus meant when he spoke of his burial. They did not expect him to die, much less be buried. However, taking Matthew 26:12 literally could well show us that in contrast to the disciples who did not know Jesus was going to die, Mary believed what Jesus said about dying and anointed his body as part of the preparation for death and burial (cf. Mark 14:8).

Mat 26:14

**“Iscariot.”** See the commentary on Matthew 10:4 for more information on this name.

Mat 26:17

**“Now on the first *day* of the *Feast of* Unleavened Bread.”** The commentators recognize that this phrase involves an idiomatic understanding of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because technically the Feast of Unleavened Bread began the evening after the Passover Lamb was sacrificed (Exod. 12:15-20; Lev. 23:6), and this event in Matthew—and the Last Supper associated with it—occurred before that time.

Different scholars postulate different possibilities for the meaning of this phrase because it is not literal, but it is not difficult to understand what is being said here. Technically the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was on Nisan 15, which started at sunset after Nisan 14, when the Passover Lamb was sacrificed. However, as Lenski correctly observes, the “first day” “originally designated the celebration of the afternoon and evening of the 14th of Nisan (the eating of the Paschal Lamb) and [then] naturally came to be used by both Jewish and Greek writers also for the entire week of the celebration that followed.”[[204]](#footnote-22438)

So, from the way people commonly thought, the Feast of Unleavened Bread originally and technically did not start until sunset ending Nisan 14 and starting Nisan 15 (the Jewish day started at sunset). Then in time, the “first day” of the Feast of Unleavened Bread included the afternoon of Nisan 14 when the Passover Lamb was killed, then eventually the saying, the “first day of Unleavened Bread,” came to occasionally be used to refer to the whole week, and that is the way it is used here in Matthew. Similarly, just as the Passover gets swept up in common language into the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Unleavened Bread is sometimes called the “Passover” (cf. Luke 22:1). In the United States a similar thing has occurred with Christmas, and it would not be uncommon for someone to see Christmas lights and trees and exclaim “It’s Christmas!” when technically Christmas (Dec. 25) was still even weeks away.

The season of Passover and Unleavened Bread took some preparation. For example, the Passover lamb was selected on the tenth day of Nisan, and that was a couple of days before the disciples ate the Last Supper, especially if Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane after dark on our Monday night, which would have been Nisan 13 to the Jews. Also, although people did not technically have to remove the leaven from their houses until Nisan 15, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod. 12:15), we know that later in history people started making plans to remove the leaven days in advance, and there is little reason that could not have happened in Christ’s time as well.

Although we cannot pin down the exact meaning of the idiom here in Matthew, or the exact day it referred to, it is clear that Matthew, who was an observant Jew, knew only too well that technically the Feast of Unleavened Bread occurred the night after the Passover was killed, but that did not stop him from writing what he did in his gospel. This tells us that Matthew and his immediate audience knew something that we modern interpreters do not know; but likely it had to do with the Feast of Unleavened Bread being idiomatically used for that general season.

[For more information on Jesus being in the grave for three days and three nights—from Wednesday Nisan 14 to Saturday Nisan 17, see commentary on Matt. 12:40, “three days and three nights.” For more information on the events from Jesus’ arrest through his resurrection appearances, see commentary on John 18:13 and 19:14. For more information on Nicodemus and that he came after Joseph of Arimathea left the tomb, see commentary on John 19:40.]

Mat 26:20

**“he was reclining *to eat* with the Twelve.”** Matthew, Mark, and Luke all agree that Jesus ate the Last Supper with the twelve apostles (Matt. 26:20; Mark 14:17, and Luke 22:14). That makes sense because much of the Last Supper was instruction and guidance that they needed to be able to start and run what would become the Christian Church.

There is not much instruction in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus instituted the communion service, which explained the need for his death to the apostles and established a rite that would keep his sacrifice in the minds of believers. He also told the apostles to prepare for dark times ahead (Luke 22:35-38).

Mat 26:24

**“but how terrible it will be for that man.”** This warning is in Matthew 26:24, Mark 14:21, and Luke 22:22. The Greek word translated “how terrible it will be for” is *ouai* (#3759 οὐαί, pronounced ooh-'eye). For an explanation of the meaning of *ouai*, see commentary on Matthew 11:21. In this context, *ouai* is an expression of warning of the grief, disaster, and divine retribution that is coming to the one who betrays God’s Messiah.

Mat 26:25

**“Rabbi.”** It is very telling that Judas would call Jesus “Rabbi” when the other disciples call him “Lord” (cf. Matt. 26:22). In the book of Matthew, Jesus is only called “Rabbi” by Judas.

Mat 26:26

**“bread.”** This was not special bread, but the ordinary bread that the apostles were eating. Originally, communion was not a “ceremony,” but occurred at the start of a communal meal. There was no special bread or wine. Jesus did not have any, nor did the early Church. They used the bread and wine they were already eating and drinking. As with most things, over time the simple offering of thanks and time that was taken to eat some bread and drink some wine in recognition of Jesus’ sacrifice became ritualized and the “communion service” was invented.

In the early Church, anyone who wanted to eat and drink and recognize the sacrifice of Jesus could. There was no “membership,” or “requirements” that had to be met. Jesus did not ask for any, nor, as far as we can tell from the apostolic Church, did the early Christians. Again, over time Christians became concerned about not having the “right” people partake of the bread and wine, especially because it was supposed to accompany a personal commitment to the Lord. That was exacerbated by the Roman persecution of the early Church, because many Christians, rather than be tortured, gave in and offered sacrifices to the Roman gods. They would be “Romans” until the time of persecution was over (most persecutions lasted only a short time), and then they wanted to be received back into the congregation. However, the “confessors,” (those Christians who were tortured and often maimed because they continued to confess Jesus as Lord but survived—in contrast to the martyrs, those Christians who died for Christ) often did not want to allow these “weak” and “uncommitted” Christians back into the Church. Thus they would try to exclude them from the meetings and the communion.

Mat 26:28

**“this is my blood.”** Here in Matthew, Jesus emphasizes that his death paid the penalty for Israel breaking the Old Covenant (the Mosaic Covenant). In Luke, Jesus emphasizes that his death ratifies the New Covenant.

[For more information on the difference between Matthew and Luke, and the two aspects of Jesus’ death, see commentary on Luke 22:20.]

**“covenant.”** See commentary on Hebrews 7:22. The word “new” is not included, as it is in the KJV. Textual scholars conclude that it was added to some Greek texts so that this verse mirrored Luke 22:20 more closely. Had “new” been original, there is no good reason for dropping it from the early texts.

Mat 26:29

**“this fruit of the vine.”** The “fruit of the vine” is wine. There are people who teach that Jesus was drinking grape juice because they think that someone as holy as Jesus would never drink alcohol. But drinking wine and beer was a part of the biblical culture, and the Bible testifies that Jesus drank wine (and it is likely he also drank beer, which was part of the biblical culture, but mistranslated in many older English versions. Cf. Lev. 10:9; Num. 28:7; Judg. 13:4; 1 Sam. 1:15; Prov. 31:6; Isa. 28:7; 56:12, etc. HCSB). When Jesus said, “the Son of Man came eating and drinking” (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34), he was contrasting himself to John the Baptist who came “neither eating bread nor drinking wine” (Luke 7:33; cf. Matt. 11:18). So unlike John who did not eat rich foods or drink wine, Jesus did both.

Also, the Last Supper was in the late spring, likely our April, and the grape harvest is in July. R. C. H. Lenski correctly writes: “in April such a thing as grape juice was an impossibility in the Holy Land in Christ’s time. It could be had only when grapes were freshly pressed out, before the juice started to ferment.”[[205]](#footnote-18917)

[For more on John not drinking wine, likely because he was a Nazirite, see commentary on Luke 1:15.]

**“when I drink new wine with you in my Father’s kingdom.”** The “fruit of the vine” is wine. At the Last Supper Jesus promised his apostles that he would not drink wine again until he drank it with them in his Father’s kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, which was the Messianic Kingdom on the restored earth. The Old Testament had many verses that promised that when the Messiah conquered the earth and restored it to “Paradise,” that wine would be abundant (Isa. 25:6; Jer. 31:12; Hos. 2:22; Joel 2:19; Amos 9:13). In fact, the great feast that will be held on the mountain of Yahweh will have “the best of meats and the finest of wines” (Isa. 25:6 NIV). Jesus and his disciples knew about the future restored earth and the food and wine that would be there, and it was very meaningful to his disciples that Jesus promised that he would not drink wine until he got to drink it with them in the Kingdom. It has now been some 2,000 years since Jesus made that promise to his disciples, and we can be sure that Jesus has kept his promise and has not had any wine since the Last Supper. It is likely that Jesus will break his wine fast with his apostles and all of us at the great feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb, that will almost surely be held very soon after Jesus establishes his Kingdom on the earth.

The REV has “new wine,” but the Greek uses the word “it,” and in this case, the “it” refers to what is being consumed, which is the wine. This is clear in Greek, which is an inflected language, but it is not clear in English if the Greek is translated literally. Saying in English, “until that day I drink new it” makes no sense, so the REV replaces the “it” with what the “it” refers to, which is wine.

[For more on the attributes of the Messianic Kingdom on earth and the names by which it is called, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more about the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven, see the REV commentary on Matt. 8:11, “recline *to eat at the feast*.” For more about the fate of the unsaved who are not allowed into the feast but are excluded from it, see commentary on Matt. 8:12.]

Mat 26:31

**“with me.”** The Greek is literally, “in me,” which can be understood as “in connection with me,” or more simply, “with me.”

Mat 26:32

**“Galilee.”** See commentary on Matthew 28:7.

Mat 26:38

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of Jesus himself with an emphasis on his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “I am troubled” (cf. NAB, CJB), the inclusion of the word “soul” points us to his thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“deeply grieved.”** The Greek word is *perilupos* (#4036 περίλυπος), and it means deeply grieved, very sad, exceedingly sorrowful. Jesus knew the time of his arrest was approaching, and he was dealing with the emotions that were flooding him. He knew from Scripture and from the culture that he would be whipped and beaten for some 40 hours before dying on the cross as the true Passover Lamb. It was requiring all his love and resolve to move ahead and obey God to his painful death.

**“*almost* to the point of death.”** The Greek is more literally simply “to death.” The Greek phrase “to the point of death” means “that his sorrow is so great that he is hardly able to bear it.”[[206]](#footnote-27864) Jesus is not saying that his sorrow will literally result in his death, but the phrase is idiomatic and means that he is very deeply grieved. We use the same idiomatic phraseology when saying things like, “I am freezing to death,” or “I am starving to death.” The word death is more idiomatic than literal and expresses the depth of the emotion.

Mat 26:39

**“let this cup pass from me.”** In the culture of the Bible, the “cup” can refer to many different things that a person can experience, and the context determines whether that experience is good or bad. The most familiar of the idiomatic uses of “cup” in Christendom is when Jesus asked God to have the “cup” pass away from him (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). In that context, the “cup,” or experience, is suffering and death. The cup can refer to wrath and judgment (e.g., Ps. 11:6; Isa. 51:17; Rev. 14:10).

The “cup” can also refer to a good experience. For example, it can refer to experiencing deliverance from some disaster (Ps. 116:13). In the famous Psalm 23, David says, “my cup overflows,” referring to his experiencing overflowing blessings. Although most often the exact nature of the cup, the experience, must be learned from the context, sometimes the experience is quite exactly described. For example, Ezekiel 23:33 speaks of the “cup of astonishment and desolation.” Also, the cup, the experience, can be given by God or by demons (1 Cor. 10:21).

Here in Matthew 26:39 the use of “cup” is likely based on the custom of the drink at a meal being passed around from one person to another. Cups were usually easily broken, and there was often only one cup, so people passed the cup around and drank what was put in it without having a choice of drinks like we do in the modern world today. Thus the cup at a meal was very similar to life: we often do not have a choice of what happens to us, we get the “cup” that we get. Here in Matthew 26:39, Jesus is asking God if he can avoid partaking of the “cup” that is being passed to him.

[For more on the custom of the cup, see commentary on Ps. 11:6.]

Mat 26:41

**“the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** The Greek text contrasts the spirit and flesh quite strongly. This is the use of “spirit” that refers to the action of the mind, i.e., attitudes and emotions. The apostles had a willing attitude, but their flesh was weak and unable to stay awake.

[For more on “spirit,” including a long list of the ways it is used in the Bible, see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Mat 26:45

**“Are you still sleeping…?”** The verse can be translated with a statement, i.e., “sleep on now…” or with a question, “Are you still sleeping…?” Commentators are divided, but most of them agree that, since Christ said very shortly after that, “Rise and let us go,” if Christ did in fact make a statement, then it is irony, not a serious statement. We have decided to translate the verse as a question given the following:

A) The words can legitimately be translated as a question.

B) Irony is hard to detect in a book and usually confuses the reader.

C) Christ obviously did not mean for them to sleep since he spoke to them (if they were sleeping and he wanted them to continue sleeping, he would not have woken them up just to tell them to sleep on) and since he told them to get up in the very next verse.

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 26:46

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 26:47

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“and with him *was* a large crowd.”** This “crowd” consisted of both Jewish police and Roman soldiers (see commentary on John 18:3).

**“clubs”** The KJV has staves, but the Greek just reads “woods” leaving the reader to figure out what the people were carrying that was made of wood. Since many people carried staffs, it would be natural to say that, but staffs were hard to fight with in a crowd and the association of this weapon with swords makes “clubs” the more likely choice.

Mat 26:51

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 26:52

**“those who take the sword will perish by the sword.”** This verse is speaking about self-willed aggression outside the bounds of the law. It has nothing to do with self-defense or the proper use of the criminal justice system. Earlier that same day, Jesus had told the disciples to buy a sword if they did not have one. “And he said to them, ‘But now, he who has a purse, let him take it, and likewise *his* provision bag; and let the one who has no sword sell his outer garment and buy one’” (Luke 22:36). Obviously, Jesus would not tell people in the afternoon to go buy a sword if they did not own one, but then later that night teach that if they used the sword they had bought they would die by it.

There is a perfectly good reason Christ told his disciples to go buy a sword: self-defense. Peter, however, was not acting in self-defense when he drew his sword and used it on the servant of the priest. The people who came to arrest Jesus represented the legal authorities at the time. If the police came to your house to arrest you, even if you had not actually committed the crime, you would not be acting in self-defense if you pulled a weapon and started to fight with them. To be acting legally, you would have to win your case in court. When Peter pulled his sword and smote the servant of the High Priest, he was acting outside the will of God and outside the law of the land, and that is the context of Jesus’ rebuke. What Jesus said has absolutely nothing to do with self-defense, war, or the criminal justice system.

What Jesus said has historically been proven to be true. Throughout history, robbers and brigands who unlawfully took up the sword against the legal authorities were frequently killed or executed.

The police and other civil authorities set up by governments are charged with the duty of maintaining a social justice system. They “bear the sword” to keep society safe, and God calls them His “servants.” The Bible states: “for he is God’s servant to you for good. But if you do what is wrong, be afraid, for he does not carry the sword for no reason, for he is God’s servant, an agent of punishment to bring wrath upon the one who practices *that which is* wrong” (Rom. 13:4).

Mat 26:53

**“he will send me more than 12 legions of angels.”** Matthew 26:53 is one of the many verses that are evidence that Jesus Christ is not God, but the human Messiah, the “man approved by God” that the Jews were expecting. If Jesus had been teaching the apostles that he was God in the flesh, they would not have been worried about protecting him, and neither would Peter have drawn a sword to defend him: God is fully capable of defending Himself!

Also, Jesus did not say to Peter: “Put away your sword. I can defend myself if I want to.” No. Jesus said he could ask his Father who would send him 12 legions of angels (72,000 angels) to rescue him. God does not need angels to defend Himself, but the Son of God, the fully human Messiah, would have needed God’s help to be delivered from the multitude of people who came to arrest him with swords and clubs.

[For more on Jesus being the fully human Son of God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Mat 26:57

**“led him away to *the house of* Caiaphas.”** Caiaphas was the High Priest. The Gospel of Matthew skips over the fact that Jesus was taken first to Annas, and from Annas to Caiaphas, but that is clearly recorded in the Gospel of John (John 18:13, 24). Annas was the father-in-law to Caiaphas, and from the biblical record and archaeological evidence, Annas and Caiaphas lived side by side in a family compound, which was not unusual. That would also explain how Peter could follow what was happening to Jesus through the night even though the Gospels seem to have him in the same general area. The compound in which Annas and Caiaphas lived would have had a big yard and been surrounded by a fence or wall, which explains why Peter had to be let into the area through a gate (John 18:16).

[For more on the chronology of the last week of Christ’s life from his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane to his appearances on Sunday after his crucifixion, see commentary on John 18:13. For more information about Jesus being in the tomb, “the heart of the earth,” for three full days and three nights, see commentary on Matt. 12:40. For information on the chronology of the four trials of Jesus on Tuesday (before the Jewish Sanhedrin, then Pilate, then Herod, then Pilate) see commentary on John 19:14, “the sixth hour.” For information on the two-stage burial of Jesus, first by Joseph of Arimathea and then by Nicodemus, see commentary on John 19:40. For information on the Hasmonean palace as the likely location of Jesus’ trial before Pilate, see commentary on Luke 23:7.]

Mat 26:61

**“I am able to destroy the Temple.”** This is not what Jesus said! Speaking to the Jews he said, “If you destroy this temple, I will raise it up in three days.” See commentary on John 2:19 and Mark 14:58.

**“and to build it in three days.”** See commentary on John 2:19.

Mat 26:63

**“that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”** What the Jews asked Jesus at his trial, and how Jesus answered, is good evidence that Jesus never claimed to be God and that there is no Trinity. Trinitarians often say that Jesus was claiming to be God, but there is no clear evidence that is true. Here is clear evidence that the priests thought Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and they did not think that “Son of God” was in any way equivalent to “God.”

