

Lessons 29-42

- 1 Proof of the Bible Part One
- 2 Proof of the Bible Part Two
- 3 Time of Ezra and Nehemiah - Fifth Period of Canonization
- 4 How the New Testament Came Together
- 5 The Inspired Order of the Books of the Bible
- 6 Introductory Survey Approach of Studying the Bible
- 7 Genesis 1 - 3
- 8 Genesis 4 - 9 Part One
- 9 Genesis 4 - 9 Part Two
- 10 Genesis 10 - 11
- 11 Genesis 12 - 36
- 12 Genesis 37 - 50
- 13 Exodus 1 - 18
- 14 Exodus 19 - 40
- 15 Leviticus Part One
- 16 Leviticus Part Two
- 17 Numbers
- 18 Deuteronomy
- 19 Joshua
- 20 Judges
- 21 I Samuel 1 - 15 & I Chronicles 1 - 9
- 22 I Samuel 16 - 31 & I Chronicles 10
- 23 II Samuel 1 - 20 & I Chronicles 11 - 20
- 24 II Samuel 21 - 24 & I Kings 1 - 11 & I Chron. 21 - 29 & II Chron. 1 - 9
- 25 I Kings 12 - 22, II Kings 1 - 2, II Chronicles 10 - 20
- 26 II Kings 3 - 25 and II Chronicles 21 - 36
- 27 Ezra and Nehemiah
- 28 Between the Testaments
- 29 Introduction Survey of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
- 30 Matt. 1 - 4:11; Mark 1:1-13; Luke 1 - 4:13; John 1 - 2:12
- 31 Matt. 4:12 - 9:17; Mark 1:14 - 2:22; Luke 4:14 - 5:39; John 2:13 - 4:54
- 32 Matt.8,11,12,13; Mark 2:23 - 4:20; Luke 6:1 - 8:15; John 5
- 33 Matt. 8,9,10,13,14; Mark 4:21 - 6:29; Luke 8:16 - 9:9
- 34 Matt 14:13 - 17:23; Mark 6:30 - 9:32; Luke 9:10-45; John 6:1 - 7:1
- 35 Matt.17:24 - 18:35; Mark 9:33 - 10:1; Luke 9:46 - 12:59; John 7:2 - 10:21
- 36 Matt. 19; Mark 10; Luke 13 - 19:29; John 10:22 - 12:11
- 37 Matt. 20:18 - 25:13; Mark 11:1 - 13:37; Luke 19:29 - 21:38; John 12:12-50
- 38 Matthew 25:14 - 26:75; Mark 13:37 - 14:72; Luke 22:1-62; John 13:1 - 18:27
- 39 Matt. 27:1 - 28:20; Mark 15:1 - 16:20; Luke 22:66;24:53; John 18:28 - 21:25
- 40 Acts 1 - 9
- 41 Acts 10 - 17
- 42 Acts 18 - 28
- 43 General Epistles
- 44 James
- 45 I & II Peter
- 46 I, II, III John & Jude
- 47 Major Prophets - Introduction
- 48 Isaiah 1 - 14
- 49 Isaiah 15 - 35
- 50 Isaiah 36 - 49
- 51 Isaiah 50 - 66
- 52 Jeremiah 1 - 15
- 53 Jeremiah 16 - 34
- 54 Jeremiah 35 - 52
- 55 Ezekiel 1 - 16
- 56 Ezekiel 17 - 32
- 57 Ezekiel 33 - 48
- 58 Background - Apostle Paul
- 59 I & II Thessalonians
- 60 Galatians
- 61 I Corinthians
- 62 II Corinthians
- 63 Romans
- 64 Colossians & Philemon
- 65 Ephesians & Philippians
- 66 Hebrews
- 67 I Timothy & Titus
- 68 II Timothy
- 69 Battle Against First Century Heresies
- 70 Minor Prophets - Introduction
- 71 Hosea & Joel
- 72 Amos, Obediah, and Jonah
- 73 Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and
- 74 Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi
- 75 The Writings - Introduction
- 76 Psalms 1 - 41
- 77 Psalms 42 - 72
- 78 Psalms 73 - 89
- 79 Psalms 90 - 106
- 80 Psalms 107 - 150
- 81 Proverbs 1 - 9
- 82 Proverbs 10 - 22:16
- 83 Proverbs 22:17 - 31:31
- 84 Job
- 85 Song of Solomon
- 86 Ruth
- 87 Lamentations
- 88 Ecclesiastes
- 89 Esther
- 90 Daniel Part One
- 91 Daniel Part Two
- 92 Ezra, Nehemiah and I & II Chron.
- 93 Revelation - Introduction
- 94 Revelation 1 - 3
- 95 Revelation 4 - 6
- 96 Revelation 7 - 10
- 97 Revelation 11 - 13
- 98 Revelation 14 - 18
- 99 Revelation 19 - 22
- 100 Questions & Answers

Bible Study # 29
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The Gospels and Acts Series—Introduction to the Survey of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

This evening we will get into a brand new series. We have been in the Old Testament for quite a while. We have gone through a historical overview of the Old Testament and focused in on the historical flow going through the historical books of the Old Testament. We will, at later times, come back and pick up the books that we did not cover going through this survey of the Old Testament. Last Bible study we came up to the time between the Testaments.

This evening we are going to start in the New Testament, and we **are going to begin a new series—a survey of the Gospels and Acts**. This is a 14-part series that will take us through the four Gospels and Acts. As we go through the four Gospels, we **are going to go through them in a harmonized fashion**. In other words, we are not going to go through the Gospel accounts one at a time, but rather we are going to go through the account and get the story flow.

On the study questions, you will be directed as to what portions or verses in each book we will be going through and where the questions are derived from. As we go through the story, it will give you a kind of a historical flow to focus in on the Gospel accounts. We will follow it up with the book of Acts, which really follows the sequence.

The material that we have gone through prior to now really sets the stage for what we will get into this evening because ultimately the whole Bible focuses on, centers on, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the One who was promised, the Savior of the world, the One who is ultimately to return as Lord of lords and King of kings. The entire Bible focuses in on Him, whether looking forward or looking back in retrospect.

We went through a series of Bible studies on the canonization of the Bible, and one of the things that we noted was the way that the Jews count the books. They count the books as being 22 books in the Old Testament, and when you look at the New Testament, there are 27. It's interesting. If you take the four Gospels and Acts—five books—you have 22 on each side: 22 books of the Old Testament and 22 books of the New Testament that come after the Gospels and Acts. If you were looking at it like a seesaw or something balanced, you have the center, the

heart and core with everything balanced on either side. The center is Jesus Christ: the story of Jesus Christ and His personal ministry, and the extension of that, as He worked through the apostles as reported in the Acts of the apostles.

Let's look into the way in which the world was prepared for the introduction of Jesus Christ, for the coming of the Messiah. God knows where He is going and He knows what He is doing. God made sure that the world was prepared for the coming of Jesus Christ and for the message that He brought.

Let's look at five specific ways in which God ensured the world was prepared, to set the stage, for the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the New Testament Church.

(1) The first way in which God saw that the world was prepared for the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the New Testament Church was what is called the "Diaspora" or the dispersion, the scattering of the Jews over the known world. The scattering over the whole known world was vital to the preparation of the establishment of the New Testament Church. Wherever the Jews went, copies of the Scriptures and knowledge of God's law also went. In the areas they settled, synagogues were established, and after a period of time, even many of the Gentiles were exposed to the teaching of the Bible.

God knows where He is going before He ever gets started. God had a plan and a purpose.

Revelation 13:8, "...the Lamb of God [Jesus Christ] was slain from the foundation of the world." In other words, from the time that God began His plan for man, He had in mind a plan that certainly included the need for a Savior. God foresaw these things. God's whole plan outlined in the Holy Days was thought out. God didn't set about building things by starting out by just kind of stumbling through.

Galatians 4:4, God knew that Jesus Christ was going to come, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law." He knew when, just as God knows now.

Acts 1:7, Jesus said, "...It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." God knows the second coming and the first coming. God set the stage.

One of the things he allowed to happen was the dispersion of the Jews. When the Babylonians (Nebuchadnezzar) took the Jews captive, there began a scattering and a settling of the Jews in various areas. The bulk of the Jews were in Babylon, but afterward, particularly with

Alexander the Great and the time after that, the Jews scattered. Most of the Jews never came back to Judea. Some came back under Zerubbabel, and others came back under Ezra and Nehemiah. There were groups of Jews and colonies of Jews that returned, but most of the Jews never returned to Judea. Just as today, most of the Jews do not live in the land of Israel. The Jews dispersed and settled in groups in various cities.

Over a period of several hundred years, particularly from the time of Alexander the Great on to about a 300-year period, there came to be sizable Jewish communities in virtually all the major cities in the Roman world. Now where there was a Jewish community, there was a synagogue. Where there was a synagogue, there was a copy of the Scriptures—there was a scroll of the Scriptures.

We take for granted the availability of the Bible, but you have to realize in that day the only copies of the Book that existed were handwritten copies. Therefore, you didn't have a lot of copies. There now were, in major cities, copies of the Scriptures; there came to be certain knowledge of this people, of their religion, of their God and things that they did. This scattering served as the basis later on when the New Testament Church was going to be built.

Where did the Apostle Paul go when he went into the cities of the Gentile world? Where did he start out? He always went into the synagogue and preached there first. That way the nucleus of the Church was people that knew the law; they were familiar with the Sabbath and were familiar with the Bible.

The first converts in any of the Gentile areas were Jews and Gentiles who attended synagogue services, so-called proselytes, Gentiles impressed with the Jewish religion. The nucleus was people who knew and understood the law and had access to the Scriptures. Then as others who came from a totally pagan background came to be converted, there were others in the Church who already had a certain understanding of the law. It was the logical way to build something. This scattering of the Jews was something important. This Diaspora was one of the ways in which the world was prepared for the introduction of the Messiah and His message.

(2) The Greek language was virtually a universal language at this time due to Alexander's conquests. Because of the Greek emphasis on education, literacy reached a high point for the ancient world. There were more people who could read and write in the Roman world at this

time than was the case for many centuries thereafter.

When you go through the Middle Ages, it got down to a point where very few people could read. The average person couldn't read or write. In fact, you don't have to go back very long ago in our time that there were many people who could not read or write at all. If they could, it was in a very limited fashion. That was very common. You don't have to go back very far where educational opportunities were not available even in this country. You go back in the 1800s and most people simply could not read or write.

The Greek period of time was really the high point of literacy in the period of ancient history. The Greeks placed a lot of emphasis on education. Obviously, there were a lot of wrong ideas that were a part of Greek education, but they did value education.

The Greek language had spread very widely because of Alexander's conquests. It was a second language in almost any of these countries. What did that mean? What was the value of that? What it meant was that most people at this time could read and write. The Scriptures were more accessible to them. They were able to read Paul's letters and the letters that the other apostles wrote, letters that make up much of our New Testament.

Much of our New Testament was letters that were sent out. What good is a letter if nobody can read it? So, it was necessary for people to be able to read. God ensured that there was this spread of the Greek language. In what language were they going to be written? They were written in the Greek language. They wrote letters to places that weren't in Greece. Paul could write to the Romans in Italy and he could write in Greek. James could write to the 12 tribes scattered abroad and he could write in Greek. You could have letters written to churches in widely scattered areas; they could be written in Greek, and people could understand it. It may not have been their first language, but Greek was a language that most people who had an education could read and write. It provided an almost universal language; you had a degree of literacy that enabled people to utilize the Bible.