[For more on Jesus being the Son of God and not “God in the flesh,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Mat 26:64

**“*Yes*, it is as you say.”** See commentary on Matthew 27:11; “*It is as* you say.” In the related record in Mark 14:62, Jesus says, “I am.” Some critics say that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. Here, he swears to it.

**“Moreover.”** Jesus agrees that he is the Christ, but he is certainly not confirming the accusation of blasphemy, so he says, “Moreover ... you will see the Son of Man....”

**“you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power.”** The most natural reading of this verse is that Jesus is specifically speaking to the leaders in front of him and saying that they would see him come down from heaven. This would then fit with all the other places in which Jesus indicated that his return would occur during the lifetime of the generation in which he lived.

It is possible, but unlikely, that this statement made by Jesus is a general statement and the “you” is not specific but refers to rulers in any age who are ungodly, such as these ungodly Jews. However, in order to make Jesus’ statement more general, the two main phrases have to be understood in an allegorical, not literal, way. As to the first of these phrases, about Jesus being at the right hand of God, many commentators say that it refers to the way it was possible to “see” the effects of Jesus’ reign from heaven through the actions of the Church. The problem with that interpretation is that there is no evidence that the unbelievers “saw” Christ reigning by watching Christians. Unbelievers regularly mocked, ridiculed, and persecuted Christians. They did not “see” the reign of Christ through them. In contrast, when Jesus actually comes from heaven where he is sitting at the right hand of God, “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him” (Rev. 1:7). When Jesus starts to come down from heaven to conquer the earth (Rev. 19:11ff), not even an unbeliever will be able to deny it; everyone will see him.

The phrase, “coming on the clouds of heaven,” should be understood in a literal way too. When it is taken allegorically, it is said to be a general phrase referring to Christ’s actions in judgments after his ascension. However, there is no reason to assume that Jesus meant it that way with the exception that his return did not occur in the lifetime of those he was speaking to. Had he returned in their lifetimes, the prophecy of him coming in the clouds of heaven and judging the earth and ruling over it (Dan. 7:13, 14), would have been fulfilled. If we read the Bible literally, then the evidence is clear that Jesus was expecting his Second Coming to occur during the lifetime of those Jews to whom he was speaking.

What Jesus said here in Matthew 26:64 (cf. Mark 14:62) fits with what Jesus said to other people at other places in the Gospels, that they would be alive to see Jesus return to earth at his Second Coming. Jesus apparently thought he would return soon and spoke that way in a number of places in the Gospels.

“The Power” is a circumlocution for God.[[207]](#footnote-24185)

[For more on Jesus speaking about his Second Coming occurring soon, see commentary on Matt. 16:28. For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mat 26:65

**“tore his clothing.”** The word “clothing” is *himation* (#2440 ἱμάτιον**;** hĭ-'mä-tee-on), which refers to clothes of any type, or the outer garment like a cloak or mantle. The Greek is plural, so it may well be that the High Priest grabbed both his inner and outer clothing at the neck and tore them a handbreadth, which was the standard tearing when blasphemy was heard. This was a sin on the part of the High Priest because the Mosiac Law specifically commanded that the High Priest was not to tear his clothes (Lev. 21:10). There are many things in the record of the arrest and trial of Jesus Christ that show that the High Priest was a wicked, ungodly man, and this is one of them. Jesus Christ said we are to know ungodly people by what they do, and this is an example of that.

**“Blasphemy...blasphemy.”** The Greek noun *blasphēmia* (#988 βλασφημία), and the verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) are transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” “Blasphemy” in English has a different meaning than *blasphēmeō* and *blasphēmia* do in Greek. In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. It is insulting God or a god, insulting something considered sacred (like defacing a cross or statue of Jesus), or falsely claiming to be God or a god in some way. However, in Greek, *blasphēmia* and *blasphēmeō* did not have to refer to God or a god, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another, slandering or insulting them. The primary meaning of them as they were used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. In this case, the religious leaders thought it was insulting to God’s reputation that Jesus would refer to himself as God’s Messiah.

[For more on *blasphēmeō* and *blasphēmia* see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Mat 26:66

**“He deserves to die!”** The Law of Moses stated: “But whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh, he is to be put to death, yes, death” (Lev. 24:16). Since blaspheming Yahweh was the only blasphemy that was deserving of death in the Law, by the time of Christ the overly religious and hypocritical Sadducees and Pharisees had apparently decided that if anyone claimed to be the Messiah they had blasphemed Yahweh and were worthy of death. As we would expect of their hypocrisy, however, they would not have put everyone who claimed to be the Messiah to death because there are always insane people who think they are the Messiah; they would have only put people to death who they considered a threat to their control over society.

Mat 26:69

**“servant girl.”** The Greek word can be either “slave girl” or “servant girl.” The context determines which. This girl (and the ones in Mark 14:66, 69; Luke 22:56; Acts 12:13) may have been slave girls, but there the context does not give enough weight to go in that direction.

Mat 26:70

**“But he denied *it* before everyone.”** Each of the Four Gospels has three times that Peter denied Jesus, but they are in different circumstances. Putting the Four Gospels together we see that there are three “denial events.” The first was a denial that occurred at the gateway to the compound of the High Priest. From history and archaeology, it seems clear that the High Priests Annas and Caiaphas lived side by side, or very close to each other, and shared a courtyard. The common custom among people of such wealth and distinction was to have a courtyard enclosed by a wall with a gate. When Peter followed Jesus and got to the compound he was stopped at the gate and questioned and denied Christ (John 18:17). Then he went to the campfire in the courtyard where he was questioned by several people and denied Christ (Matt. 26:69; Mark 14:66-68; Luke 22:55-57; John 18:18, 25). Then he went back to the gate where he was questioned again, and again denied Christ, and a rooster crowed twice (Matt. 26:71-75; Mark 14:68-72; Luke 22:59-62; John 18:26-27). So there were three “denial events,” with different specific denials occurring at each place. The rooster crowed twice, both while Peter was at the gate the second time (Mark 14:68-72). It is very common that roosters crow twice or several times, and often those crowings are not separated by much time at all. It is quite possible that Peter would deny Christ, the rooster crow, then someone else quickly make an accusation, Peter deny Christ again, and then the rooster crow again. The denial event at the gate would not have had to have taken long at all. Because the accusations and denials at any one place—the gate, the courtyard, and the gate again—happened in quick succession, Jesus was accurate in saying that Peter would deny him three times, counting a flurry of accusations and denials as one denial.

Mat 26:71

**“another *servant girl*.”** The REV adds “servant girl” in italics because the Greek is feminine. Thus, any Greek reader would recognize that it referred to another servant girl, rather than just another servant. There are times the Greek can be more succinct and clearer than the English.

Mat 26:72

**“he denied it, *this time* with an oath.”** For more on the denials of Peter, see commentary on Matthew 26:70.

Mat 26:73

**“your accent makes you known.”** It is common for “city folk” to make fun of the way “country folk” talk, and the culture at the time of Christ was no different. Galilee was considered unsophisticated by the standards in Judea and Jerusalem. Robertson writes: “The Galileans had difficulty with the gutturals.”[[208]](#footnote-23953) Paul Maier writes: “It was a standing joke that you couldn’t tell if a Galilean were talking about an ass, a lamb, or a jug of wine, since they pronounced *hamor*, *immar*, and *hamar* just about the same.”[[209]](#footnote-10178)

Mat 26:74

**“curse...swear.”** See commentary on Mark 14:71.

Mat 26:75

**“the words.”** The Greek text has “the word,” which is a collective singular. In English, we would say “the words” for clarity.

**“he went outside.”** Peter was in the courtyard, but he did not give himself away by openly crying in the courtyard with all the people there. He left the courtyard and cried privately.

**Matthew Chapter 27**

Mat 27:1

**“Now early in the morning.”** This council is the trial of the Sanhedrin that occurred around dawn on Tuesday morning. Jesus was condemned and sent from this trial to Pilate. This trial is covered in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but left out of John (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-23:1).

Mat 27:2

**“Pilate.”** This is the first mention of Pontius Pilate in the Bible. Pilate was Prefect from AD 26-36, the second longest rulership of any Prefect of Judea. It helps to know this because there is a lot of misinformation among Christians about Pilate being a horrible governor, but not according to Roman standards.

In order to really understand Pilate’s actions at the trial of Jesus Christ, it is helpful to understand another incident that occurred less than a year earlier. About half a year before the trial of Jesus, Pilate had set up some golden shields in his Jerusalem headquarters that had a dedication to Tiberias on them. The Jews protested the presence of these shields, but Pilate refused to remove them. The Jews took their case straight to Tiberias, the emperor of Rome at the time. The letter got to Tiberias as quickly as it did because it was sent through Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee, who forwarded it from the Jews to Rome. No wonder Scripture says Pilate and Herod were hostile toward each other before the trial of Jesus (Luke 23:12).

Tiberias wrote a terse letter to Pilate, ordered him to move the shields to Caesarea, and warned him to uphold all the religious and political customs of the Jews. This letter was no doubt on his mind at the trial of Jesus, and when Pilate was about to let Jesus go, the Jews played their trump card and said, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king speaks against Caesar” (John 19:12).

What is not known by the average reader is that “Caesar’s Friend” is more than just a phrase; it is a name, a designation, a “badge of belonging” to a very exclusive group of people who were especially close to Caesar. If a person who was designated to be “Caesar’s Friend” officially displeased Caesar to the point of being kicked out of the club, so to speak, the consequence was compulsory suicide or exile from Rome.

When we closely follow the events in the trial of Jesus, we can see that the Jews knew about the letter from Tiberias to Pilate and Pilate’s position as “Caesar’s Friend,” and used them to their advantage to pressure Pilate. When Jesus first came before Pilate, the Jews accused him of being an evildoer (John 18:30), and tried to say things that would convince Pilate to crucify him because of Roman law and sensibilities, such as that he had been corrupting the nation and forbidding paying taxes to Caesar (Luke 23:2). Had Pilate complied, that would have ended the matter as far as the Jews were concerned. But when Pilate refused to crucify Jesus, saying he had not committed a capital crime, the Jews moved their reason to their religious customs and the charge of blasphemy, saying that Jesus needed to die because he made himself the Son of God (John 19:7). Of course, when Pilate heard that Jesus had called himself the Son of God, he tried even harder to let Jesus go, but that was when the Jews, in a less than subtle way, made it clear it was going to be Pilate or Jesus. Besides, as Pilate continued to resist the Jews’ pressure to crucify Jesus, it got to the point where a riot started to break out (Matt. 27:24). Preventing a riot was the reason the Roman governor came from Caesarea to Jerusalem during the feasts in the first place, and if there had been a riot, and if news of that got back to Tiberias, it would not go well for Pilate. Pilate realized that, in the face of the hatred and determination of the Jews, he was not accomplishing anything but stirring up a riot, something that would likely cost lives—including his own.

Pilate also realized that if he did not crucify Jesus, the Jews would write to Tiberias and say that Pilate had not obeyed Tiberias’ command that had come in the letter, because he had not been respectful of Jewish laws and customs about things such as blasphemy, and worse, he allowed a man to live who called himself a king and threatened the unity of the Jewish people and even the Roman Empire. At that point, most people would have done what Pilate did: save his own life. Pilate had Jesus crucified.

[For the order of the events of Jesus’ last days, see commentary on John 18:13.]

We know quite a bit about Pilate from Roman records. However, there was no physical evidence found in Israel for his governorship until 1961. An Italian team of archaeologists under the direction of Antonio Frova discovered a stone about two feet by three feet while excavating an ancient theater in Caesarea, the Roman capital of Israel. The stone tablet read in Latin: “Pontius Pilatus, Prefect of Judea, has presented the Tiberium to the Caesareans.” The record that Pilate was a “Prefect” is correct; he was not a “Procurator” (despite the many reference works that say he was). Calling Pilate a “Procurator” is a historical anachronism, because it was not until later, under the emperor Claudius (ruled 41-54) that the Roman governors of Judea were referred to as Procurators. The Prefects had more military responsibilities than the Procurators. We can correctly call Pilate a Prefect or a governor.

Pilate’s name tells us much about him. The family name Pontius was the name of a prominent clan among the Samnites, a group of people who lived along the Apennine Mountains southeast of Rome. Early on in Rome’s history, the Samnites had fought a series of wars with Rome and almost conquered them. A fighter that was often seen in the gladiator arena was a person dressed as, and trained to fight as, a Samnite warrior. The Samnites were conquered and absorbed by Rome, their leading class becoming the Roman equestrian class (the Roman middle class). Pilates’ first name is typically Samnite, and means, “armed with a pilum.” The pilum was a javelin about 6 feet long that was half wooden spear handle and half pointed iron shaft. It was a very effective weapon, and quickly copied by the Romans and used in the legions.

[For more information on Pilate likely being at the Hasmonean Palace just west of the Temple, see commentary on Luke 23:7.]

Mat 27:3

**“brought back the 30 pieces of silver.”** Judas had gotten the money from the priests in payment for betraying Jesus (Matt. 26:14-16). Now he regretted it and returned it, but could not overcome his feelings of wrongdoing and self-condemnation, and so committed suicide.

Mat 27:5

**“he hanged himself.”** The natural reading of Matthew 27:5 leads us to believe that Judas killed himself very soon after Jesus was arrested, and the rest of Scripture supports that conclusion (cf. John 17:12). We have supporting evidence from Luke 24:9 that Judas killed himself before Jesus was raised from the dead, because when the women found the tomb empty on Sunday morning, they went to “the Eleven,” which is a title that the remaining apostles were given after Judas killed himself (see commentary on Luke 24:9). Although there seems to be a contradiction between Matthew 27:5 and Acts 1:18, that can be resolved (see commentary on Acts 1:18).

The verb for “hanged himself” is *apagchomai* (#519 ἀπάγχομαι) and it occurs here in the aorist tense, middle voice (*apēgxato*; ἀπήγξατο), and thus it refers to something that Judas did to himself, in this case, hanged himself. *Apagchomai* only occurs this one time in the New Testament, and Robert Gundry offers a reason that Matthew would have this unusual verb here. *Apagchomai* is the same verb and in the same verb form (aorist middle, third-person singular) that is used in the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) in the record of the death of David’s friend and counselor Ahithophel. Ahithophel had been David’s friend for years, but he turned against David and joined Absalom’s rebellion against David (2 Sam. 15-18). He began to advise Absalom, David’s son and enemy (2 Sam. 17:1-3), but when his advice was not heeded, he committed suicide by hanging himself. In explaining the occurrence of *apagchomai* in Matthew, Gundry writes that it “alludes to Ahithophel’s suicide by hanging (2 Sam. 17:23). The allusion not only exemplifies Matthew’s habit of borrowing OT [Old Testament] phraseology. It also agrees with his interest in Jesus as the son of David…for Ahithophel was a friend of David. As Ahithophel turned against David, Judas turned against Jesus.”[[210]](#footnote-12543)

Jesus Christ is called “the Son of David” many times in Scripture, and the comparisons and typology between David and Jesus Christ are numerous and strong. That seems to be the case here in Matthew 27:5 as well. Ahithophel, David’s friend, turned against David and then ended up hanging himself, and similarly, Judas, an apostle of Jesus Christ, turned against the Son of David and then later hanged himself. The typology between David and Christ in the context of Judas betraying Christ can also be seen at the Last Supper (John 13:18), when Jesus quoted Psalm 41, a psalm of David, and said “The one who eats my bread lifted up his heel against me” (Ps. 41:9). This betrayal happened to David, possibly by Ahithophel, and it happened to Jesus as well when Judas betrayed Jesus.

Unlike Peter who denied Christ but then repented and rebuilt his relationship with Jesus, Jesus indicated that Judas would kill himself rather than repent and continue as part of the believing community. Quite early on in his ministry Jesus knew Judas was “a devil” (John 6:70). Furthermore, at the Last Supper Satan entered Judas and influenced him to betray Christ and likely kill himself shortly afterward as well (Luke 22:3). Furthermore, people who sin, even who sin greatly, are forgiven if they repent and ask for forgiveness, but Jesus said of Judas, “how terrible it will be for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! *It would have been* better for that man if he had not been born” (Matt. 26:24). It does not seem that Jesus would have said this if he believed Judas would repent of betraying Jesus.

Also, the disciples knew that Judas had betrayed Jesus, so it is unlikely that they would have received him back into their company. Jesus had revealed at the Last Supper that one of the apostles would betray him, and the apostles discussed it at that time (Matt. 26:20-25; Mark 14:17-21). Then, in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked Judas directly if he was betraying him (Luke 22:48), and the apostles were right there with Jesus to hear that. Since Judas came to the Garden with the Roman soldiers, and given what Jesus had said about being betrayed by one of the twelve, the apostles had to know that Judas was the one who had betrayed them. Given that, it would be very unlikely that the rest of the apostles would have taken Judas back into their company. However, if they had, it would have only been with Judas’ heartfelt and humble apology and confession of sin, but there is no such confession recorded in the Bible.

Judas knew his betrayal was known to the apostles, and thus to him, it would have been highly unlikely that the apostles would take him back into their company, especially after Jesus said it would be better if Judas had not been born. All this is evidence that Judas killed himself very soon after returning the money to the religious leaders (Matt. 27:3-5).

Mat 27:9

**“spoken.”** Not “written,” either by Jeremiah or Zechariah, but “spoken” by Jeremiah.[[211]](#footnote-17256) These words are found in Zechariah 11:12-13 with allusions to Jeremiah 18:1-4; 19:1-3. They are ascribed to Jeremiah since, in Jesus’ day, the books of the prophets were headed by Jeremiah, not Isaiah as now, and the quotation is identified by the name of the first book of the group, rather than by the name of the specific book within the group. Similarly in Luke 24:44, “Psalms” includes all the books known as the writings because it is the first book of the group.[[212]](#footnote-27996)

The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew has the abbreviation for Yahweh in this verse, but it is very different from the Greek text and is not included in the REV (see commentary on Matt. 3:3).

Mat 27:10

**“Lord.”** The Greek is *kurios*, Lord, and the Hebrew text of Matthew reads *adōnai*, Lord. The Hebrew of Zechariah 11:13 reads “Yahweh” (see commentary on Matt. 3:3).

Mat 27:11

**“Are you the king of the Jews?”** Pilate’s question, “Are you the King of the Jews,” and Jesus’ affirmative answer, “Yes,” is very important, both for Pilate and for us, and it is recorded in all four Gospels (Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; and John 18:33 and 18:37). The question and answer also show us that this interaction was in the first of Jesus’ two trials before Pilate, something that is made clear in Luke (Luke 23:1-19). Neither Matthew, Mark, nor John mention Pilate sending Jesus to Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12), but they blend Jesus’ two trials before Pilate as if they were one trial. However, by studying all four Gospels together we can see that this question was part of Jesus’ first trial before Pilate and when Matthew speaks of Barabbas (Matt. 27:15-22), that was part of Jesus’ second trial before Pilate.

**“*Yes, it is as* you say.”** Jesus answered Pilate’s question in the affirmative, that, yes, he is a king. It is important to translate this verse in the affirmative. Jesus was not playing word games with Pilate, giving him an ambiguous answer. Pilate’s everlasting life was at stake, and Pilate, like everyone else, had to have a chance to believe and accept Jesus as the Messiah. This should not be considered unusual. Jesus had told many others he was the Messiah (Matt. 16:16-20; Mark 14:62; John 4:26; 10:24-25); besides that, the conversation between Pilate and Jesus was not as short as Matthew 27:11-14, Mark 15:2-5, or Luke 23:3 record. The Gospel of John records the longer conversation (John 18:33-38; 19:9-11). In this longer conversation, Jesus tells Pilate that although he is a king, “My kingdom is not of this world” and “my kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36), and “Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice” (John 18:37). Of course Pilate, being a Roman and believing in the Roman gods, if he believed anything at all, did not have a clear and accurate picture of God, the afterlife, the Messianic Age, or anything that would have given true meaning to what Jesus said. To Pilate, Jesus’ words were likely nonsense, and he responded with “What is truth?” (John 18:38). One thing Pilate did get from his conversation with Jesus was that he was not a threat to Rome in the sense that he was trying to foment rebellion and overthrow Roman rule. That is what the religious leaders were accusing Jesus of, so that Pilate would crucify him, but Pilate, after questioning Jesus, was satisfied that was not the case, and came to the religious leaders and said, “I find no reason for a charge against him” (John 19:6).

Many excellent Greek scholars attest to the fact that Jesus’ answer to Pilate, which in Greek is more literally, “You are saying,” was idiomatic and not an ambiguous statement. A. T. Robertson correctly states, “By his answer (‘thou sayest’) Jesus confesses that he is.”[[213]](#footnote-18674) W. R. Nicoll simply says that Jesus’ answer “= yes.”[[214]](#footnote-31065) R. C. H. Lenski says this about Jesus’ answer: “It is the regular way of affirming the contents of the question.”[[215]](#footnote-27491) Albert Barnes says, “Thou sayest.” [KJV] That is, thou sayest right, or thou sayest the truth. …Though he acknowledged that he was the king yet he stated fully that his kingdom was not of this world, and that therefore it could not be alleged against him as treason against the Roman emperor.”[[216]](#footnote-32582) Further evidence that this was an affirmative statement comes from Matthew 26:64 and Mark 14:62.[[217]](#footnote-29845) In these two parallel records the high priest asks Jesus if he was the Messiah. Matthew records that the Lord answered, “You have said it” (*su eipas*); but Mark reports the answer with the clear affirmative, “I am” (*ego eimi*). This interchangeability of the two statements demonstrates that the idiom was confirmatory. (Cf. Matt. 26:64; 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 22:70; 23:3; John 18:37).

Translators are often in a bind when translating the Bible, and especially so when the original language uses an idiom, because there are times when a literal translation in one language means something else in another language, and that is the case here. Jesus was not being cute or playing games with Pilate. Pilate’s believing in Jesus as the Christ and Pilate’s everlasting life was in play, and so Jesus was not playing word games with him, any more than when Jesus answered the question of the High Priest, “Are you the Christ” and Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61-62). In English “You say so” is a way of deflecting from giving an answer, but that is not what Jesus was doing here. Some scholars say Jesus was being unclear in his answer like he often was when answering questions about who he was during his ministry. But earlier in his ministry Jesus did not clearly reveal himself to the religious leaders because his time to suffer and die had not come. At his trial before them earlier that day he was very clear that he was the Christ, and he was that clear to Pilate as well, saying he was a king.

There is even more evidence that this phrase is not vague but is an affirmation. During the Last Supper, in Matthew 26:25, Judas asks Jesus if he is the one who will betray Jesus, and Jesus responds with this exact phrase “You have said it.” But we know that this did come to pass, and that Jesus knew Judas would betray him (John 13:2, 11). Thus this phrase in Matthew 27:11 is used as an affirmation.

Mat 27:15

**“Now at the *Passover* Feast, it was the governor’s custom”** Matthew blends Jesus’ two trials before Pilate as if they were one trial. However, by studying all four Gospels together we can see that this mention of Barabbas was part of Jesus’ second trial before Pilate (see commentary on Matt. 27:11).

Mat 27:16

**“Barabbas.”** It is ironic that the “notorious” (or “well-known”) prisoner was called “Barabbas,” because in Aramaic it means “son of [the] father,” from the Aramaic *bar*, “son” and *abba*, “father.” In releasing a prisoner, the people had a choice between a “son of a father” (Barabbas), or the “Son of the Father” (Jesus Christ). The bad choice they made was Barabbas, the revolutionary. There is no explanation in the text for why Pilate would have put only those two men before the crowd for consideration. It seems clear that Pilate was hopeful that the crowd would ask to set Jesus free. For example, when presenting Jesus he said, “Jesus who is called Christ” (Matt. 27:17), perhaps he was making an attempt to try to remind the people that even they were aware of the healings and miracles that Jesus had done and the possibility that he was the Messiah. In any case, his efforts were in vain.

In Matthew 27:17, there are a number of manuscripts that read, “Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” Although there are more manuscripts that read “Barabbas” than read “Jesus Barabbas,” there is good reason to believe that “Jesus Barabbas” was original. For one thing, “Jesus,” which is the same name as “Joshua,” was a very common name at that time so there would be no problem with both men being named “Jesus.” Also, textually, there seems to be no good reason any scribe would add the word “Jesus” to a manuscript of Matthew, whereas it can be easily seen that religious scribes zealous to protect Jesus’ name, would omit the name “Jesus” before Barabbas.

Mat 27:19

**“wife.”** According to tradition, Pilate’s wife is named Procla, or Claudia Procla, but there is little actual support for the name.

**“sent to him.”** The dream so disturbed Pilate’s wife she actually interrupted Pilate’s work as governor to tell him not to have anything to do with “that righteous man.” We do not know any details as to how Pilate’s wife came to that conclusion about Jesus. She was almost surely well aware of the greedy, power-hungry religious leaders, even as Pilate was (Matt. 27:18), and may have heard of Jesus’ miracles and done some investigation on her own. It is also possible that the dream was so vivid, and Jesus’ innocence proclaimed so vividly in it, that she came to the conclusion that Jesus was a righteous man based on the dream alone. Given what we know about where Pilate was when he tried Jesus, most likely at the ancestral Hasmonean Palace near the Temple, it is clear why she “sent to him.” She would have been staying at Herod’s Western Palace.

**“today.”** The Greek is *sēmeron* (#4594 σήμερον), which means “today.” This is a very accurate chronological statement, although some English versions completely misinterpret and mistranslate it, and read “last night.” This was “today.” It was Jesus’ second trial before Pilate, which was around noon (John 19:14). The Jews had taken Jesus to Pilate early in the morning (John 18:28). But when Pilate learned that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent him to Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee. But Herod Antipas could not get any satisfaction from Jesus and sent him back to Pilate who had to call the Jews back together (Luke 23:13), and put Jesus on trial again. The three Roman trials of Jesus are recorded in Luke 23. Pilate’s wife sent to him during this second trial before Pilate, a fact we know because Pilate was already trying to get the Jews to choose between Jesus and Barabbas, something that occurred during this second trial before Pilate. Typically, the Romans got up very early in the morning, and it is very likely Pilate’s wife did too. She did not have the dream during the night, or she would have interrupted Pilate’s first trial of Jesus. She would have had no way of knowing Pilate would send Jesus to Herod; Pilate did not even foresee that himself. During her morning snooze, which would have been in the day—thus, “today”—she had the dream that so disturbed her, and sent to Pilate to have nothing to do with Jesus.

[For more information on the chronology of the events from Jesus’ arrest to his death, see commentaries on John 18:13 and 19:14. For information on the events and chronology of Jesus’ death and resurrection and his being in the tomb from Wednesday night to Saturday night, see commentaries on Matt. 12:40 and Luke 23:50. For more information on Nicodemus and that he came after Joseph of Arimathea left the tomb, see commentary on John 19:40.]

One thing the dream does is show us God’s love for people and that He genuinely did try to warn Pilate not to have anything to do with Jesus. Furthermore, Pilate himself knew Jesus was innocent (Matt. 27:18). In spite of God’s warning and what Pilate himself knew, he condemned an innocent man to death so he could augment or save his political career. Godly people must learn that the Devil works hard behind the scenes to set people up so that they face potential ruin if they do not give in to evil. But we must not give in to evil. God will deliver us now and/or reward us in the future. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could have been killed for not bowing to Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image (Dan. 3). Daniel could have been killed just for praying (Dan. 6). Godly people must follow their example.

**“dream.”** The Romans put a lot of weight into dreams, particularly when there was a lot going on politically. Calpurnia, the wife of Julius Caesar, had a dream that he was going to be killed, and her pleas were so insistent that he almost stayed home, but did not, and was killed by Brutus and his co-conspirators. That event gave dreams a lot of standing to the Romans, and was no doubt one of the reasons Pilate worked so hard to have Jesus released.

Mat 27:20

**“persuaded.”** The Greek word is *peithō* (#3982 πείθω), to persuade, have confidence in. Zodhiates does a very good job defining this word.[[218]](#footnote-16810) It sometimes gets translated “trust” but the REV has stayed away from that translation and stayed with “persuaded.” It also gets translated “obey,” but that is not technically correct, and especially in Hebrews 13:17 (“obey your leaders”) it gets misused. We have left it “obey” in James 3:3, because although the horse’s bit does allow us to persuade it, “obey” is more understandable in the context.

Mat 27:22

**“He should be crucified!”** The Greek has an aorist imperative verb, which can be translated as “Let him be crucified,” or “He should be crucified,” or even as “He must be crucified.”

Mat 27:23

**“He should be crucified.”** This is not the same crowd that had said, “Hosanna,” and “Son of David” some days earlier. See commentary on Luke 23:21.

Mat 27:24

**“but rather that a riot was starting.”** Pilate did not want to put Jesus to death and tried to dissuade the Jews from pressing the issue. But the Jews used pressure tactics to get Pilate to order the crucifixion. They lied (Luke 23:2), threatened (John 19:12), and started a riot (Matt. 27:24). The riot would have been an important factor in Pilate giving in to the Jews and agreeing to crucify Jesus. As the Roman governor, Pilate was charged with two top responsibilities: keep tax money flowing into Rome, and keep the peace. Keeping the peace was important to the flow of tax money and the well-being of society. In Judea at that time there were the Jesus supporters, including his disciples and many who believed in him, but also many who sided with the religious leaders and thought Jesus was a fraud. As the day drew on and the crowd at the trial swelled, there was a growing danger that any riot would turn into a battle between the two sides with people being hurt and even killed, and Pilate would be held responsible. From his gubernatorial perspective, it was now expedient that Jesus be sentenced to be crucified. Pilate’s instincts were correct: as soon as the trial was over and the issue settled, the religious leaders stopped stirring up the people and the crowd dispersed.

Mat 27:27

**“the governor’s headquarters.”** The Greek text is “the praetorium,” and the praetorium was normally the headquarters of the residence of the Roman governor. The exact place that was called the praetorium is debated. Roman Catholics mostly say it was the Antonia Fortress north of the Temple. Protestant scholars mostly tend to say it was Herod’s western palace. However, it is likely that in this case, the praetorium was the ancient Hasmonean place in the middle of Jerusalem (see commentaries on Luke 23:7 and John 18:28).

**“the whole cohort *of Roman soldiers*.”** The standard size of a cohort was 600 men. It was one-tenth of a “legion,” which was 6,000 men. However, just as the size of a “legion” was almost never exactly 6,000 men, and was often considerably smaller, that same was true of a cohort. It is unlikely that this cohort was fully 600 men. It was likely smaller, but it still would have been a lot of men.

Mat 27:29

**“mocked.”** The Greek word translated “mocked” is *empaizō* (#1702 ἐμπαίζω), and means “mock,” “make fun of,” “ridicule.” In some contexts it has a second meaning, that of outwitting someone in a way that makes a fool of the person; to trick; to deceive; (Matt. 2:16). The “mocking” can be simply verbal, or it can be physical as well, and thus it can be categorized as physical abuse. It is used that way in the Septuagint (Judg. 16:25; 1 Sam. 31:4; Prov. 23:35). *Empaizō* is also used euphemistically for rape (Gen. 39:14, 17; Judg. 19:25; 20:5), which has caused some people to speculate that during his torture Jesus was raped by one or more of the Roman soldiers. Although homosexuality and bisexuality were common in the Roman world, the context of “mock” in the NT seems to exclude rape. For one thing, *empaizō* is used of Jesus being mocked when he was in public settings and even when he was on the cross (Luke 22:63; 23:36). He was also mocked in Herod’s presence but certainly not likely raped right there in the public of Herod’s court (Luke 23:11).

The times Jesus is recorded as being “mocked” when he was alone with the soldiers also seem to exclude him being raped. Both records, Matthew 27:29-31 and Mark 15:17-20, show that the soldiers put royal clothes on Jesus, then mocked him, then removed those clothes. That the clothes were removed after he was “mocked” certainly seems to exclude rape as part of the mocking. Jesus went through terrible and prolonged verbal and physical abuse between the time he was arrested and the time he died on the cross, and that included being mocked in many different settings by many different people. Sadly, Jesus still suffers physical abuse via his Body, the Church, which is persecuted for his name. Nevertheless, there will come a day when that will stop, and every knee will bow before him.

Mat 27:32

**“Cyrene.”** Cyrene was settled by Greeks in the seventh century BC and was the leading city of the district of Cyrenaica (also called Pentapolis) in North Africa. The city of Cyrene was about 17 miles from the Mediterranean Sea, built on a plateau. Cyrenaica was ruled by its own people but surrendered to Alexander the Great in 331 BC. Later, it was given to the Romans. At the time of Christ, the city of Cyrene was the capital of Libya in northern Africa on the Mediterranean Sea, which in 27 BC was made, together with Crete, the Roman province of Cyrenaica. People from Cyrene were present in the Temple on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10).

Mat 27:33

**“to a place called Golgotha (which means, Place of *the* Skull).”** There is strong evidence that the crucifixion of Christ occurred on the Mount of Olives. While no one piece of evidence completely makes the case, the cumulative evidence is overwhelming that the Lord Jesus was crucified near the top of the Mount of Olives. Added to that is the fact that the other two sites proposed by most of Christianity, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Garden Tomb, do not fit with all the biblical evidence for the place of the crucifixion. Nine points of evidence are listed below:

**1) A Mount of Olives crucifixion fits with the roads of Jerusalem, especially the road between the Temple and the Mount of Olives.**

Many people and priests passed by and mocked Jesus, so he was crucified near a road, one that a lot of people and priests would travel on Passover day (Matt. 27:37, 41; Mark 15:29, 31; John 19:20-21. There is historical evidence that at the time of Christ, there was a bridge or partial bridge over the Kidron Valley leading from the Mount of Olives to the Temple. Although archaeologists and historians argue about the bridge, at the very least there was a well-traveled road from the east gate of the Temple to the Mount of Olives. Also, there was a well-traveled north-south road on the top of the Mount of Olives. So a crucifixion site near the top of the Mount of Olives would have been close to major roads, and the people and priests would have been traveling on those roads to get to the Temple for Passover. Furthermore, the priests would have used the east-west road to get to the place where the unclean parts of the sacrifices were burned, which was on the east side of the city and most likely near the top of the Mount of Olives. It is unlikely that the chief priests and people would go much out of their way to mock a dying criminal. But if the crucifixion was near the top of the Mount of Olives, the road between the Temple and the eastern altar on the Mount of Olives would have made access to the crucifixion site easy and a large number of priests and people would pass there on their way to or from the Temple, especially on the eve of Passover. In contrast, it does not seem like there would be nearly the foot traffic at the traditional sites and especially not for the priests.

**2) Jesus was our sin offering, and was crucified where the Temple sin offerings were burned, on the east side of the Temple.**

Jesus Christ was the sin offering that paid for our sin (2 Cor. 5:21). The Bible says that the bodies of the sin offerings were burned outside the camp, and the evidence supports that place outside the camp and the city of Jerusalem was to the east. The Bible says that the bodies of sin offerings were to be burned at a place outside of the camp that was ceremonially clean (cf. Exod. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27; cf. Heb. 13:11). The ashes from the altar of sacrifice in the Tabernacle and Temple were taken to a clean place outside the camp and dumped there, and that dumping would have been at one specific place; the priests and Levites did not dump ashes from the altar in lots of different places. Then Leviticus specified that the bodies of sin offerings were burned at that same “clean place where the ashes are poured out” (Lev. 4:12). That clean place was outside the camp of Israel while they traveled, and outside the city of Jerusalem once that capital city was established.