(3) A third way in which the world was prepared was the relative peace and stability which the Roman Empire provided along with a system of Roman roads which facilitated travel. This opened a way for the proclamation of the Gospel over a wide area. In most periods of history, you had all these little nations, little kingdoms, and

they were all fighting one another. You couldn't go from one place to another, without somebody knocking you in the head, killing you and stealing what you had. How were you going to get there?

You don't have to go back very far in the history of this country when roads were few and far between. In 1928, when Huey Long came in as governor of Louisiana, there were less than 100 miles of paved roads in the state.

The Romans built thousands of miles of paved roads in the Roman Empire. Not graveled roads, we are talking about paving. The Romans built roads that were so substantial that there are Roman roads that are still in use today. You have places in Spain and in Italy where they are still using roads that the Romans built. The Romans were tremendous engineers. They put curbs and drains on these roads; they got the pitch as to the elevation of the road where the rain would shed. They came in and dug down, cleared it away, tamped the earth, and put in crushed rock. They built right on up to where on top was paving stone—and there were thousands of miles of that. In fact, you could travel in the whole Roman Empire.

The speed with which you could travel from one area to another was not duplicated again until after the middle of the 1800s. Julius Caesar could travel on Roman roads from a city in Switzerland to Rome in four days. They even had way stations along the way. Every 20 miles you could change horses for official Roman business; you could go at full horse speed on a good paved road for carriages and chariots. There were mileage posts all over the Empire. There are a few you can still find. There is an old saying, "all roads lead to Rome." They literally had the best system of roads that existed until you get into the 20th century.

What does that mean? The Romans thought they were doing that to move their armies. But how do you think the apostles were able to travel and go from one end of the Empire to the other—all the way from Britain, through France, Spain, Italy, across through Greece and Asia Minor, and on into the Middle East, down into Egypt and as far as Babylon—over a vast area. Because you had the Roman Empire, you didn't need passports or papers. The Romans ruled with an iron hand. It was safe to travel because the Romans policed it. Roman garrisons were all along the way so you could safely travel all over Europe and the Middle East and as far as India. There was Roman law. Paul was a

Roman citizen; wherever he went, that Roman citizenship was good and it was recognized.

Roman roads made it possible not only to travel, but you had mail service. This facilitated communication as much as what could have been done prior to the invention of modern electronic technology, steam engines and things of that sort. You would have to come all the way to the middle of the 1800s before you could even begin to duplicate it. In terms of the roads, you really didn't have the equivalent until this century.

The Romans were builders. They were engineers. The Roman Empire set the stage. It provided a period of relative peace and stability. It centered at the time of the first century, the time when things were at their height. The first two-thirds of the first century was a time when the Church was growing, when there was a need—and here it was—a situation that wasn't duplicated until our time.

(4) A fourth way in which the world was prepared for the coming of the Messiah and His message was the fact that the bankrupt pagan mythology of the Gentile world had ceased to be strongly believed, particularly by those with any degree of education. The mystery religions of the East were gaining prominence in the areas of Greece and Rome, as well as more traditional areas of Babylon. The point is that many people had ceased to be satisfied with what traditional religions had to offer.

We have all heard of the old pagan mythology. Maybe in school you had to study about Greek or Roman mythology. You've heard about Zeus, Athena, Mars, all the Greek gods or the Roman gods and all the various things. What you come up to is, by this point in history, most educated people had ceased to believe mythology as being real. They still told the old stories and went through a lot of the ceremonies, but it was obvious that this really did not answer the questions that people wondered about. It was bankrupt. Pagan mythology had simply ceased to provide the answers people were looking for.

It was a time of great religious turmoil. Many of the so-called mystery religions of the East had begun to spread. People were searching. They had ceased to be satisfied with what traditional religion offered. So, it set the stage. At a time when people were questioning, there was certain curiosity.

(5) Because of at least a limited understanding of Daniel's 70-week prophecy given in Daniel 9:24, many of the Jewish religious leaders were expecting the Messiah in that generation. Many Jews were restive because of their subservient

status to the Romans and eagerly anticipated the coming of the Messiah who would free them from the yoke of foreign domination. This was what the Jews were looking at. They looked at all of the prophecies in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and Zechariah, and they said, 'When the Messiah comes, He is going to run out the Romans.' They liked that idea.

The Romans may have built roads and policed the areas, but they were foreigners, and in many ways, harsh taskmasters. They allowed a certain level of freedom on the local scene, but they didn't allow independence. That was very important to the Jews. They were expecting the Messiah, but they were expecting Him to come and take action when He came—as far as overthrowing the Romans. The Jews were expecting something in that generation.

Daniel had made a prophecy of 70 weeks to be determined. He talked about 62 weeks plus seven weeks from the time that the decree to rebuild Jerusalem went forth. From this decree issued by Artaxerxes in 457 B.C., there would be 69 weeks until the Messiah, the Prince, would come. Sixty-nine weeks equal 483 days or 483 years (a day for a year). If you move forward from 457 B.C. 483 years, you come to 27 A.D.

The Jews did not fully understand what all that portended, but it was obvious that something was going to happen right around that time. Jesus began His public ministry in 27 A.D. That's when He made His public appearance as the Messiah. We would date the prophecy to begin at the time that Jesus made His appearance and was baptized by John the Baptist. Then the final 70th week was His ministry. He was cut off in the midst of the week, three and one-half days or three and one-half years. He was literally cut off in the midst of the week because He was crucified on a Wednesday. He was cut off in the middle of a prophetic week in that His ministry, instead of lasting seven years, it only lasted three and one-half years. This means that there are three and one-half years left which will undoubtedly be the first three and one-half years of the Millennium when He will conclude His ministry to Israel and will set the stage to expand out into the world.