There is historical evidence that the “clean place” was east of the camp. Also, the Tabernacle only had one gate and it was on the east side. Hebrews 13:11-12 speak of the sin offerings being burned outside the camp, and for that reason, Jesus suffered “outside the gate,” which would have been to the east.

It would have taken a lot of effort to burn the bodies of the sin offerings. Burning the body of a bull to ashes takes a lot of wood and heat. Logically, to do that would have meant building some kind of altar or altar-like structure that would support the wood and the animal body and allow air to get to the fire and keep it hot and burning. Although the Old Testament does not call the place of burning an altar, the book of Hebrews does, and Hebrews 13:10-12 refers to an “altar” outside of Jerusalem where the bodies of animals were burned. In fact, the book of Hebrews goes so far as to say that “we [Christians] have an altar” where the sin offerings were burned, so the altar east of the Temple is for believers, which is exactly correct if Jesus was the sin offering and died near that eastern altar. After all, Jesus Christ was God’s sin offering for the sins of the people of the world, so it would be logical that he would be sacrificed near that altar where the bodies of sin offerings, including the Red Heifer, were burned, which would be on the Mount of Olives.

Furthermore, the wording of Hebrews 13:10-13 supports the connection between the sin offerings and Jesus Christ. Thus, Hebrews 13:11 says that the bodies of the sin offerings are burned outside the camp, and then Hebrews 13:12 says, “for this reason Jesus also suffered outside the gate.” It is important to note that the comparison that Hebrews is making is drawing upon the Tabernacle of Moses. For example, Hebrews 13:10 speaks of people serving in the “tent” (i.e., the Tabernacle), not the “Temple.” Also, Hebrews 13:11 speaks of the sin offerings being burned outside “the camp,” that is, the camp of Israel in the wilderness. If the text was referring to a later time, i.e., after the city of Jerusalem was conquered and the Temple set up, the text would have said “outside the city.” The reason that Hebrews refers back to the Tabernacle is that the Tabernacle was portable and it moved around, and Hebrews is contrasting that with a permanent city that is coming in the future. Hebrews says that believers “do not have a permanent city here” but are looking forward to there being one (Heb. 13:14). It would not do for Hebrews to speak of Jerusalem but then indicate it was not permanent, because Old Testament prophecy shows that Jerusalem is permanent; it will be rebuilt and renewed, but it is permanent, it will be Jesus’ capital city when he rules the earth. The Tabernacle imagery in Hebrews is important for the study of where Jesus was crucified because Hebrews says that Jesus suffered “outside the gate” and the only gate of the Tabernacle was on the east side. So Jesus suffering where the bodies of the sin offerings were burned and that being “outside the gate” is supporting evidence that Jesus was crucified east of the Temple, and east of the Temple was the Mount of Olives.

[For more on the altar east of the Temple where the bodies of sin offerings were burned, see commentary on Heb. 13:10.]

**3) The Red Heifer sin offering was a type of Christ and it was both sacrificed and burned on the Mount of Olives.**

The Red Heifer was a sin offering that typified Christ in many ways. She (a heifer is a female cow) was a sin offering (Num. 19:9, 17), but unlike the regular sin offerings that were slaughtered in the Temple and then the body was carried out east of the Temple and burned, the Red Heifer was both slaughtered and completely burned to ashes outside the Temple and east of it. Numbers 19:1-9 describes the burning of the Red Heifer outside of the camp of Israel and according to the Mishnah, a Jewish commentary on the OT, a bridge across the Kidron led to an altar where this burning occurred. “After the establishment of the Temple in Jerusalem, the ritual of the Red Heifer was celebrated on the Mount of Olives; leaving the Temple by the East Gate, the procession led by the High Priest crossed the Kidron Valley on a special causeway [bridge] and climbed to the summit where the animal was sacrificed” (*Mishnah,* tractate ‘Parah’).

The book of Numbers also gives good evidence the Red Heifer was slaughtered and burned east of the Temple. Numbers 19:4 says, “and Eleazar the priest is to take some of her blood with his finger and sprinkle her blood toward the front of the Tent of Meeting seven times.” The fact that the priest sprinkles the blood “toward the front of the Tent of Meeting” shows that the Red Heifer was sacrificed on the east side of the Tabernacle/Temple because the “front” of the Tabernacle/Temple was to the east. Blood could not be sprinkled toward the front of the Tabernacle from any direction but the east. Any blood sprinkled from the north, south, or west of the Tabernacle or Temple would be sprinkled toward the side or back, not the front. Jacob Milgrom writes about the phrase “toward the front of the Tent of Meeting” in *The JPS Torah Commentary*: “According to the rabbis, the front, that is, the entrance of the Tent [the Tabernacle], must be seen. Hence if the wind blows the Tent flap shut, the sprinkling is invalid. During Second Temple times, the High Priest performed the ceremony atop the Mount of Olives, which afforded a view of the entrance to the Temple building.”[[219]](#footnote-17549) Also, the *Oxford Archaeological Guide to the Holy Land*[[220]](#footnote-23333), notes that the Red Heifer was burned on the Mount of Olives.[[221]](#footnote-12831)

**4) The Bible says Jesus was crucified near “the Place of the city,” which was the Temple, and the Mount of Olives was very near the Temple.**

John 19:20 says that Jesus was crucified near the Temple, “the Place of the city,” and the Mount of Olives was very close to the Temple, right across the Kidron Valley. The NIV translates John 19:20 as “the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city,” and almost all English versions read in a similar way. But a more accurate translation of the Greek text is “where Jesus was crucified was near the Place of the city” (cf. *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*). The Jews referred to the Temple as “the Place,” and the word “Place” is used for the Temple in a number of verses in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 24:15; John 4:20, 11:48, 19:20; Acts 6:13-14, 21:28). If Jesus was crucified near the “the Place of the city,” i.e., the Temple, then the most likely place would have been on the Mount of Olives, right across the bridge and a few hundred yards from the Temple.

In the Greek text the word “city” is in the genitive case (thus, “of the city”), and the governing noun of the genitive phrase is *topos*, “place,” so the correct translation of the Greek text is “near the Place of the city.” To translate the Greek text as “the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city” is to separate the genitive from its governing noun and treat the genitive as an accusative, which it is not.

There are several reasons why most English Bibles read “the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city,” instead of “where Jesus was crucified was near the Place of the city.” One reason is the lack of understanding among Western scholars that the Temple was called “the Place,” especially in light of where Jesus was crucified. Another reason is that the traditional English translation of John 19:20 goes back to the 1500s (cf. William Tyndale’s New Testament of 1534 and the Geneva Bible of 1599; etc.), and many translators like to stay close to a traditional reading if they can. Also, the traditional translation supports the traditional sites for the crucifixion because they are “close to the city” of Jerusalem but would not likely have been considered to be close to the “Place” (the Temple) by people in Jesus’ time.

The tradition of referring to the Temple as “the Place” is very old. For example, in the Old Testament, the Temple is referred to as ‘the place.’ Geoffrey Bromiley writes, “In a rich formula which is constantly repeated, the Jerusalem Temple is called ‘the holy place which Yahweh your God shall choose…to cause his name to dwell there’”[[222]](#footnote-13021) “…the LXX [Septuagint] developed the term [*topos*, “place”] into a technical one for the holy place.[[223]](#footnote-10350) “Historically, then, the land is no longer Israel’s place even before the final expulsion from Palestine [at the Babylonian Captivity], the theological understanding of ‘place’ is fully oriented to the Temple as the holy place.”[[224]](#footnote-11229) “The OT-Jewish use of *topos* for the Jerusalem Temple is continued in the New Testament…”[[225]](#footnote-23830) (Punctuation added for clarity and Greek words were put in English letters).

**5) People near the cross could see the tearing of the Temple veil, which would only be possible from near the top of the Mount of Olives.**

The Bible indicates that the soldiers and people at the crucifixion could see the Temple veil tear, and the only place outside the walls of Jerusalem where that curtain could be seen was near the top of the Mount of Olives. Matthew shows that the veil of the Temple tore right when Jesus died. Matthew 27:50, 51; and 27:54 say, 50“And Jesus, having cried out again with a loud voice, gave up his spirit. 51And Look!, the curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth was shaken, and the rocks were split. 54Now the centurion and those who were with him keeping watch over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, were greatly afraid, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God.’”

All three of the synoptic Gospels point out that people “saw” things that were happening, and the tearing of the Temple veil is specifically mentioned in all three synoptic Gospels, and seeing it tear would have made a powerful impact on anyone at the crucifixion site. Also, the fact that the Temple veil tore from top to bottom showed that God was the one who tore the veil because if people had done it, they would have had to have torn it from bottom to top. This act of God was almost certainly part of the reason the centurion said that Jesus was the Son of God (Matt. 27:54).

When Matthew says when the centurion and soldiers “saw the earthquake and the things that were happening,” there is no good reason to exclude the ripping of the Temple veil from the things the people saw, and the only place in Jerusalem outside of the Temple where a person could see the Temple veil was the Mount of Olives. The Temple was clearly visible from the Mount of Olives, and so was the veil that covered the front of the Temple. The veil in front of the doors of the Holy Place was a massive curtain that Josephus describes as being 55 cubits high and 16 cubits wide, which would be over 80 feet high and 24 feet wide.[[226]](#footnote-13848) The Temple faced east toward the Mount of Olives, and so anyone standing near the top of the Mount of Olives would have been able to physically see the Temple veil being torn. Note that Matthew 27:50-51, Mark 15:37-38, and Luke 23:45-46 all record the events of Jesus dying and the Temple veil being torn in the same two-verse context. Upon seeing what happened the soldiers and the people proclaimed that Jesus was righteous or even the “Son of God” (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47-48), and the people in the crowd beat their chests (Luke 23:48). So the fact that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all indicate that the people at the crucifixion site could see the Temple veil torn open is good evidence that the crucifixion was on top of the Mount of Olives.

The Bible says that the “veil of the Temple” was torn, but scholars are divided as to whether the veil that was torn was the inner veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, or whether it was the outer veil that could be seen by worshipers and was in front of the doors of the Temple. But logically, if only the inner veil was torn the common people would still not have access to God. In fact, if only the inner veil was torn the people would not have known it. Only the priests and Levites could go into the Holy Place, so if only the inner veil was torn the priests and Levites would be able to enter the presence of God, but the people would not be able to enter, and would have had no sign that they could enter. The point of the Temple veil tearing was not so that Levites and priests would have access to God, but that every believer had access to God, and that would demand that it was the outer veil that was torn open, and many scholars agree with that.

Ulrich Luz writes: “The narrator speaks of ‘the curtain.’ It does not appear to bother him that there is more than one. The [two] possibilities are the curtain that separates the holy of holies…from the rest of the Temple, and the curtain at the main gate between the Court of the Israelites and the actual Temple building...the outer curtain is more suitable for an interpretation as a sign of disaster. It was the only curtain that was visible and publicly accessible so that people could see at all what had happened. Furthermore, there are texts that associate this main entrance to the Temple with signs of disaster that announce its impending destruction. …For the readers of the Gospel of Matthew who are aware of Jesus’ prediction of the coming destruction of the Temple (Matt. 23:38-24:2)…an interpretation in terms of the destruction of the Temple was more likely.”[[227]](#footnote-21579)

The theologian and translator Saint Jerome (c. AD 345-420) wrote that in his estimation it was the outer veil of the Temple that tore.[[228]](#footnote-11404) Grant Osborne admits that there is no way to know for sure which of the two veils is meant, but writes: “The outer veil...fits the imagery of a public sign, and Josephus (J. W. 5.3) and several Jewish sources speak of the tearing of Herod’s magnificent veil at the entrance (so [William] Lane, [Craig L.] Blomberg, [Herman] Ridderbos, [W. D.] Davies and [Dale C.] Allison).”[[229]](#footnote-16107) Robert Gundry writes that the “veil” of the Temple “refers either to the inner curtain dividing the holy place from the holy of holies in the Temple or to the outer curtain at the front of the holy place (see BAG, s. v., whose certainty in favoring the inner curtain is not justified). If the outer curtain is meant, we might think of a sign of judgment visible to the general public….”[[230]](#footnote-32077) Alan McNeile makes a case for the outer veil and wrote that the Gospel “almost certainly pictures a portent visible to all, not only the priests who happened to be in the Holy Place at the moment.”[[231]](#footnote-30244)

Davies and Allison write, “Some expositors hold that the veil is the outer veil and its rending foreshadows or symbolizes the destruction of the temple in AD 70. …This interpretation is especially attractive as similar portents announcing the doom of the temple are recorded by both Josephus (*Bell*. 6:288-309) and the Talmud (*b. Yoma* 39b; *y. Yoma* 6.43c). One may also observe that Liv. Proph. Hab. 12 attributes the prophecy to Habakkuk: Concerning the end of the temple…the veil of the sanctuary will be torn to pieces….’ If our Gospel’s rending of the veil anticipates or inaugurates the end of the temple, it thereby vindicates Jesus’ prophecy against the place (Matt. 24:2). Further, it is most appropriate that, immediately after people mock Jesus for his prophecy about the temple (Matt. 27:40), his word should be vindicated. …In addition to the two common lines of interpretation, several others may be noted. (i) T. Levi 10:3 foretells that ‘the curtain of the temple will be torn so that it will no longer conceal your [priests] shameful behaviour.’ (ii) those who view the darkness of Matt. 27:45 as mourning can find the same theme here: the temple mourns by tearing its garment. (iii) several early Christian sources refer to the temple Angel mourning and then leaving. …In addition, *if* there is any connection between the rending of the veil and the similar signs remembered in the Jewish sources…it is worth observing that these last mention signs near the outer entrance, not the Holy of Holies.”[[232]](#footnote-27987)

**6) The Bible says Jesus was crucified at the place of the skull, and the word “skull” was used for counting people, and the top of the Mount of Olives was a place where people were counted for the Temple tax.**

John 19:17 says that Jesus was crucified at “the place of the skull (which in Aramaic is called *golgotha* and in Hebrew is called *gulgoleth*).” It was common to use the word “skull” to mean “counting” or “numbering.” We do a similar thing today when we “take a headcount.” The word *gulgoleth* is used 12 times in the Old Testament, and although three times it refers literally to a skull, the other nine times it refers to a poll or counting of people (cf. Exod. 16:16 “each”; Exod. 38:26 “person”; Num. 1:2, 18, 20, 22 “one by one”; Num. 3:47 “each one”; Judg. 9:53 “skull”; 2 Kings 9:35 “skull”; 1 Chron. 10:10 “head”; 1 Chron. 23:3 “total”; 1 Chron. 23:24 “individually”). Also, the word translated as “census” in many English versions is actually “*rosh*,” “head” (Exod. 30:12; Num. 1:49; 4:2, 22).

So, when Jesus went “to the place of the skull” it could easily have meant “to the place of the counting” which is what *gulgoleth* meant most of the time in the Old Testament. The top of the Mount of Olives was a place where the Jews registered for the Temple Tax prior to the feast.[[233]](#footnote-17656) Thus, the top of the Mount of Olives would have been known as “Golgotha,” the place of the counting.

While Gordon’s Calvary, the traditional protestant spot of the crucifixion, looks somewhat like a skull today, there is no evidence that it did at the time of Jesus. The hollow eyes and nose of the “skull” at Gordon’s Calvary are cisterns that were broken and exposed through erosion, and it is quite possible that the erosion occurred after the time of Christ and that the area did not resemble a skull at the time of Jesus, 2,000 years ago. But in any case, it is most likely that “the place of the skull” referred to counting, not to a literal skull.

**7) The Hebrew text of Matthew does not say Jesus was crucified at the “place” of a skull, but the “mountain” of a skull, and the most prominent mountain in the area was the Mount of Olives.**

There is historical evidence that Matthew penned the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, not Greek, and the Gospel of Matthew that exists in Hebrew is called *Even Bohan*. In *Even Bohan* the site of Christ’s crucifixion in Matthew 27:33 is referred to as a “mountain.”[[234]](#footnote-28196) The word in the Hebrew text is *har*, mountain or hill, not just “place.” So, whereas the Greek text of Matthew calls the site of the crucifixion a “place” (“the place of skull” or “the place of numbering”), the Hebrew says the “mountain of a skull” or “the mountain of numbering.” Jerusalem is hilly. Jerusalem has a valley to the east and one to the south, and a third valley running up through the core of the city just west of the Temple. Also, the Temple is on a mountain, Mount Zion, and the Mount of Olives is directly east of Jerusalem. However, there is no mountain to the north, northwest, or west of the Temple Mount. Given the hilly nature of Jerusalem, there is no good reason that the traditional sites of the crucifixion would be called a “mountain” or even thought of as a separate prominent hill, whereas the Mount of Olives clearly would be. In fact, it is called the “Mount” of Olives because it is a mountain—indeed, the most prominent mountain in the vicinity of Jerusalem, even higher than the Temple Mount itself. Furthermore, it is directly across the Kidron Valley from the Temple and thus only a few hundred yards east of the Temple. There is no good reason that the Hebrew text of Matthew would have “mountain” to describe the traditional sites of the crucifixion, but it would have used “mountain” to describe the Mount of Olives. Thus, the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew gives us supporting evidence that the site of the crucifixion was on the Mount of Olives.

[For more on the Gospel of Matthew being penned in Hebrew before being translated into Greek, see commentary on Matt. 3:3. For a version of *Even Bohan* with commentary, see George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew.*]

**8) Roman custom was such that the Romans tried to crucify people close to the crime they committed or the place of their arrest, and for Jesus, both of those were on the Mount of Olives.**

According to Roman custom, enemies of the state were regularly crucified at the scene of the crime or the place of arrest. Dr. Ernest Martin gives evidence for this fact in his book *Secrets of Golgotha*.[[235]](#footnote-21893) The Romans correctly assumed that most criminals against the state had local support, so crucifying a criminal in the general area of their crime or arrest made sense in that it discouraged people from becoming involved with criminal activities. In fact, much of the reason for crucifying a criminal instead of executing them in some other way was the public terror caused by crucifixion, which was gruesome and excruciatingly painful, and especially so since the crucified person usually did not die until the third day on the cross.

Pilate crucified Jesus for the “crime” of declaring himself a king, and he was publicly declared to be the king by the people as he rode on the donkey from the top of the Mount of Olives. The people shouted, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord” (Luke 19:38; John 12:13). Pilate confirmed that by asking Jesus if he were a king, to which Jesus replied that he was (John 18:37). Also, it is well-known that Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, which is on the west slope of the Mount of Olives. So both the “crime” and the arrest of Jesus were associated with the Mount of Olives, and given the traffic that would have passed by the top of the Mount of Olives on Passover, and given Roman custom, a crucifixion site near the top of the Mount of Olives makes perfect sense.

**9) The Bible says that in the place where Jesus was crucified was a garden and a new tomb, and the Mount of Olives is known for having both those things.**

John 19:41 says that at the place where Jesus was crucified there was a garden with a new tomb in it, and both tombs and evidence of ancient olive trees have been found on the Mount of Olives. In fact, the Hebrew words transliterated as “gethsemane” are *gat sehmanim*, or “oil press,” and a grove of olive trees large enough to have an oil press would rightly be called a “garden.” The Mount of Olives was a customary place in Jerusalem for a tomb to be cut out of the rock, and many tombs have been found there. Since the west slope of the Mount of Olives was close to the Temple it was expensive land, so it makes sense that if a tomb was cut out on the Mount of Olives, it would have had to have been paid for by a wealthy man, and the Scripture points out that Joseph of Arimathea was wealthy (Matt. 27:57). Thus, the Mount of Olives perfectly fits the description in the Gospels that the crucifixion was close to a garden and Joseph’s tomb.

Mat 27:34

**“they gave him wine mixed with gall to drink.”** The “gall” is more specifically said to be myrrh in Mark 15:23. “Gall” is a more general term for a bitter drink, and in this case the myrrh was bitter, so Matthew refers to it as “gall.” Wine mixed with myrrh was sometimes offered to people being crucified because the myrrh deadened the senses, stupefied the person, and thus helped to lessen the pain. Jesus refused it because he needed full control of his senses and the suffering was part of the redemption of humankind. In this case, the “wine” was almost certainly wine vinegar because this was the spring of the year and the last grape harvest was the previous summer, many months before. For the most part, the ancients had no way to keep wine fresh such that it did not turn into wine vinegar.

Mat 27:35

**“casting lots *for them*.”** The better manuscripts end with this phrase. Some manuscripts also have the words that are translated in the KJV, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.” But those words seem to be a harmonization with John 19:24 and also to make the verse fit better with Psalm 22:18; thus the evidence is that the longer phrase is not original.

Mat 27:39

**“insults.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) is transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” However, in Greek, *blasphēmeō* and *blasphēmia* (the noun) did not have to refer to God or a god, although they could, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meanings were showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. In this case, the people were hurling insults at Jesus.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Mat 27:40

**“rebuild.”** The Greek text is just “build,” not “rebuild,” but in both Hebrew and Greek the word “build” is used for rebuilding and for building up a building, city, etc.

Mat 27:43

**“let God rescue him.”** The Greek is literally, “let him rescue him,” but that could be unclear in English.

Mat 27:45

**“sixth hour…ninth hour.”** The sixth hour is our noon, and the ninth hour is about our 3 p.m. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

Mat 27:46

**“Eli, Eli.”** This is Hebrew, while the *Eloi, Eloi*, of Mark 15:34 is Aramaic. Matthew wrote in Hebrew, but beyond that, it seems most likely that Jesus originally spoke these words in Hebrew (see commentary on Mark 15:34).

[For more about Matthew originally writing his gospel in Hebrew, see commentary on Matt. 3:3.]

**“My God, my God.”** For this being evidence that Jesus Christ is not God, see commentary on Mark 15:34. Also see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”

**“why have you forsaken me?”** It is sometimes taught that God forsook Jesus, and that He did so because Jesus became sin. That is simply not true. First, God did not forsake Jesus; the Scripture clearly states that Jesus was doing God’s will and could even have had 72,000 angels to help him if he wanted (Matt. 26:53). At the time of the crucifixion, “God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ” (2 Cor. 5:19). Furthermore, God does not leave us when we sin. If there is any truth that is central to Christianity, it is that God loves sinners and stays with us even when we do sin. Even if Jesus did “become sin,” God would have stayed with him just like He stays with us when we sin. Also, Jesus did not “become sin,” as if he could somehow embody sin. He became a “sin offering,” and was the completion and fulfillment of all the sin offerings that had gone before him that could not actually take away sin.

[For more on Jesus becoming a sin offering, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:21.]

In one of the greatest examples of love the world has ever seen, Jesus continued to try to demonstrate to people that he was the promised Messiah even from the cross. One notable way he did that was by quoting at least the first and last verse of Psalm 22, a Psalm of David and one that his audience would have known well. Psalm 22 is a Messianic Psalm, and one that clearly portrays the crucifixion and what was going on in those circumstances.

For one thing, it certainly looked like Jesus had been forsaken by God, even though he certainly knew he had not been (cf. Ps. 22:1).

* Ps. 22:6 says, “I am a worm,” and the Hebrew word for “worm” also refers to the scarlet color of the dye produced by the worm, and Jesus, covered with blood from head to toe, fit the description of that red worm.
* Ps. 22:7 says, “All those who see me mock me. They insult me with their lips. They shake their heads,” That was certainly true as anyone at the location could see.
* Ps. 22:8 tells us what the mockers said: “He trusts in Yahweh, *so* let him deliver him. Let him rescue him, since he delights in him.” We know from the Gospel records that this is what the mockers were saying.
* Ps. 22:11 says, “Do not be far from me, for trouble is near. For there is no one to help.” and that was certainly true. Trouble was all around him in the form of his enemies, and his disciples had fled the scene.
* Ps. 22:12 says, “Many bulls have surrounded me. Mighty *bulls* of Bashan have encircled me.” The bull represented a powerful, irresistible force, and in this case, the Roman soldiers who guarded Christ were certainly like bulls surrounding him.
* Ps. 22:14 says, “I am poured out like water. All my bones are dislocated.” Jesus’ strength was almost gone, he was dehydrated, and his bones had been pulled and stretched by Roman torture and by the act of crucifixion itself, but miraculously, not a bone was broken.
* Ps. 22:15 says, “My strength is dried up like a potsherd. And my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.” After losing all that blood and being beaten for so long Jesus has almost no strength left. As he became dehydrated, his tongue would swell and become sticky in his mouth. This also explains why, even though he quoted Psalm 22:1, some people misunderstood and thought he was calling out for Elijah.
* Ps. 22:16 says, “For dogs have surrounded me. A company of evildoers have enclosed me. They have pierced my hands and feet.” The Gentiles were known as dogs, and the Roman soldiers surrounded Jesus and had pierced his hands and feet. This is an amazing prophecy since crucifixion did not exist in the time of David, so David wrote this prophecy purely by revelation, there is no cultural way David could have known about crucifixion.
* Ps. 22:17 says, “I can count out all of my bones. They look, they stare at me.” Jesus hurt so badly that it was like he could count all his bones. Besides that, the Roman flagellum whip was tipped with pieces of metal or bone and ripped the flesh off the body, often exposing some of the bones. It may well have been possible that some of Jesus’ bones were actually exposed. Also, people were staring at him and gloating.
* Ps. 22:18 says, “They divide my garments among them. They cast lots for my clothing.” The Roman soldiers did exactly what the prophecy said.
* Ps. 22:24 says, “For he [God] has not despised or ignored the affliction of the afflicted person, nor has he hidden his face from him; but when he cried out to him, he heard.” This shows that although we can feel like we are abandoned when we are suffering, godly people know in their heart that God is still with them, and Jesus certainly knew that.
* Ps. 22:31 closes with, “for he has done *it*,” which can be “It is finished.”

Jesus knew that godly people standing within hearing distance would be able to mentally recite much or all of Psalm 22 and then see how it was being fulfilled right before their very eyes, and then would also be able to describe that to others and spread the news about him. Thus, with his dying words Jesus was trying very hard to reach a lost world and reconcile them to God.

As Jesus was quoting from Psalm 22, there is every reason to believe that his audience recognized what he was quoting, even if he only quoted the first and last verse. (It is noteworthy that Charles Spurgeon thinks that Psalm 22, “may have been actually repeated word by word by our Lord when hanging on the tree.”)[[236]](#footnote-15976)

By the time of Jesus, the Jews read from the Old Testament in the synagogue every week (Acts 13:15; Acts 15:21; see also Luke 4 when Jesus read from Isaiah). After Nebuchadnezzar burned the Temple to the ground and thus brought the sacrifices and rituals associated with the Temple to an end, the reading and study of the Old Testament became much more central to Judaism. Even after the Temple was rebuilt in the Persian period, the attention to reading and study of the Old Testament that had become part of the synagogue service never stopped. Since the average Jew did not have a copy of much if any of the Old Testament, it was important to them to go to the synagogue to hear it read and discussed. Furthermore, the Jews encouraged each other to memorize the Scriptures even starting from the time they were children (Deut. 6:1-5). This meant that every devoted Jew had more than a passing familiarity with the Psalms.

Another way we can see that the Jews were very familiar with the Psalms is from how many times Psalms are quoted in the New Testament, and quoted as if the audience was familiar with them (Matt. 4:6 [Luke 4:10, 11]; Matt. 5:5; 13:35; 21:9; 23:39 [Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35; 19:38; John 12:13]; Matt. 21:16, 42 [Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7]; Matt. 22:44 [Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-43; Acts 2:34-35; 1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 1:13]; Matt. 27:46 [Mark 15:34]; Luke 23:46; John 2:17; 6:31; 10:34; 13:18; 15:25; 19:24; Acts 1:20; 2:25-28; 2:30-31; 4:25-26; 13:22, 35; Rom. 2:6; 3:4, 10-14, 18; 4:7-8; 8:36; 10:18; 11:9-10; 15:3, 11; 1 Cor. 3:20; 10:26; 15:27; 2 Cor. 4:13; 9:9; Eph. 4:8, 26; Heb. 1:5-13; 2:6-8, 12; 3:7-11, 15; 4:3, 5, 7; 5:5-6; 7:17, 21; 10:5-9; 13:6; 1 Pet. 2:7; 3:10-12; and Rev. 2:26-27).

This large number of quotations shows that, as well as comforting and encouraging verses, the Psalms contained verses that gave important information about the Messiah and the Kingdom—something that would not have been lost on the Jewish audience, nor on the converts who came to Judaism.

The words that Jesus spoke from the cross were not the words of a man who had been forsaken by God. They were Jesus’ last possible attempt to reach the world with the Word of Truth.

**“ninth hour.”** About our 3 p.m. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

Mat 27:50

**“gave up his spirit.”** When Jesus “gave up his spirit,” he died, and the fact that Jesus died shows he was a human. God cannot die. The death of Jesus has been a topic of discussion among theologians for many centuries. Most of the discussion centers around various theories of atonement, but some of the discussion has centered around the belief held by some Trinitarians that Jesus had to be God because the death of a human could not pay for all the sins of mankind.

It is a common Trinitarian assertion that only the death of God could pay for the sins of all mankind. While at first glance that belief may seem logical to some people, it falls apart under deeper scrutiny. Let’s examine why. Trinitarian doctrine is that Jesus is 100% man and 100% God. Moreover, when Jesus died on the cross, Trinitarian theologians do not say that “God died,” because everyone knows that God cannot die, He is eternal and immortal. Instead, theologians teach that the human part of Jesus died and the God part lived on. But that creates a problem. Since the Trinitarian assertion is that “God” had to die to pay for the sins of all mankind, but only the human part of Jesus died and the “God” part did not die, then “God” did not die on the cross. But if “God” had to die to pay for the sins of humankind, then when the human part of Jesus died on the cross, that could not pay for the sins of humankind, so the sins of humankind were not paid for.

So although some Trinitarians say that “God had to die for the sins of mankind,” they have to admit that only the human part of Jesus died, and thus it was the death of a human being, a man, that paid for the sins of mankind. But that means that Jesus did not need to be God to pay for the sins of mankind, he could have just been fully human, and that is what the Bible says about Jesus; that he was fully human. This accords with what Romans teaches, that death came to mankind as a result of a man, Adam, and so everlasting life came by a man also (Rom. 5:15). Thus, as Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus was “a man pointed out to you by God” (Acts 2:22).

[For more on dead people being totally dead and not alive in any way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on why Jesus had to be fully dead, not just have his body die, see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:20. For more on Jesus being fully human and not “God in the flesh,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” and see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and also see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith.*]

**“spirit.”** The Greek word is *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα). Here it refers to the natural life of the body. Note that what is here called “spirit,” referring to “life,” is called “soul” in Matthew 20:28. Both the words “spirit” and “soul” are sometimes used for the human life of the body.

[For more on this, see commentary on Luke 23:46, and see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Mat 27:51

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“curtain of the sanctuary.”** At the time of Christ, the Temple had two veils, or curtains. The inner veil separated the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the covenant was, from the Holy Place, where the menorah and table of the Bread of the Presence were. This inner veil is mentioned in Hebrews 6:19. The second veil, the outer veil, was in front of two huge doors. Together, the doors and veil separated the Holy Place from the Court of the Priests, where the great altar was and sacrifices were made.

The second veil, the one in front of the doors of the Holy Place, was a massive curtain that Josephus describes as being 55 cubits high and 16 cubits wide, which would be over 80 feet high and 24 feet wide.[[237]](#footnote-12045) It was a most beautiful curtain that is described as being woven from blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine linen, all made with mystic significance and having a panorama of the heavens portrayed on it.

**“from top to bottom.”** This showed that God tore the Temple veil. If people had torn it, they would have had to start at the bottom and torn it to the top. That the Temple curtain was torn from top to bottom not only showed that God tore the veil, but the act was also likely very symbolic. It showed the extreme grief God experienced when His only begotten son died. God symbolically tore his clothes, which is exactly what the Jews did when they experienced heavy grief and sorrow (e.g., Gen. 37:29, 34; Josh. 7:6; Judg. 11:35; 2 Sam. 1:11; 2 Kings 6:30; Mark 14:63; Acts 14:14).

**“the earth was shaken.”** Earthquakes were viewed symbolically as denoting the presence and intervention of God (cf. Exod. 19:18; 1 Kings 19:11). The sign of an earthquake upon Jesus’ death is indicative of God’s power being displayed through the death of Jesus on the cross. Large earthquakes were known to have occurred in Judea. Josephus mentions one during the reign of Herod the Great, “such as had not happened at any other time, which was very destructive to men and cattle.”[[238]](#footnote-11691)

Neither the Gospel of Mark (Mark 15:38) nor the Gospel of Luke (Luke 23:45) record any geological events coinciding with Jesus’ death. All three Synoptics record the tearing of the Temple curtain, but only Matthew provides details surrounding the additional signs that accompanied Jesus’ death.

**“the rocks were split.”** This is not referring to rocks on the ground that would have simply moved around. This is referring to the huge “rocks” that were the rock faces of cliffs and slopes, or huge rocks that were partially buried in the ground and would split rather than move. Zechariah 14:4 mentions an earthquake that will occur when Christ returns to earth and fights the Battle of Armageddon that will split the Mount of Olives itself, and create a valley running from east to west where the mountain used to be. This earthquake at the time of Christ likely caused great fissures in the ground in some places and landslides in other places. It is also possible, even likely, that the huge lintel rock that supported the Temple curtain was split, and as it fell it tore the Temple curtain.

Mat 27:52

**“many bodies of the holy** **ones** **who had fallen asleep were raised.”** For information on this event, see commentary on Matthew 27:53.

**“fallen asleep.”** The Greek verb is *koimaō* (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

Mat 27:53

**“they entered the holy city and appeared to many**.**”** Matthew 27:52-53 has caught the attention of readers for centuries because of the notable miracle that the verses describe. These verses occur immediately after the death of Jesus recorded earlier in the chapter.

In this third sign that Matthew records in association with Jesus’ death-resurrection event, it seems that a point is being made about the effectual power of the cross for not just opening up the way to God but also to the conquering of the power of death itself (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54-57). Just as Jesus had died and was raised back to life, the record of people being raised from the dead testifies to the victory over death that Jesus has brought about as Messiah.

It is most likely that the significance of this death-resurrection sign is that it is a prophetic foreshadowing that points to the resurrection of everyone who believes that God raised Jesus from the dead (some see an echo here of Ezek. 37:12-14). As Leon Morris remarks concerning this sign, “Matthew is making the point that the resurrection of Jesus brought about the resurrection of his people.”[[239]](#footnote-20757) Thus, in a dramatic way, the death and resurrection of Jesus will end the power of death itself.

Despite the testimony that this last sign of Jesus’ death-resurrection seems to provide, it raises a number of questions about details surrounding this sign.