The Jews had a certain limited understanding of that. That's why Herod quizzed the wise men (Matthew 2). The Magi came, and Herod wanted to know where the Messiah was going to be born, the One who was going to be King of the Jews. Herod, of course, thought that *he* was king. It kind of disconcerted him when he found out someone else was going to be king. Here are

these guys that had come all the way from the East, probably from the Parthian Empire. They had made this journey, coming here looking for somebody, and they weren't looking for Herod. That made him a little nervous. He called the Jewish religious leaders and wanted to know some answers; they were able to tell him that there was a certain expectation that they had around that time. God had set the stage for the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the New Testament Church.

We look at the Gospels and there are four of them. Have you ever asked yourself why? Why four? You have Matthew. Why do you need Mark, Luke and John? Why are there four Gospels? Are they identical? Do they all say the same thing? If they don't, why don't they? Why do some have certain information and others have other information?

The four Gospels are the account of Jesus Christ's life and His ministry. We have four distinct accounts. There is a purpose and logic as to why it was handled the way in which it was. The Gospel accounts take their name from their authors. Matthew wrote Matthew, etc.—that's pretty obvious. Now who were these four individuals? Mark and Luke weren't apostles. Matthew and John were of the twelve. Where did they come in? Why were they the ones?

Matthew was one of the original 12 apostles. He was also called Levi; he was probably of the tribe of Levi. He was an educated Jew from Palestine, a Roman tax collector, obviously an educated man. This was a position that demanded a certain amount of education. Because of his occupation, he would have been very unpopular with people. Tax collectors aren't really popular today; they were less popular then. Back then they didn't get a salary; it was a commission job. You got a percentage of the take, which gave you a lot of incentive to be kind of strong on tax collecting. The Romans didn't care as long as they got theirs. Matthew left this job and accepted the opportunity to be one of the 12 apostles.

His Gospel was the earliest written, about 45-50 A.D. It was evidently the only one of the Gospels to have been written originally in a language other than Greek. *Matthew was probably originally written in Hebrew with a Greek translation. It was written primarily for use in Palestine among the Jews there in Judea.* The copies that have come down to today were written in Greek—undoubtedly, translated into Greek by Matthew himself. It was written in Hebrew for a Hebrew audience. It was written

for the Jewish audience there in Judea, with a translation made so it could be utilized outside the area of Judea.

Matthew, in many ways, is the Jewish Gospel. It deals with the King and the Kingdom. The term “Kingdom of heaven” is used in the book of Matthew 33 times. Have you ever wondered why Matthew talks about the Kingdom of heaven, and Mark, Luke and John talk about the Kingdom of God? There is a reason.

The Jews had developed such a consciousness of keeping God’s law during this time between the Testaments, particularly after the Maccabees revolt and the time the Pharisees came to the fore. The idea was to put a hedge about the law to make sure nobody even got close to breaking the law. They developed an almost superstitious type of awe and respect for God’s name; they wanted to make sure they didn’t use the name of God in vain. So, the way to not use God’s name in vain was to not use God’s name. They got to where they would not pronounce the name of God.

Anywhere you see in the King James Version of the Bible the name “LORD” in all capitals or “GOD” in all capitals, it is translated from the original Hebrew “YHVH.” Hebrew is basically written with just the consonants and not the vowels. We are not entirely sure of how to pronounce it. The reason we are not sure how to pronounce it is that the Jews quit pronouncing it. Whenever they would read the Scriptures orally, every time they would come to that name, they would substitute the word “Adoni,” which is the Hebrew word for Lord. They used it as a euphemism for God’s name, just as a title of respect.

Even today, a Jew, instead of saying, “Praise be to God” or something of that nature, he would use the Hebrew phrase “Barach Hasheem,” which simply means “Blessed be the Name.” They wouldn’t pronounce the name; they would say, “Blessed be the Name.” The Jews did not use the term “Kingdom of God”; they used the term “Kingdom of heaven” as a euphemism. It was the Kingdom of God ruled from heaven, so came the common term among the Jews. When the Jews discussed the Kingdom, they always used the term “Kingdom of heaven.” That is why they always used it. When Matthew wrote a Gospel to the Jews, he used the terminology that was common. That was what the Jews in Judea used. That was the term they used and that was why they used it.

So, you find throughout the book of Matthew, written for the Jews in Judea, the use of the term

“Kingdom of heaven” where other Gospels were written to a wider audience. They were written to areas outside of Judea, and they used the term that was the most commonly used term. There is nothing wrong with the term “Kingdom of God.” In fact, Mark, Luke and John all use it. Matthew simply used the term that the Jews were accustomed to using. “Kingdom of heaven” is used 33 times in Matthew out of regard for Jewish sensibilities. The Jews normally referred to the term “Kingdom of heaven” rather than “Kingdom of God.”

Matthew introduces Jesus Christ as the son of David. He quotes His legal genealogy through Joseph. When Matthew gives the genealogy, he gives the legal genealogy and traces it back to David and to Abraham. Matthew traces the genealogy back no further than Abraham because to Abraham were the promises made, and the promise of the scepter confirmed through David. Matthew has no need to trace it back further than that, but he does trace it back that way to accentuate the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of David.

Matthew quotes the Old Testament 65 times. There are 65 Old Testament quotations in Matthew—just chock-full—because it was written to people who were very familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures.

The terms “righteous” and “righteousness” are used more often in Matthew than in the other three Gospels put together.