One question that is hotly debated is whether or not these “many saints” were raised in glorified bodies or their natural bodies. The traditional answer to that question is that when the saints got up from the dead they were in their glorified bodies and then, at some point, perhaps very shortly after going into Jerusalem, they ascended into heaven. However, the biblical evidence is against the saints being raised in glorified bodies. Jesus Christ had not yet been raised from the dead, and Jesus was the “firstborn from among the dead” (Col. 1:18; cf. Rev. 1:5), and the “firstfruits” from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Some Bible teachers try to get around this objection by asserting that the phrase, “after his resurrection,” in verse 53 refers to the entire event, and that the dead were not raised until after Jesus’ resurrection. However, that is not the reading of the Greek text. According to the text of Matthew, the saints were raised from the dead when Jesus died. R. C. H. Lenski gets around the firstfruits argument by saying that Jesus is still the firstfruits from the dead even though these many saints were raised before him, because the saints stayed around their graves for the three days before appearing to people and thus gave time for Jesus to get up.[[240]](#footnote-25582) But that is an unjustified sidestep of the problem: if many people were resurrected in glorified bodies before Jesus was, then Jesus was not the firstfruits from the dead.

Another reason the saints could not have been raised from the dead in glorified bodies and shortly after that ascended into heaven is that when the Gospel of John was written (perhaps AD 80-90), no one was in heaven but Jesus. The textual evidence is that the way John 3:13 is written in the KJV represents the original reading of the Greek text, and it says, “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven.” Thus, when John wrote, no human was in heaven but Jesus. That would mean that the many saints were still on earth in glorified bodies at least until the Gospel of John was written, perhaps 50 years later, which stretches the limits of credulity.

[For more on the correct translation of John 3:13, see commentaries on John 3:13 and 3:16.]

There is another piece of supporting evidence that the “many saints” had not been raised in glorified bodies and quickly ascended to heaven. On the day of Pentecost, only 50 days after Jesus died, Peter taught the crowds that part of the proof that Jesus was indeed “Lord” and “Christ” was that Jesus had been raised from the dead and had ascended to the right hand of God, and that this was in contrast to great men like David who were still buried in the ground (Acts 2:24-33). But if “many saints” had also been raised from the dead in glorified bodies, and also ascended into heaven, then a large group of saints, including Jesus, had been raised and ascended to heaven, and that would have considerably weakened Peter’s argument because then Jesus would have not been special, he would have been part of a group. Opponents could have simply said that lots of people were raised and ascended, so why was Jesus different from the others (even though we know he was)?

The evidence from Acts and the early Church leads us to conclude, but the Bible never specifically says, that the many saints got up in their natural bodies and died again quite quickly. But even if that was the case, there are still many unanswered questions about the event. For example, who were these many saints, and how would people know they had been raised from the dead? Also, what was the reason they stayed near (or perhaps even “in”) the tombs for three days before going into Jerusalem? Also, why is there no other mention of them in the Bible? The chief priests apparently knew nothing about them, and were concerned only that Jesus’ tomb be sealed (Matt. 27:62-66), and why did none of those “many saints” get word of their resurrection to the apostles who were living in fear during those same three days (John 20:19)?

Also, after the three days were over and they went into Jerusalem, why does the biblical evidence lead us to believe they never appeared to the apostles? After all, evidence of Jesus’ resurrection was coming to those confused believers from many sources; Mary Magdalene, the other women, Peter himself, and the men who were on the road to Emmaus, so why not from a few of those “many saints” as well? Another concern is how these many saints would rejoin society. Theories differ, and perhaps a possible one is that these people had not been long dead, as many assume, but had just recently died and simply returned to their families.[[241]](#footnote-25610)

Most conservative commentators recognize there are difficulties with the record in Matthew but just take what Matthew says at face value without commenting too much about it or offering potential solutions to those problems. Many other scholars recognize problems with Matthew 27:52-53 and offer different solutions to them. A common one is that Matthew is speaking in an apocalyptic fashion and using a word picture that draws on Old Testament motifs and connects Jesus’ death and resurrection to the future resurrection of believers. Another explanation is that by the time Matthew wrote, there was a tradition that the event had happened, and Matthew pulled that tradition into the text.[[242]](#footnote-26262) A. B. Bruce writes: “We seem here to be in the region of Christian legend.”[[243]](#footnote-29190) However, it seems very unlikely that Matthew would put apocalyptic typology, legend, or tradition into the Gospel of Matthew as if it were literal history. A few Bible teachers have suggested that the record was added to the early texts of Matthew, but there is no textual evidence for that. So as obscure as it is, it seems that to show that the death of Jesus conquered death for everyone, when Jesus died some dead believers got up from the dead for a few days then rather quickly died again, awaiting the first resurrection.

As a side note, Matthew 27:53 uses the Greek word *egersis* (#1454 ἔγερσις), “resurrection,” and this is the only time it is used in the New Testament. In fact, it is also used only once in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, and that usage was not about getting up from the dead, but arising from sleep. “You know when I sit and when I rise” (Ps. 139:2 NIV). The word means “a waking up as from sleep, a rousing or rising up.” As far as all other extant Greek literature is concerned, *egersis* was not used of rising from the dead until the Church Father, Irenaeus.[[244]](#footnote-31740) Several scenarios are possible: by the time Matthew wrote, Christians were using “*egersis*” to refer to the resurrection because it can mean a waking from sleep, and Matthew used it that way. Or Matthew may have been the first to use it that way and the concept spread in Christianity.

Mat 27:56

**“Mary Magdalene.”** Mary is called “Magdalene” because her hometown was Magdala, on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee.

[For more information on Mary Magdalene see commentary on Luke 8:2.]

Mat 27:57

**“when it was evening.”** In the biblical culture, “evening” was used two different ways. It was “either from our three to six o’clock p. m., …or from our six o’clock p. m. to the beginning of night,”[[245]](#footnote-32063) That the people in the biblical culture thought of evening in terms of an early evening and a later evening explains verses such as Exodus 12:6; 16:12, and 29:39 where the Hebrew text reads, “between the evenings” (cf. YLT, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible). The cultural use of “evening” beginning at 3 p.m. also explains why the daily afternoon sacrifice, which was killed around 3 p.m., was called “the evening sacrifice.” Jesus had died at 3 p.m., so according to biblical culture, “evening” had come.

After Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and got permission to take the body of Jesus (Matt. 27:58; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:52; John 19:38). He then went and bought the linen to wrap Jesus in. He did not do that earlier, perhaps in expectation that Jesus would somehow not die at the hands of the Romans (Mark 15:46). He wrapped the body in a clean linen cloth and put it in the tomb without using any spices, which was not the traditional Jewish burial custom (Matt. 27:59; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53). Why would Joseph do that? The most likely reason is that Nicodemus, who brought the spices, was supposed to meet Joseph at the tomb but was delayed. Then Joseph, not knowing what had happened to Nicodemus, closed the tomb and left (Matt. 27:60; Mark 15:46). At that point, the women from Galilee who were watching Joseph, and had seen that he had laid Jesus’ body in the tomb without preparing it with spices according to the common custom, left also (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55). The Sabbath would have been about to start or just starting by that time.

It has sometimes been taught that the reason that Joseph only wrapped Jesus in a linen cloth without spices was that he believed Jesus would be raised from the dead, and thus he did not bother to bury Jesus with all the spices and formal wrappings. However, that explanation is not likely. It leaves us with some unanswered questions, such as how Nicodemus knew Joseph was going to get Jesus’ body and how he knew where Joseph buried him. Also, if Joseph did not properly bury Jesus because he believed Jesus would be raised from the dead in three days, it would have been inappropriate and presumptuous for Nicodemus to go to Joseph’s personal tomb, open it, and wrap Jesus’ body without Joseph’s permission.

The women from Galilee had watched Joseph put Jesus’ body in the tomb without preparing it with spices as was not only the common custom but certainly would have been the respectful thing to do to Jesus. That is why they went and bought and prepared spices, and went to properly bury Jesus on Sunday morning—they weren’t expecting Jesus to get up either. It was Wednesday just before sunset when the women saw Joseph bury Jesus without spices, but they could not buy the spices at that time. Luke 23:54 says the Sabbath was beginning, however, this “Sabbath” is not the weekly Sabbath, but the Sabbath that was the day of Nisan 15, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was always a Sabbath (Exod. 12:16-17; Lev. 23:6-8). The year Jesus was crucified, Nisan 15 was a Thursday. So the woman bought and prepared the spices on Friday, and rested Saturday (the weekly Sabbath), and then brought the spices to the tomb early Sunday morning (see commentary on John 20:1).

That the women had to wait until after the Special Sabbath on Thursday to buy spices explains why Mark 16:1 says they bought the spices after the Sabbath, but Luke 23:56 says they bought and prepared them before the Sabbath. They bought and prepared the spices on Friday, which was after the Special Sabbath on Thursday, which was the first day of Unleavened Bread, and before Saturday, which was the regular weekly Sabbath.

Although the women would have had time to bring the spices to the tomb on Friday, they did not do that. The most logical explanation for that is that they knew there was a guard at the tomb. The guard had been set for three days (Matt. 27:62-66). However, they would have thought that by Sunday, the fourth day, the guard would be gone and they could successfully anoint Jesus’ body, which is why they came on Sunday morning.

After Joseph of Arimathea and the women left the tomb, Nicodemus came with his servants and gave Jesus a burial that was according to Jewish custom. He brought spices with him, and rewrapped Jesus’ body with the spices. However, the women had already left and did not see what Nicodemus had done. It would have been natural for a rich man like Nicodemus to have servants with him, who are the “they” of John 19:40. After all, Nicodemus was a wealthy man and member of the Sanhedrin (John 3:1), and he was bringing 75 pounds of spices, which would have required help and were very valuable. Also, as an older man, 75 pounds of spices would have been a lot to carry. Furthermore, because Joseph and his servants had already sealed the tomb with the huge rolling stone, Nicodemus would have needed his servants to open it back up (Matt. 27:60; Mark 15:46). It is possible that Nicodemus’ work was completed after dark, and thus on the Sabbath, or he may have gotten Jesus buried just before the Sabbath started. In either case, he would not have been able to eat the Passover meal because he had touched Jesus’ dead body.

[For more on the three days and nights between Jesus’ death and resurrection, see commentary on Matt. 12:40. For more on the chronology of the last week of Jesus’ life beginning with his arrest, see commentary on John 18:13. For more on Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus burying Jesus, see commentary on John 19:40. For more on the concept of “between the evenings,” see commentary on Exod. 16:12.]

Mat 27:58

**“Then Pilate commanded it to be given *to him*.”** From a Roman perspective, Jesus was a criminal, and after his death, his dead body would have been simply thrown into a pit with the other criminals who were crucified that day and all of them would have been buried together and forgotten. Of course, if a family member or friend wanted a body, he could have it. Thus, when Joseph asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, it was given to him. The whole arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus seems to have caught Mary and the apostles completely off guard. They were unprepared for his death, and the apostles were not ready to publicly step forward and claim the body. From a Roman legal perspective, after Pilate gave Joseph the body, it belonged to him and he could do with it as he pleased.

Mat 27:60

**“laid it in his own new tomb.”** This was just before sunset on Wednesday evening. Joseph was supposed to work in tandem with Nicodemus, but for some reason, Nicodemus was late and showed up after Joseph had closed the tomb and left. The fact that Jesus was buried without a proper kingly burial was part of the fulfillment of Daniel 9:26, that after the Anointed One was “cut off,” dead, he would have nothing.

As it turned out, Jesus was dead on the cross and taken down from the cross before sunset and buried, just as the Mosaic Law required (see commentary on Deut. 21:23).

[For more on Joseph and Nicodemus planning to work together but Nicodemus being late, see commentary on John 19:40. For more information on a Wednesday crucifixion and burial, see commentary on Matt. 12:40.]

Mat 27:61

**“And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary…”** The Bible tells us how the women knew about where Jesus was buried. It seems that they did not want to leave Jesus just hanging on the cross, so they stayed in the area. In any case, the women were still there when Joseph took Jesus down from the cross and carried his body away, and they followed Joseph, and sat down where they could see what he was doing (Luke 23:55). That is why Matthew 27:61 says they were “sitting opposite the tomb,” i.e., they were sitting in a way they could see the tomb. Joseph may have noticed them, or he may have been trying so hard to finish burying Jesus before the darkness set in that he did not pay attention to them. After all, it was Passover, and Jerusalem was packed with people. The women noticed that Joseph did not properly prepare Jesus’ body for burial, but simply wrapped him in a cloth, closed the tomb, and left, which is why they went to prepare spices themselves. (see commentaries on Matt. 27:60 and John 19:40).

[For more information on Mary Magdalene, see commentary on Luke 8:2.]

Mat 27:62

**“Now on the next day.”** This is the morning of Nisan 15 (Nisan 15 had started at sunset the night before). The Passover sacrifice is killed in the late afternoon on Nisan 14 but eaten after sunset. Since sunset starts the next day, the Passover meal actually ends up being eaten on the next day, Nisan 15, which is the first day of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod. 12:6-19). In spite of the fact it was a Sabbath day, the Pharisees and chief priests were so filled with trepidation about Jesus that they went to Pilate and requested a guard to keep the tomb secure.

Pilate’s answer, “You have a watch,” or as it is in some versions, “You have a guard,” has sometimes been misunderstood to mean that the Priests already had the Temple police, so they should use them. That is not correct. Pilate gave permission to the priests to requisition a detachment of Roman guards, which is why the guards would have been in trouble if the governor heard that the body of Jesus had been stolen while they were guarding it (cf. Matt. 28:12-15).

**“gathered together.”** This gathering would not have involved every member of the Sanhedrin, but only a select group. Also, they would not have met together somewhere and then marched as a group to Pilate because that would have attracted too much attention, and it was a Sabbath day. Instead, they would have communicated their purpose quietly, and then gone as individuals to Pilate, gathering together as a group once they were in his presence.

Mat 27:63

**“will be raised.”** Passive voice. The religious leaders remembered, but did not believe, what the disciples never grasped—that Jesus taught he would be raised after three days.

Mat 27:65

**“You can have.”** The Greek word is *echō* (#2192 ἔχω), which is usually “you have,” but in this case, it can be “you can have.”[[246]](#footnote-15659)

**“a guard of soldiers.”** The Greek word is *koustōdia* (#2892 κουστωδία), a guard of Roman soldiers. The Pharisees and chief priests were so filled with trepidation about Jesus that they went to Pilate and requested a guard to keep the tomb secure (Matt. 27:62-66). Pilate’s answer as it appears in many English versions, “You have a watch,” or “You have a guard,” has sometimes been misunderstood to mean that Pilate told the priests that since they already had the Temple police, they should use them. That is not correct. Pilate gave permission to the priests to requisition a detachment of Roman guards, which is why those soldiers would have been in trouble if the governor heard that the guard had fallen asleep and the body of Jesus had been stolen (Matt. 28:12-15). Pilate would not care if the Temple police had fallen asleep and Jesus’ body had been stolen.

Mat 27:66

**“sealing the stone.”** They did not “seal” the stone in the sense of somehow gluing it closed. That is not the meaning of “seal” in this case. If they could have glued the stone closed, they would not have needed the guard. They put a seal on the stone, which would have been wax or clay that connected the stone to the wall and which would have had a “seal” (an insignia of some kind), pressed into the wax. If the stone were moved, the wax or clay would have been broken and the insignia destroyed. This seal let everyone know the grave had not been tampered with. It is even possible that, in this case, the seal was clay attached to the wall of the tomb and wax on the rolling stone, with a cord between them.

**“setting the guard.”** The Greek text simply has the phrase “with the guard” at the end of the sentence, which has led to various interpretations and translations. For example, the NASB says that the Jews sealed the tomb “along with the guards.” Some interpreters have even suggested that the Jews “sealed” the tomb “with the guards,” meaning that the guards were the effective seal, but this interpretation seems very unlikely. It seems most likely that the phrase is not meant to communicate that the guards helped seal the tomb, but rather that the tomb was left “with the guard,” as the Jews requested, so the body would not be stolen. It is likely that the “guard” is not referring to an individual soldier but is a collective reference to those soldiers who were left to guard the tomb. Therefore, perhaps a more conflated translation would be: “So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone *and leaving it* with *soldiers of* the guard.”

**Matthew Chapter 28**

Mat 28:1

**“as it began to dusk *and come* toward the first *day* of the week.”** This event, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary coming to view the tomb, is not recorded in any Gospel but Matthew.

The translations differ about this verse, so to properly understand it we must pay strict attention to the Greek text, the Jewish customs, and the event itself. This event occurred on Saturday, Nisan 17, in the late evening, just as the Jewish day Sunday was “dawning,” i.e., starting, that is just before the Saturday Sabbath ended at sunset and Sunday, the first day of the week, began. The fact that Matthew records that the Sabbath was just ending at sunset tells us that Matthew is written from the point of view of Jewish timing, not Roman timing. The Jews began their new day at sunset, while the Romans began their new day at midnight (like Westerners still do). This verse is not speaking about Sunday morning when the sun came up, as many people believe.

Although many translations have the word “dawn,” in this verse, we must not confuse that with the Western view of “dawn,” i.e., when the sun comes up. To the Jews, a new day “dawned,” or started, at sunset. The Greek text reads in a way that seems very difficult when translated literally, which is due to the idioms involved. A very literal rendering of the Greek text is: “Now late of the [on the] Sabbaths, at the dawn toward the first of the Sabbaths.” This is a very difficult sentence, and to understand it we need to know two things: the first thing is that “Sabbaths” (the plural of Sabbath) was the regular Jewish idiom for a week. The second thing is that the word “dawned” is the Greek word *epiphōskō* (#2020 ἐπιφώσκω, pronounced eh-pee-'phōs-kō), which literally means, “to grow light,” and it was used of the “dawn” or “beginning” of something. In the United States, we have the same basic idiom and use “dawn” for the beginning of something. When something brand new is coming that will make significant changes, someone might say, “A new day is dawning,” even though it is technically not either a new “day,” nor is it “dawn.”