Matthew alone tells of the Jews’ request that Christ’s blood be upon their heads. Remember that? Pilate was getting ready to wash his hands and he said, ‘Look, He is innocent; I don’t want this righteous man’s blood be upon me.’ And the mob said, ‘His blood be upon us.’ Matthew records that. He’s the only one that did, but he was writing to them and wanted to make sure that they understood the enormity of what they had said. He mentions that specifically.

Matthew was the only account that tells of the sealing of the stone when Christ was crucified—the sealing of the stone, the setting of the guard and the fabrication of the story that the disciples came and stole the body while the guard slept. Matthew mentioned that because he was writing to an audience that was familiar with the story. That was a story that had been widely circulated.

The Pharisees wanted a sign that He was the Messiah. Jesus told them the only sign He would give them was that He would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. That was a sign; in a unique way, it was a sign to the

Pharisees, the Jewish religious leadership. You know why it was such a special sign to them? Because when Jesus was buried, they went to Pilate and said, 'Look, this deceiver (KJV, "schemer") has said He is going to rise from the dead. You know what's going to happen, Governor? His disciples are going to come and steal the body and carry it away. They are going to tell the story that He rose from the dead, and we are going to have more trouble than we have now. What we want you to do is to set a guard on the tomb and we are going to seal it.'

What is meant that they sealed it? It is like an official document that is sealed. The Post Office puts a seal on registered mail; if you open the letter, it will be apparent because you have broken the seal and it will show. That's what they did at the tomb. They rolled this big flat stone there in the front and placed the Governor's seal there; if anybody came in and moved it, it would be apparent that they moved it. They placed a guard there to make sure nobody did. And you know what happened? He rose anyway. He was gone.

Who knew for a fact that the disciples didn't come and steal Him away? Well, the guard and the Pharisees knew it. The Jewish religious leaders knew it because they told the guard to tell the story that he went to sleep, and the disciples came and stole the body while he was asleep. If the Governor heard the story, the leaders would make sure he didn't get in trouble with him.

They bribed the guard. Now if you bribe somebody to tell a story, who knows if they are telling a story? The guy that paid the bribe and the guy who took the bribe, those are the two that know. The people that hear it may not know, but if I bribe you to do something, there are two of us that know that you aren't telling the truth—you and me.

Christ being in the tomb three days and three nights was, specifically, very uniquely a sign to the Jewish religious leadership because they knew the truth. They had the evidence and they had fabricated this story. Matthew told that. His is the only one of the Gospel accounts that mentions it because he is writing to the audience of people who had firsthand knowledge and memory. Matthew was writing within 15 years after Christ's crucifixion and ascension.

Remember 1974? You remember events that happened then? Sure you do. That's not that long ago. It would be very difficult to falsify something like that because you have too many people who are alive who have firsthand knowledge and memory. He gives some of these

specific details that have specific relevance to his audience.

He is the only one who mentioned the fact that when Christ rose from the dead, many of the saints who had died and were buried also rose. There were a number of people who had died prior to Christ's death who were resurrected. Some had been dead for hundreds of years and some who recently had died. If you attended a guy's funeral last month, you saw him dead in the coffin. All of a sudden, the guy comes walking up. When they pick you up off the floor and kind of revive you, you realize something unusual has happened. This was not the normal course of events. These were the saints. It was a witness to the resurrection.

It had happened 15 years earlier; the story on that was still circulating around. People had heard about some of these things. Matthew gives the details. These were incidents that would have had particular interest and benefit to Jewish readers there in Judea. Matthew gives those things.

Matthew chapters 1—4 are basically chronological chapters.

Matthew chapters 5—13 are topical. In other words, Matthew deals with what Christ said on a subject. He may introduce what Christ said. He is going alone telling the story. For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, he gives what Christ said, not only at that moment, but the other things Christ said on that subject are put in at that time. These are topical. They may have a general chronological flow, but they are topical. When he dealt with a subject, he told you what Christ said on that subject, even though He may have said part of it in the story flow and part of it six months later, etc. Matthew kind of gives you what He said on a subject.

Matthew 5, 6 and 7 give greater details. This had particular significance for a Jewish audience because this was Jesus Christ in the role of Lawgiver. Remember the scripture we focused on back in the early part of the Bible study?

Deuteronomy 18:15, the canonization was when Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, ..." —One who will give law.

Deuteronomy 34:10, then at the end of Deuteronomy we are told, "But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, ..." We are told that no prophet like Moses has arisen. The Old Testament concluded as Ezra and the scribes working with him provided and gave the final copies of the Old Testament and

put it in final form. They could state that “the Prophet like Moses had not yet arisen.”

Matthew points out who that prophet like Moses was. Jesus Christ came as a lawgiver, and in the Sermon on the Mount, He is giving law. Over and over again He said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not do this, etc...but I say to you.” He modified. He changed. He gave law. Matthew gives greater details and focuses on the Olivette Prophecy which had specific relevance.

Matthew chapters 14—28 are again chronological. Matthew gives the most detailed account of Christ’s teaching on the Mount and of the Olivette Prophecy in Matthew 24.

Mark’s Gospel, primarily, represents Peter’s account. Mark was Peter’s companion, disciple and his assistant. All ancient tradition treats the Gospel of Mark as Peter’s account. John Mark, who was the author of Mark, was a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). He was from Jerusalem. His mother Mary lived in Jerusalem, and her house was used as a meeting place for the Church (Acts 12:12). Tradition states that the upper guest room, at which Christ and the 12 apostles held the Passover, was located in that house, in John Mark’s mother’s house.