[For more on *epiphōskō*, see commentary on Luke 23:54.]

According to Jewish reckoning of time, the new day was beginning, or “dawning,” at sunset on the weekly Sabbath. Thus, sunset on Saturday started Sunday and the new week. Many English versions read “dawn” in this verse, but to understand the verse, we must realize that the sun is going down and the new day is starting; the verse is not saying that the sun is coming up. About this verse, Robertson writes: “This careful chronological statement according to Jewish days clearly means that before the Sabbath was over, that is before six PM, this visit by the women was made ‘to see the sepulcher.’”[[247]](#footnote-31902) Robertson is correct that this is a “careful chronological statement,” and not paying attention to it is one of the reasons people wrongly think the Bible contradicts itself in the timing of some of the events that occurred after the death of Jesus.

If we read the verse in an amplified form with notes included, we get: “Now late of the [on the] Sabbaths [the week, i.e., as the week was ending on Saturday night], at the dawn [the ‘beginning’] toward the first of the Sabbaths [i.e., at the beginning of the next week, which started at sunset Saturday night when Sunday, the next week began].”

There are an impressive number of versions that translate this verse so that it can be correctly understood if the reader knows the Jewish customs. Furthermore, there are a number of scholars and commentators who understand it properly, such as A. T. Robertson, Heinrich Meyer, and Robert Gundry. However, there are also translations and commentators who think the verse is referring to Sunday morning, not Saturday night. What we must remember, however, is that very few translators or commentators understand the correct chronology of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, which means they interpret the text in light of their erroneous understanding. They try to squeeze all the biblical events in between Friday afternoon and Sunday at daybreak while it is still dark, and to do that, records that are separate events need to be melded together as single events. Lenski, for example, equates this visit of the two Marys to be the same as the visit of the women on Sunday morning despite the fact that on Sunday morning Mary Magdalene went alone to the tomb, met Jesus alone (Mark 16:9), never saw an angel, and quickly went and told the disciples that the tomb was empty and Jesus’ body gone (John 20:2), whereas when the group of women came to the tomb on Sunday morning they met the angel, then Jesus, and went to tell the disciples Jesus was alive (Matt. 28:5-10). Blending records together, such as these, creates insurmountable apparent contradictions that there is simply no need to create if we allow for more time in the record and correctly interpret the chronology. Even the simple reading of Matthew 28:1-2 has the earthquake happening after the two Marys come to see the tomb, but if their visit is Sunday morning, as commentators like Lenski propose, then the earthquake had to come before they came to the tomb.

Many versions translate the verse in a way that shows that the women came to the tomb on Saturday evening as the Saturday Sabbath was ending and the new day, Sunday, was beginning. As we said above, to properly understand some of these versions, we must keep in mind that “late on the Sabbath,” or “at the close of the Sabbath,” or “in the end of the Sabbath” was always Saturday evening before sunset, never Sunday morning. Sunday began at sunset on Saturday; that was when the new day, Sunday, “dawned,” or “began.”

**ASV and RV:** “Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week....”

**William Barclay:** “Late on the Sabbath, just as the day was breaking on the Sunday….”

**BBE:** “Now late on the Sabbath, when the dawn of the first day of the week was near….”

**Darby:** “Now late on sabbath, as it was the dusk….”

**Douay-Rheims:** “And in the end of the sabbath, when it began to dawn toward the first day of the week….”

**Geneva Bible:** “Now in the end of the Sabbath, when the first day of ye weeke began to dawne….”

**KJV:** “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week….”

**Moffatt Bible:** “At the close of the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning….”

**The Scriptures:** “But late in the Sabbath, as it was dawning into day *one* of the week….”

Translations from the Aramaic also read that the women came on Saturday evening.

**Murdock:** “And in the close of the sabbath, as the first [day] of the week began to dawn….”

**Magiera:** “Now in the evening of the Sabbath, as it was twilight [on] the first of the week….”

Another important fact we must pay attention to if we are going to properly understand this event is that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to “see the tomb.” This is very important and ignored by most commentators. This is not the trip the women made on Sunday morning when they came with spices. They did not have any spices with them. The text specifically says they came to see the tomb, not to anoint Jesus’ body. One reason they likely did not have any spices with them is that it would have been breaking the Mosaic Law for them to carry a load of spices on the Sabbath day—that would have been considered “work” (cf. Jer. 17:22). But the women could walk to see the tomb because walking on the Sabbath was allowed as long as one did not walk too far or carry anything heavy. Thus, this verse does not contradict the verse that says the women “rested” on the Sabbath (Luke 23:56).

We also must realize that this trip to the tomb is not the one that Mary Magdalene made alone on Sunday morning. On the trip Mary Magdalene made on Sunday morning, she was alone, and when she saw the tomb was open she ran and got Peter and John who then went to the tomb with her following. Then, after they left, she met the “gardener” who was actually the Lord (John 20:1-18).

On this trip that Matthew 28:1 speaks of, as the Sabbath was coming to an end on Saturday evening, the women came to “look at” the tomb. The Greek word *theōreō* (#2334 θεωρέω), “to look at,” usually refers to viewing something from a distance, which would have been the case since the guards would have kept the women from getting too close to the tomb. At this time on Saturday evening, the stone would have been still in place in front of the tomb. Since the women came Saturday night just to see the tomb, it is very possible that they were checking to see if the Roman guard was gone yet. The third day of Christ’s “three days and three nights” ended just about sunset Saturday evening, so if the guards had already left, then the way was clear to bring the spices Sunday morning. However, the guards were still there and so was the stone that was covering the tomb door. Due to the time of day, it is possible that Jesus was already up from the dead and out of the tomb—he did not have to move the stone to get out in his newly resurrected body. If not, his resurrection would have occurred very shortly after they saw the tomb and left.

There is a time break between Matthew 28:1 and Matthew 28:2. The events of 28:2 occurred around dawn Sunday morning because when the angel opened the tomb, some of the guards went and reported to the chief priests what had happened. One of the astounding things about the four Gospels is that there is no explicit description of Jesus getting up from the dead, an event that would have happened around the time Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb. There is no description such as, “Then the life of God entered Jesus and he woke up from the dead and passed effortlessly through the stone wall of the tomb.” No amount of guesswork will tell us for certain, but it is possible that any description of the resurrection cannot come close to describing it as it would need to be described. After all, it involved changing Jesus’ dead human body into the living spirit-powered body of the one who is second in command to God in all the universe.

**“the other Mary.”** This is presumably Mary, the mother of James and Joses (Matt. 27:56).

Mat 28:2

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“there was a great earthquake.”** On Nisan 18, Sunday morning, while it was still very dark, but getting close to early dawn, there was an earthquake and an angel rolled the stone away from the tomb door. We know this occurred in the dark but close to dawn because Mary Magdalene had not come to the tomb yet, and she came when it was dark (John 20:1), and also because the guards went back into the city and told the chief priests what had happened shortly after they had been frightened by the angel (Matt. 28:4, 11). Scripture says that the guards were still talking to the chief priests when the women (who had gone to the tomb with spices to bury Jesus with and had arrived at the tomb at dawn just after the sun rose; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1), had already seen both the angels and Jesus, and were on their way to tell the disciples what they had seen (Matt. 28:5-11). Thus, the angel rolling back the stone and scaring the guards could not have been too long before daybreak. However, it was early enough that the guards had left by the time Mary Magdalene arrived, and she had come alone to the tomb before the sun rose and thus before the group of women who came with the spices, who arrived after the sun had risen. The guards coming to their senses, discussing what to do, and then going to the chief priests and reporting to them what happened, would have likely taken no more than an hour, two at the most.

It is often taught that the resurrection occurred simultaneously with this earthquake. However, Scripture never says this. The actual event of the resurrection is not portrayed in Scripture. Furthermore, this was now Sunday, the first day of the week, which would have been the fourth day since Jesus was buried. But Jesus was only in the grave for three days and three nights (Matt. 12:40). Christ’s resurrection was “three days and three nights” after his burial, so the resurrection would have occurred on Saturday just before sunset.

If Jesus got up from the dead Saturday night around sunset, why would the angel wait until just before dawn to open the grave? The most likely reason is that God knew the disciples would start coming to the tomb Sunday morning, and did not want to have the tomb open all night without a guard lest people think that the most likely explanation for the missing body of Jesus was that people stole it (which is what people believed anyway; cf. Matt. 28:15). So likely not too long before sunrise Sunday morning (an hour or so would be enough), there was an earthquake. The earthquake and angel were not needed for Jesus to rise from the dead and leave the tomb, they were for a witness of the resurrection to people, and to clear the way for the disciples to get to the tomb without Roman interference. The angel rolled the stone away, doing it without human involvement, proving the tomb was empty. Then, when Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb before sunrise, the guard was already gone, and by the time the women who brought the spices to the tomb were going to tell the disciples what had happened to them, the guard was in the city reporting the event to the priests.

The fact that the earthquake and stone being moved in Matthew 28:2 comes after the women went to see the tomb (Matt. 28:1) is more confirmation that Matthew 28:1 occurred Saturday night, hours before the stone was rolled away by the angel (see commentary on Matt. 28:1)

**“the Lord.”** For more information on “the Lord” see commentary on Matthew 3:3.

**“rolled away the stone.”** The Greek is *apokuliō* (#617 ἀποκυλίω), to roll away. In this context, it seems that the stone was more than simply rolled back away from the entrance of the tomb, but rather rolled away from the tomb entirely. It would have been lying flat on the ground some distance from the grave to mark the fact that the grave was empty for all to see, and could not be closed again without a major effort requiring many men. The flat stone also provided a good seat for the angel, who sat on it in triumph of the resurrection.

Later Greek manuscripts added “from the door” for clarity, but the textual evidence shows that reading was not original. Nevertheless, it is in some Byzantine manuscripts and appears in the King James Version. Then other scribes added to that addition “of the sepulcher,” making the long reading, “rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulcher,” but the original reading was simply “rolled away the stone.”

Mat 28:3

**“his clothing was white as snow.”** This does not mean much to us today because we have clothing that is bright white, in fact, white as snow. But that was not the case in the ancient world. Natural wool and natural fibers such as cotton or linen are not normally bright white, and in the ancient world, it was very difficult to get those natural fibers to the point of being really white. And even if they could get their clothing bright white, almost no one would want to. The ancient world was very dirty, and any bright white garment would soon have very obvious stains all over it. It was much better to have a natural color that would be easier to maintain and not show dirt as easily.

Mat 28:5

**“And the angel answered and said to the women.”** There is a time break between Matthew 28:2-4 when the angel rolled away the stone and Matthew 28:5-10 when the angel, and then Jesus, speak to the women. The women had arrived after the sun rose (Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; see commentary on Matt. 28:2).

Mat 28:6

**“he has been raised.”** The Greek verb is an aorist passive, that Jesus Christ “was raised” or “has been raised” (see commentary on Luke 24:6).

**“Come, see the place where he was lying.”** Since the women were already in the tomb, this is a clear indication that there was more than one room in the tomb, and the women were standing in the weeping chamber, the large room just inside the door of many tombs. The angel invited the woman to step into the room that had held the dead body of Jesus (See commentary on Mark 16:5).

Mat 28:7

**“go.”** The Greek verb is *poreuomai* (#4198 πορεύομαι), and is an aorist participle, literally, “having gone.” This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect, when a past tense is put for something that is actually future to express the certainty of it or emphasize it.

[For more information on the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“indeed.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Galilee.”** One of the interesting details in the record of the death and resurrection of Christ is the fact that it took so long for the disciples to obey the command to go to Galilee. The chronology of the trip to Galilee is: On the night of his arrest Jesus told the disciples that he would meet them in Galilee after his resurrection; so obviously they were supposed to go there (Matt. 26:32). However, they were all denying that they would forsake him, and his statement about Galilee seemed to go unnoticed. It would have been a great act of trust for them to have gone to Galilee and waited for him to meet them, just as he said. It seems certain, however, that he knew they did not believe he would be raised from the dead, and just as certain that he would have to tell them a few times to go to Galilee, which is what he ended up doing.

The Sunday after he was resurrected, angels, then Jesus himself, told the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee (Matt. 28:7, 10), but they still did not go. Then, when Jesus appeared to the disciples behind closed doors that evening (Luke 24:36-46; John 20:19-24), the Bible does not say he told them to go to Galilee, but at that point, they should have believed the women (and what Jesus said in Matt. 26:32) and left for Galilee. Instead, they were still in Jerusalem, still behind locked doors, a week later when Jesus appeared to them again (John 20:26-29).

The Bible does not say if Jesus told the disciples to go to Galilee in this second behind-locked-doors meeting with his disciples. However, it seems that he did, because the next thing the Bible says after the second meeting is that the disciples went to Galilee (Matt. 28:16a), and Jesus met them at the Sea of Galilee (which John 21:1 calls the Sea of Tiberias because Tiberias was the most influential city on the lake).

A major reason for the disciples to go to Galilee was it was the base of Jesus’ operation and where he had the most disciples. In the days before his ascension, in Jerusalem there were only 120 disciples (Acts 1:15). In contrast, he met with more than 500 people at one time (1 Cor. 15:6), which is likely the meeting on a mountain in Galilee, mentioned in Matthew 28:16-20.

The Bible does not record the consequences of the disciples not obeying Jesus and going to Galilee. However, we know that Jesus would not say to do it if there was not some good reason, so we can be sure that there were some consequences. There were almost certainly two important consequences: for one thing, if all the apostles had returned to Galilee right after his death, the rumor that they had taken Jesus’ body from the tomb would have been difficult to perpetrate, because if his leaders had all left the area, what disciple would steal the body? The lie that the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body only made sense because the apostles were still in town and in hiding.

Even on Sunday morning, however, Jesus was still directing the apostles to go to Galilee. He still wanted the witness of his resurrection to reach the people of Galilee, and there may have been another reason as well. It is likely that the disciples were being sought out by the religious leaders and painfully interrogated. The situation was dangerous enough that a week after the resurrection the disciples were still hiding behind locked doors. It is typical that the Bible would not focus on any hardship to the disciples at this time, focusing instead on the resurrection of Christ and events involving his appearances to people, so the fact that the Bible does not mention any specific persecution does not mean it did not happen. By the time Jesus and the apostles showed back up in town, likely almost a full month later, Jesus apparently did not publicly show himself, and the religious leaders apparently thought the crisis was over and left them alone.

**“Look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Mat 28:9

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Jesus met them.”** The first person that Jesus met after his resurrection was Mary Magdalene. The next people Jesus appeared to was this group of women that had come to the tomb to properly bury his body but were met by angels and now were on their way to the disciples to tell them that Jesus had been raised from the dead. How much more convincing their testimony should have been now that they could all say in unison that they had actually seen the living Christ. No matter; the Eleven and the disciples did not believe them any more than they had believed Mary Magdalene. By evening, however, when Cleopas and the other disciple returned from the road to Emmaus, where they had seen the Lord, Jesus had already appeared to Peter, and at last the disciples (most of them, anyway), believed he was raised from the dead (Luke 24:34).

**“Greetings.”** The Greek reads *chairō* (#5463 χαίρω, pronounced 'kī-rō). It means “be well,” or “rejoice,” and was a standard greeting like our “Hi.” The Hebrew text of Matthew (see commentary on Matt. 3:3) has, “May the Name deliver you.” In this case, “the Name” in full is used instead of the rabbinic abbreviation for Yahweh, which is apparently an abbreviation of the Hebrew for “the Name.”

**“paid homage.”** The act of grabbing the feet was an act of homage. See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

Mat 28:11

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“some of the guard.”** At the same time that the women were traveling to tell the disciples, some of the guards arrived at Jerusalem and gave their report to the Jews. The Bible does not say how many guards watched the tomb, but only “some” of the guards reported what they saw, the rest were apparently so terrified they ran off and stayed hidden.

The religious leaders bribed the guards with a large amount of money to say the disciples stole the body while they were asleep, a report that is still often believed. Also, the Jews told the guards that if Pilate heard they had fallen asleep, a capital offense, the Jews would take care of that also. That fact confirms that the guards were Roman soldiers and not Temple police, because if Jewish police had fallen asleep on the job and the body of Jesus had been stolen, Pilate would have not cared at all about it. But if Roman soldiers on duty had fallen asleep and botched their assignment, they could have been executed.

God sent an angel to roll back the stone in sight of the guards (Matt. 28:2-4). This was grace upon grace to them. He did not have to do that. He could have just rolled the stone back by invisible power. God gave the guards a wonderful opportunity to believe in, and testify to, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was not something they expected when they got “tomb guard duty,” but it is what happened. We never know when God is going to move powerfully in the world. If we happen to be fortunate enough to be part of a move of God, we need to be prepared to believe and testify. These guards showed that they were more interested in money than the truth.

Mat 28:16

**“The eleven disciples.”** The “eleven disciples” are the apostles minus Judas, who has committed suicide (Matt. 27:5). In Greek, the second word in the sentence is the particle *de*, which is usually a break or a change of subject. It seemed the best way to represent that break here was simply to start the new sentence without any connective particle in English.

**“went to Galilee.”** The “eleven disciples” now travel to Galilee. There is a long time break between Matthew 28:9-10, when Jesus met with the women and told them to report to the apostles and tell them to go to Galilee, and Matt. 28:16 when the Eleven actually go to Galilee. It would have been ten days or more.

Jesus had met the women on Resurrection Sunday, the eighteenth of Nisan, and spoken with them about the disciples going to Galilee. But they were still in Jerusalem on Sunday the twenty-fifth of Nisan when he appeared to them a second time behind closed doors. Even if the disciples left that day for Galilee, it was usually a trip of three days.