He was a teenage boy at the time. This certainly fits with the evidence that Mark, himself, was the young teenager who fled naked from the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:51-52). It mentions the account of the young boy who was there in the house. He heard Christ and the disciples leave after the Passover service, and he wanted to go out and see what was going on. He just wrapped a sheet around himself and sneaked out of the house to follow them. He got out there trying to see where the action was and he saw the action, all right! Here came the Romans, and he saw all that happen. All of a sudden, one of the soldiers looked over there in the bushes and saw this person crouching down. They grabbed for him. When they grabbed the sheet, he turned loose of it and took off running, which was a smart thing to do, but rather embarrassing. When he told the story in the book of Mark, he told the story, but he left out his name. That’s a firsthand account that basically only the author would know.

He had certain firsthand impressions, but they were the impressions of a young boy, of a teenager. It’s interesting that in *Mark’s account*, the stress is continually on what Christ did, more than on what He said. The miracles are stressed quite a bit in the book of Mark. These were things that certainly would have impressed a young person the most.

Mark was Peter’s traveling companion. Peter, in the latter period of his ministry, had his headquarters in Babylon, which was the capital of the Parthian Empire. It had a large Jewish community; a considerable portion of the remnants of the 12 tribes was in the area of the Parthian Empire—those that had not already migrated to Britain. Peter was in Jerusalem for perhaps the first 10 or 12 years of the New Testament period. But even prior to that time, he had begun to leave.

By the time you pick up the ministerial conference (Acts 15) in Jerusalem in 49 A.D., James was the chief apostle in Jerusalem. Peter came in and out, but he was not based in Jerusalem. By the early to mid-40s A.D., Peter had left Jerusalem and only returned periodically. He was primarily based in Babylon. This is where his epistles were written from.

1 Peter 5:13, he says, “She [the Church] who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son.” Babylon was the capital of the Parthian Empire. It had a very large Jewish community, and it was an area where there were many of the ten tribes that had not yet migrated from the Parthian Empire into Europe. Mark was there with Peter.

Mark’s Gospel was written at Peter’s direction. It was primarily written and circulated in the areas of Peter’s ministry. It was probably written about 60 A.D. The scope of Mark’s Gospel corresponds to that of Peter’s address at Caesarea, as recorded in Acts 10:34-43. The narrative abounds with details of time, place, circumstances and the feeling and manner of Jesus and the others mentioned. Greek scholars state that the language of Mark is “clean, vigorous, direct speech of the sturdy middle-class.” The style is very simple. The stately periods of the classics are wholly absent. The narrative is commonly terse and concise. The descriptions are wonderfully vivid.

Mark throughout portrays Jesus as the servant of the Lord. Much is said about the Servant (Isaiah 53). Go back and look at those prophecies. Mark is a Gospel of deeds. The word “*euthus*,” which is rendered “straightway” or “immediate,” is used 41 times in Mark—five times as many as are used by the other three writers put together. Mark’s entire Gospel is in chronological order and stresses action and deeds. It is the account that records the vivid impressions on a teenage boy with the details and general outline supplied by Peter. It was written primarily to circulate in the areas where Peter was preaching—the Israelite areas, the areas where there was a

Jewish community outside of Judea and the area where the 12 tribes were.

Luke, on the other hand, was Paul's traveling companion. Just as Mark was written at Peter's direction and utilized in the Churches where Peter was primarily ministering, Luke was Paul's traveling companion and represents Paul's account. It was written for circulation in the Greek speaking Gentile world to which Paul was commissioned to preach.

Luke was a highly educated Greek, probably from Antioch. He was a physician. *His account is written in the classical, historical style of the day. He refers to many historical illusions.* Luke is the one that tells you that Christ was born when Tiberius Caesar Augustus was emperor, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. He records those historical details written from the standpoint of a Greek historian. He is the one who gives the chronological details. Theophilus (Luke 1:3), who was a wealthy nobleman, must have played the part of patron and paid the cost of production of the Gospel because it is dedicated to him, as was standard practice in the classical Greek world. It was intended for the public, especially the Greek public. From the beginning it was written in that vein.

Luke stresses the humanity of Christ. He traces the genealogy all the way back from Mary to Adam. Matthew traces it back to Abraham and stops because as far as the Jews were concerned, that was as far as you needed to go. Luke traces it back to Adam, stressing that Jesus was the Son of man and the Promised Seed—the Seed that was promised to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15). Luke traces it back that way, going back to the common ancestry that everyone has. Luke emphasized that Christ was the Son of man as well as the Son of David.

Luke 2:10, he's the one who speaks of "...good tidings of great joy which will be to all people." Luke is the only one who mentions that. It is only in later retrospect of Paul's ministry that the full implications of that statement came to be understood. The good tidings, good news, were for all people, everybody regardless of ethnic origin.

Isaiah 52:10, Luke is the only one that quotes "...all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6). Luke emphasizes some of those things. In Luke, Christ is pictured as the Redeemer.

Luke was probably written during the time that Paul was in prison in Caesarea, which would put it about 58 A.D. It was written to circulate in those areas.

All of these three accounts, Matthew, Mark and Luke, were written within the first 30 years of the New Testament period. There was nothing written immediately because the 12 apostles were expecting the end at any moment. That was kind of the thinking—"any day now, any day."

Acts 1:6, when Christ got ready to ascend from the Mount of Olives, the disciples questioned, "...Lord will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" "Right now?" Undoubtedly, Peter was the one that asked the questions; he was never afraid to speak up.

They were expecting it at any moment, so there obviously wasn't any need to write a bunch of things down because they expected it was going to happen in just a few days or a few months. Some of the earliest converts liquidated property and pooled all their money together. Nobody wanted to leave Jerusalem and go back home because they just knew it was all going to come together quickly. But 12 to 15 years later, it was apparent that things were going to go on a little longer than what was anticipated. By this time you begin to have adults coming on the scene who really didn't have firsthand memory of those events, even in Judea. It began to be necessary, so Matthew wrote the first account.

At the time he wrote, the whole Church was primarily centered there in Judea. It had not really begun to spread outside Judea. The Church's decision on circumcision was not made until several years later, so the real mushrooming growth of the Church outside of Judea had not really occurred to speak of. Matthew's account was needed in Judea because the account was written from a Jewish viewpoint by a Jew living in Judea.

But as the Church grew and growth mushroomed, Peter was in Babylon ministering over a wide area with the 12 apostles under his direction. Paul was traveling throughout the Gentile areas. As things progressed, perhaps 12 to 15 years after Matthew had written his Gospel, there became greater need. Paul and Peter each had one produced under their direction that stressed details that were important to be understood by the people to whom they were ministering. They wrote Gospels that stressed things that they felt needed to be stressed in their areas. Then by the time we come to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., three of the Gospels existed—Matthew, Mark and Luke.

The Gospel of **John** was the last written. It was written almost 30 years after all of the apostles were dead. John wrote in the late 90s

A.D. John's perspective was quite different. At the time Peter, Paul, Matthew and the others were doing what they were doing, Jerusalem hadn't been destroyed. The Church was centered in Judea and the Jewish element clearly predominated. The questions involved questions of the law.

By the time John wrote in the late 90s, the Jerusalem Church had fled Jerusalem. It was destroyed, and the Jews were scattered. All of the original apostles were dead. There were heresies coming into the Gentile world. John had totally different things to address. Questions had arisen that simply never had even been an issue 40 to 55 years before when the others were writing. John was written much later.

John closed the canonization of the New Testament by adding his own five books to the 22 that had previously been canonized by Peter. We noticed that when we went through how the New Testament came together in the Proof of the Bible series. John wrote one more Gospel account in order to meet certain needs of the time. There were certain problems that were engendered by Simon Magus and the Gnostic heresies that were sweeping the Church at that time. John's epistles and his Gospel were written to meet this necessity. *John emphasizes the divine nature of Jesus Christ. He emphasizes the teaching of Christ, particularly in regard to the Holy Days.*

It's interesting. John doesn't start out by giving you the genealogy from Abraham or from Adam.

John 1:1-3, John starts out, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." John starts out by going back to the very beginning showing that the One that we know as Jesus Christ was from the beginning—He was God. Because there were problems around that time and that was not something clearly understood, many of the heretics were teaching all kinds of crazy ideas. John dealt with some of those things.

If you go through the book of John, nearly the whole book of John centers around what Jesus said and did in seven Festival seasons. We could go through a sermon sometime just showing you how we can find several Passovers, Feast of Trumpets, Feast of Tabernacles, the Last Great Day, Pentecost, as well as some Unleavened Bread seasons.

John does not give the same information the others gave. There was no need to go back through and retell it. He skips the Sermon on the Mount and the Olivette Prophecy; there was no need to give that information. Matthew had given it in detail. Mark and Luke had added the details of any clarification that was needed in addition to Matthew. John didn't need to give that. He focused in on what Christ said, did and taught in the context of the Holy Days and the Festivals.

John uses the expression over and over again, the "Feast of the Jews." He emphasizes the fact that Jesus observed the same days the Jews observed because by this time, the Holy Days were coming to be questioned. In some of the Gentile areas, they were trying to downplay the necessity of keeping the Festivals. John emphasized over and over that Jesus kept them. John is the only one who gives a detailed account of the teaching of Christ to the apostles on the night of the final Passover. The others describe in detail the physical actions that took place. John describes what Jesus said. He doesn't go into detail about the bread and the wine—Matthew, Mark and Luke had already given that—but John gives you in detail what Jesus said.

John wrote from Ephesus in the 90s A.D. He was writing to the whole Church. He emphasized deep spiritual things. John was an elderly man, probably around 90 years of age when he wrote this—comparable age to Mr. Herbert Armstrong in the last years of his life. Mr. Armstrong also wrote with an emphasis on very deep spiritual things.

I mentioned the Holy Days. Just to give you an idea: John 2—3 relate to the Passover; John 4 to Pentecost; John 5 to the Fall Festivals, particularly Trumpets; John 6 to Passover and Unleavened Bread; John 7:1-36 relates to the Feast of Tabernacles; John 7:37 through chapter 10 relates to Christ's teaching on the Last Great Day; and John 11—19 focus on Christ's final Passover. As you go through, you have this outline.

John emphasizes the things that Christ taught. He gives us the message that Christ gave on the various Festival seasons so that we might have a deeper understanding of the New Testament implications of these days. John recorded Christ's teaching on these occasions. It was something skipped over by the others, but it was an issue by the time that John wrote.

We have what each one adds in. God used different men writing from different backgrounds, different perspectives, writing to

different audiences at different times over the period of about a generation to record the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Each one adds in details. Because of circumstances, they emphasized certain details in different ways so we are able to have an overview and a balanced picture. No one Gospel, while it contains a tremendous amount of useful and necessary information, gives as balanced a picture as all four taken together. I hope that we can gain a little bit of insight as to why there are these four.

We are going to begin going through the Gospel accounts. Matthew will be the one that we will perhaps refer to quite a bit for the story flow and some of the details he adds in. But we are going to go through everything in all of them. We are going to go through *in survey fashion*. You will notice on the study questions that I give you the verses from each book, so you won't need a harmony of the Gospels, per se. If you have one, fine. This will take you through step by step and will point out the scriptures that overlap. We will start going through that next time.

To give you an idea of what we will cover, we will cover the beginning portion, the equivalent of the first four chapters of Matthew. In other words, we will cover from His birth up to prior to the Sermon on the Mount. Then following that, we will cover the time period from the time of the Sermon on the Mount through Passover 29 A.D., covering about a year of Christ's ministry. Christ's ministry stretched from the fall of 27 A.D. to the spring—Passover 31 A.D.