Then between the first half and second half of Matthew 28:16 there is another time break. After the apostles went to Galilee, Jesus met them on the Sea of Galilee, which is the third time he appeared to all of them together (John 21:14). Then, sometime after that meeting, Jesus met with the apostles and a large group of disciples on a mountain (Matt. 28:16b).

Mat 28:17

**“they.”** This refers to all the disciples together. This is almost certainly the event recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:6 when he was seen by more than 500 believers at one time. There were not 500 disciples in Jerusalem, which is clear from the fact that there were only about 120 there around the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:15). However, Jesus’ headquarters through most of his ministry had been Galilee, and thus the account of the more than 500 people who saw him at one time would have occurred there. The fact that he met with so many disciples at least partially explains why he would go to Galilee at all. There were many like Thomas who needed to see proof to be sure, and Jesus’ appearing in person in Galilee was surely a boost to the believers.

Although all the disciples “worshiped” Jesus, which in that culture meant to bow down before him or prostrate oneself before him, some of them “doubted.” This is understandable. Jesus told the apostles over and over he was going to be killed and then raised from the dead, and it was such a foreign concept to them they did not understand the plain words he was speaking. The death and resurrection of the Messiah was a new concept to these Jews, and so it was natural that, even when they were faced with the living Christ, some of them “doubted;” they were not 100% sure of what they were seeing.

**“bowed down *before him.*”** See commentary on Matthew 2:2. Most versions translated *proskuneō* as “worship” here, but that is an unclear translation. The act of “worship” in that biblical culture was to fall down before someone, which is what these disciples did. That does not mean that they did not doubt at the same time. They bowed (or fell down) before him, but even in doing that act of showing respect, some were doubting.

Mat 28:18

**“all authority in heaven and on earth.”** God has set Jesus Christ as His second-in-command, his under-ruler, and given him all authority to administer His creation (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:18-22). He has made Jesus, “Lord” (Acts 2:36). Given that, what are some of the things that Jesus is doing now? Jesus is the head of the body of Christ, directing and guiding it (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Jesus gives the gift of holy spirit to people when they get saved, and thus he adds to his body (Acts 2:32-33; 2:47; Matt. 16:18). He supports his body, the Church, and causes it to grow (Eph. 5:15-16; Col. 2:18-19), and he organizes it, for example, by creating leadership positions (Col. 1:15-19). Jesus sets people in their personal ministries (Eph. 4:7-8, 11). He gives revelation to people (Gal. 1:11-12; Acts 9:10-17; 16:7; 18:9). He is a wonderful counselor (Isa. 9:6).

Jesus also ministers through his angels (Rev. 1:1). He prays and intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26-27, 34; Heb. 7:25). He protects us from evil (2 Thess. 3:3). Jesus heals people (Acts 9:32-34). He gives grace and peace to us (1 Cor. 16:23; Eph. 1:2; 1 Thess. 5:28). He is with us in our trials and suffering (Acts 9:4; Rom. 8:26). We can fellowship with Jesus (1 John 1:3), and we can pray to him for support (John 14:12-14; Acts 7:59; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 12:8-9). Jesus will raise us from the dead (1 Thess. 4:15), transform our bodies when we are raised at the Rapture (Phil. 3:21), and be our judge on our Day of Judgment (John 5:21-29; 2 Cor. 5:10).

It is important to understand that when Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” he did not mean that he was now in control of everything that happens on earth or even that he could micromanage what happens on earth if he wanted to. God had “all authority” before He gave it to the resurrected Christ, and God could not and did not control what the Devil, demons, or even people do; they are free will beings.

When we read that Jesus has “all authority,” we need to define it in biblical terms and see how it plays out in the Bible. God did and to a degree still does have all “authority” in the sense that He is the final judge and the most powerful One in creation. It is based on God’s ultimate authority that allows Him to send Christ back when He decides to do so, judge and reward the righteous, and judge and condemn the unsaved. God’s ultimate authority was why He could create free will beings without fear of them overthrowing Him, and also why it was He who created the rules by which all living beings are governed and will be judged. God does not lose His authority just because He allows free will beings to act of their own volition. After all, it was because of His love and desire for spirit beings and physical beings to love Him that He created that free will volition.

When God raised His Son from the dead, He invested Christ with His authority, such that now Christ works with the Church, gives grace and mercy, works through the gift of holy spirit, and will be the judge of both the righteous and unrighteous at the resurrections. But in the same way that God had all authority before Christ’s resurrection but allowed free will beings to live by their own free will decisions, today Christ has all authority but allows free will beings, including the Devil, demons, and people, to live by their free will decisions. However, there will come a day in the future when Christ’s authority over God’s creation will be more fully demonstrated, and he will come down from heaven, kill or imprison all of God’s enemies, and conquer the earth. Then, eventually, he will have judged every person and the Devil and his demons, and the saved will live forever while the unsaved will be annihilated and gone forever.

**“has been given to me.”** This is one of the many verses that make it clear that Jesus Christ is not God. If Christ were really God, and co-equal and co-eternal with the Father as the Trinitarians teach, then it is illogical to say Christ was *given* authority. God, by definition, *has* authority.

Jesus is a man, and the authority he has was given to him by God and is not a function of his “divine nature.” The wording of Matthew 28:18 is, in actuality, a refutation of the Trinity. Jesus is that man to whom God gave “all authority.” In contrast to Christ, there is no verse anywhere that says “God” was given authority. God has all authority, and delegates it to others. Although there are some Trinitarians who teach that Jesus divested himself of his authority when he was incarnated as a human, this verse is after Jesus’ resurrection, and all Trinitarians affirm Jesus had his full position as God after he was raised from the dead, which was the case in this verse.

The Trinitarian refutation to the Scripture saying that “God” gave Jesus his position and authority, such as in Acts 2:36, which says, “God has *made* Jesus both Lord and Christ,” is to say that “God” means the Father. But there is no evidence for that; it is an assumption to support the doctrine and not what the Bible actually says. If we simply read the Bible as we would normally understand it, then “God” does not have to be constantly redefined. Jesus is the man, Jesus, and “God” is God.

Many verses say that Jesus was given what he had from “God.” These include that he was “given” all authority (Matt. 28:18), “made Lord and Christ” by God (Acts 2:36); and that God “put” everything under his feet and “appointed” him to be Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22). The most natural reading of the Bible is that “God” is the Father, and Jesus is the human Messiah, and “God” does things for Jesus, but “God” never does things for “the Father” because He is the Father.

Another reason that Matt. 28:18 disproves the Trinity is that if “God” is made up of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, then by definition Jesus cannot have “all authority.” By virtue of being “God,” the Father and Holy Spirit would both have equal authority with Jesus. In fact, it is part of the standard definition of the Trinity that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are “co-equal.” The only way Jesus could be given all authority would be if he were not God, but the Messiah, God’s chosen ruler, and the Father had entrusted him with all authority, just as God gave Jesus the authority to judge on the Day of Judgment (John 5:22).

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Mat 28:19

**“Go and make disciples of all the nations.”** The phrase, “of all the nations” reads as if it were a genitive when in fact “nations” is in the accusative case (direct object), not the genitive case. Thus, in one sense, a more proper translation is “go disciple all the nations.” Normally we would want to avoid the genitive in this case because it can be limiting and mean “out of,” thus referring to making some of the people disciples, whereas the accusative is a clearly broad goal, “disciple all the nations.” The reason that most versions read, “make disciples of all the nations” rather than “disciple all nations” is that the Greek word *mathēteuō* (#3100 μαθητεύω) more naturally refers to both the making and training of disciples. Thus, if we say, “go and make disciples of all the nations,” we clearly understand that they were not disciples before, and we have to get them saved and then disciple them, whereas if we say, “go disciple all nations,” they may already be disciples and we are going to give them further instruction. Translators differ as to which translation is closer to representing what Christ said, and so both translations exist among the English versions.

It seems clear that after his resurrection Jesus expanded the missionary work of his disciples. Whereas before his resurrection he clearly said, “Do not go on *any* road of the Gentiles, and do not enter into *any* city of the Samaritans, but go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6), now he says to go to the nations and disciple them.

**“baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the holy spirit.”** This phrase is part of a famous last saying of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew now generally known as “The Great Commission.” The passage has elicited much discussion because it is an important declaration of Jesus to his disciples before he ascended into heaven.

The ancient Church applied this command to the apostles and rarely applied this command to any concept of universal evangelism.[[248]](#footnote-20763) In the Middle Ages it was associated with apostolic succession and even in the Reformation it was not thought of as a general mission of the Church, although the Anabaptists and some independent Protestant theologians applied it to mission work. It was not until around the year 1800 that Matthew 28:19 began to be generally accepted by Protestants as applying to universal mission work.

The phrase “baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (or “holy spirit”)” has been the common reading in every major English translation. However, there has been some debate in the past century about whether this reading is original to the Gospel of Matthew. There is a shorter reading of the verse that a few theologians have thought to be original based on the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea in the early fourth century AD, and the Shem Tov Hebrew manuscript of Matthew, an independent Hebrew witness, omits the baptismal command in this verse. However, trying to modify the Greek text of Matthew based on that slim evidence is not generally good exegesis.

If the current manuscript reading of Matthew 28 is not correct, that would mean that all the “correct” manuscripts, and the literature of the early church including the quotations of Matthew 28:19 in the writings of the Church Fathers, would have had to have been destroyed or altered, and in general, the early church was too fragmented and not centralized enough for that to happen.

[For a more complete discussion of this, see “[Is Matthew 28:19 a Forgery?](https://www.biblicalunitarian.com/articles/is-matthew-2819-a-forgery)” by Sean Finnegan on biblicalunitarian.com.]

Further evidence that the reading of Matthew 28:19 was not changed after the Council of Nicea is that there were still many people in the Church who did not believe that Jesus was fully God and fully human, and if the text of Matthew had been changed at or after the Council of Nicea, then it seems certain that people who opposed the developing theory of the Trinity would have made enough of an issue of it that some trace of those arguments could be found in the literature of the time, but no evidence of any argument about changing the text exists.

The REV reads “baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the holy spirit” on the basis of the Greek manuscript evidence. In order to substantiate the conclusion for the longer, common reading as being original to the Gospel of Matthew, we will discuss both the textual and external evidence in support of the common reading and respond to some of the major questions that are often raised about them.

The external evidence in support of the longer, common reading is strong in that it appears in every single New Testament Greek manuscript that contains this section of Matthew. However, it must be pointed out that the oldest manuscript witnesses of Matthew 28:19 are Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus from the fourth century, after the Council of Nicea, because the last section of the Gospel of Matthew is missing from all extant papyri and the Old Syriac manuscripts. But in addition to the manuscript evidence in favor of the longer, common reading, there are a number of patristic writers who support this reading as well.

Does the commonly accepted translation of Matthew 28:19 prove the existence of the Trinity? No. The mention of the Father, Son, and holy spirit together in one context only shows that these three exist. The doctrine of the Trinity that states there are three “Persons” in one God was not codified until AD 381. The Council of Nicea in AD 325 merely decided that Jesus was God, and did not make the Holy Spirit into a “third Person” in the Trinity. Also, there is a debate about whether the English translation of Matthew 28:19 should read “Holy Spirit” or “holy spirit” (the biblical evidence supports “holy spirit”), but in any case, there is no presentation in Matthew 28:19 of any formal doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity states that the Father, Son, and “Holy Spirit” together make “one God” and that the three “Persons” are co-equal and co-eternal, and that doctrine is not stated in this verse. This verse refers to three, but never says they are “one.” If the phrase about the Father, Son, and holy spirit is original, then the three things this verse refers to are: God the Father; His Son the Lord Jesus Christ; and the holy spirit, a “gift” from God (cf. Acts 2:38).

Given God’s ultimate authority and power, Christ’s exalted position as the risen Messiah and Lord, and the power of God to believers via the holy spirit, which Jesus spoke of at the Last Supper, it makes sense that Jesus would mention all three of them here in Matthew 28. However, if Jesus commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and holy spirit, why, in the book of Acts, did the disciples consistently baptize “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:47-48; 19:5-6)? There are a couple of possibilities as to why that would happen, and none would require us to change the wording of Matthew 28:19 in the Greek text. For example, we today think of a baptism “formula” because we are thinking in terms of what happens in churches based on 2,000 years of church practice. But there is no evidence that John the Baptist or Jesus’ disciples used any “formula” when they baptized as recorded in the Four Gospels. So it could well be, and it makes sense in the historical context, that Jesus was not giving his disciples a “baptismal formula” to use, but rather just telling them to baptize in the “name” (authority) of the Father, Son, and holy spirit, and they did that, but in the baptism itself, they just pronounced the name of Jesus Christ, the risen Lord and head of the Church. There are also some other possibilities that have been set forth by church historians as well.

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“name.”** A study of the biblical culture and language shows that in this context the word “name” primarily stood for “authority,” and doing something in the “name” of a person or persons who had great authority was very common. In fact, acting “in the name of” is still common today, and the Macmillan Dictionary says that to act “in the name of” is “using the authority given by someone or something.” Biblical examples are very numerous and space allows for only a few examples, but Deuteronomy 18:5-7 speak of serving in the “name” (authority) of the Lord; Deuteronomy 18:22 speaks of prophesying in the “name” (authority) of the Lord; 1 Samuel 17:45 says David attacked Goliath in the “name” (authority) of the Lord, and 2 Samuel 6:18 says David blessed the people in the “name” (authority) of the Lord; and 2 Kings 2:24 says Elisha cursed troublemakers in the “name” (authority) of the Lord.

In Acts, the apostles baptized in the “name” of Jesus Christ because it meant all his authority. Similarly, Paul rhetorically asked the Corinthians if they were baptized “in the name of Paul” (1 Cor. 1:13), which of course they were not because Paul had no power or authority to save anyone. These scriptures are only a small sample of the examples that could be given, but they make the point. Also, although there are other customs involving the word “name,” authority is one that is most applicable in Matthew 28:19.

It was also part of the customary use of the word “name” that it was often used in the singular even when there was more than one person involved. It is sometimes claimed that because Matthew 28:19 says the “name” (singular) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that the three must be one God, but that is not true, as a study of the word “name” in the Bible and biblical culture shows. The word “name” in the singular was often used of two or more. For example, Genesis 48:16 (KJV) says, “…the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac.” Some modern versions read, “names of my fathers,” but the Hebrew text uses the singular, “name.” We see the same distributive use of the word “name” in verses such as 1 Samuel 17:13, where the “name” of Jesse’s three oldest sons was Eliab, then Abinadab, then Shammah. No one claims that the three eldest sons of Jesse, the father of David, were somehow “one,” it is just that the Bible sometimes uses “name” in a distributive sense.

The word “name” is also used in the singular when speaking of more than one god. Exodus 23:13 (KJV) says not to mention the “name of other gods” (cf. Deut. 18:20; Josh. 23:7). We should note that although the Hebrew text uses the singular word “name,” some modern versions ignore that fact and translate the Hebrew word as “names” (cf. HCSB, ESV, NET, NIV), but other modern versions leave “name” singular (cf. NAB, NASB, NLT, JPS, NJB). 2 Samuel 7:9 has the singular word “name” as a collective singular that refers to a group of people. The King James Version reads, “And I [God]was with thee [David]…and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great *men* that *are* in the earth” (most modern versions have translated the second “name” in the verse as the plural noun “names,” but the Hebrew text is singular and reads “name,” and the same is true in 1 Chron. 17:8). We also see the singular word “name” used to refer to a group of people in Proverbs 10:7: “…the name of the wicked will rot” (NASB). There are English versions that change “name” to “names,” but in the Hebrew text “name” is singular. Also, the NET and the Complete Jewish Bible translate the word “name” as “reputation” in Proverbs 10:7, but the Hebrew word is “name,” even though a person’s name and reputation were intertwined. In concluding this discussion on “name,” we should see that “name” referred to the name and the authority and reputation of the one or ones whose name was being used, and also that a common custom was to use the word “name” in the singular even when it referred to a group.

Also, although it is sometimes stated that in order to be baptized into something, that something has to be God, that reasoning is false because Scripture states that the Israelites were “baptized into Moses” (1 Cor. 10:2).

In Acts, the apostles baptized in the “name,” the authority, of Jesus Christ.

Mat 28:20

**“Remember.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20. This could have been translated “Pay attention,” because Jesus was trying to make sure he had the attention of those he was speaking to, but given the circumstances, “remember,” is a good way to translate the word *idou* here (cf. HCSB).

**“I am with you always.”** This is a wonderful promise to believers, especially when we feel that Jesus is not with us. Life is difficult, and there is a universal spiritual war going on between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. God cannot “just make things better.” He will one day, but not right now. Furthermore, we must remember that God has to be righteous and also follow His own promises. For example, He says that as we sow we reap. So if we sow into our lives in such a way as to cause trouble for ourselves, God just cannot step in and override His own law so things will be better for us here on earth. That does not mean that Jesus is not with us, watching us and helping as best he can: he always does that, and we need to trust that he is

[For more on God’s help in troubled times, see commentary on Rom. 8:28.]

Occasionally this verse is used to prove the Trinity because it is said that the only way that Jesus could always be with his Church is if he were God. However, that is an unproven assumption and is not stated in Scripture. Furthermore, there are different ways of being “with” someone. For example, Scripture shows us that there is a use of “with us” that is spiritual in nature, not physical. Also, we must be careful not to underestimate the power and authority God gave Christ when He set him at His own right hand and gave him a name that is above every name. Just two verses before this one, Christ said he had been given “all authority.” God gave Christ all authority, and made Christ Head of the Church, so it is only logical to conclude that God also gave Christ the power to stay in communion with his Church.

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