Next Bible study will basically cover from Christ's birth up through the first six months of His ministry, which would bring us to Passover of 28 A.D. Then in the second series we will cover the next year, from Passover 28 A.D. to Passover 29 A.D., which will be basically the equivalent of Matthew 4—9. As you begin to get into the latter part of Christ's life, we begin to get more and more details, so we will begin to go a little more slowly. I think it will be helpful to go through and get a little bit of an overview, step by step, of the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ stretching on into the ministry of the New Testament Church.

[Editorial Comment: Both the *New King James Bible* (NKJV) and *A Harmony of the Gospels in Modern English* (MEV, 2nd Edition) are used in the Gospels Series unless otherwise indicated.]

Bible Study # 30
January 24, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Matthew 1—4:11;
Mark 1:1-13; Luke 1—4:13; John 1—2:12
(Chart at end)

The Bible study material we **are focusing on this evening is the events surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ and immediately thereafter.** The events that surround the birth of Christ are often read over and not properly understood.

To begin with, God prophesied many of the details of the coming of the Messiah centuries before—details involving time and place. God brought about these events, right on down to moving the Gentile king Caesar Augustus to institute a special taxing system so as to bring Joseph and Mary to the right place at the right time.

Think about that for a little bit. Caesar didn't know why he got this brainstorm as a new way of taxing people. All he knew was kind of like "a little bird" told him something. An idea popped into his head, 'You know what I could do? I'll bet there are people who are evading taxes. We need to crack down on taxes. What we need is this system where we make everybody go to their home city, the city to which their particular clan is attached. We will take a census, and in the process of this census, we will tax everyone.'

Generally, one of the main reasons for taking a census is to see that nobody evades their taxes. Caesar Augustus came up with this great idea at this particular time. He may have thought it was just to raise more money, but in reality, God stirred him up to do that to make sure that Joseph and Mary were at the right place at the right time. God worked through circumstances to bring about fulfillment of the prophecies that prophesied that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

The birth of the Messiah—think about the way that Christ's birth was announced. To begin with, the angels announced the birth to shepherds in a distant field. The result was that these shepherds journeyed into Bethlehem looking for the newborn Messiah. What do you think they did? They were stopping people all along the way and inquiring where they could find the newborn Messiah. You better believe this set the whole city of Bethlehem astir. Everything was in an uproar because of these shepherds. The angels

didn't tell them exactly where it was; they had to hunt through the city, which means you get the whole city abuzz. Within the next couple of days, they probably had Jerusalem "abuzz," too.

I might mention in terms of the "manger"—most people misunderstand and the traditional pictures are generally incorrect. There have been a number of recent things that have shown, from archeology and archeological excavations, the way that houses were commonly constructed. It shows that the common way of construction involved the use of a big room and stalls for animals off this room. The barn and the house were, in that sense, built together, but not in the sense that the animals wandered through the living quarters of the people.

I have some pictures from a recent article in *Biblical Archeological Review* showing some things that they had excavated. It was a fairly compact arrangement where the center structure was the main room, the main courtyard. Approximately where the beams are, there would be several pillars and there would be an upstairs. It was kind of an enclosed courtyard area down there where cooking fires would be and various things of this sort. Over in the courtyard where the pillars came up, a low wall—kind of a half wall—would be divided into stalls for animals. Generally, they would have cobblestones in there with cracks between them where the stalls could be washed down. The floor of the main courtyard would be clay. It was tamped down until it was solid, but it was basically a dirt floor. Then there would be stairs leading up to a second floor where there would be bedrooms over the stalls. In the winter when they would bring the animals in, the animals would be in their stalls that were divided off from the rest of the house. That served to actually provide heat for the house because it was closed in, and the animals were down there.

If you have ever been in a barn and there were cows in several of these stalls, you would realize what an amount of body heat they could give off in this small confined space. The heat would tend to rise, and that had a very heat-conserving effect for the bedrooms that were on the upper story. This is still done in the Middle East and portions of Europe where the houses and the barns are kind of built together. Most of the living quarters are upstairs, and they keep the animals downstairs. During the summer and most of the spring and fall, the areas where the animals were kept during the winter are cleaned out and are pretty well empty. They may put the animals in

part of the time or bring them in to milk, but generally they are just kept there during the winter or when they needed to be fed.

It was a time when the animals were still abiding in the fields. Even by night they were not being brought in. This was a time when Bethlehem was heavily crowded and, as a result of that, these stalls in the lower part of the house were rented out to handle this great influx of people. Since the inns had been over crowded, private individuals were renting out a room or a place in their homes. This area downstairs which is attached to the dwelling (where the animals would have been kept in the winter) was part of what was being rented out. That, undoubtedly, was where Christ was born—in one of those stalls.

In Luke 2:8-18, the shepherds coming in and inquiring over the city ensured that the news was going to spread like wildfire among the common people of Bethlehem. A little while later, maybe a month or six weeks later, wise men from the East came. They came before Herod inquiring about the birth of the Messiah. Herod summoned the whole Sanhedrin (Matthew 2). He was all upset. He didn't know what was going on; he demanded of them where the Messiah would be born, and they had to give testimony. The witness from the wise men, the Magi, was an announcement to the officials of the Jewish nation. The very top officials, the whole Sanhedrin and the Roman appointed king had a witness that the Messiah was born. The Sanhedrin had to acknowledge where.

Matthew 15:24, notice, "But He answered and said, 'I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'" If you note here, this is the story of the Canaanite woman who came and wanted Christ to heal her daughter. Christ had not come to deal with the world as a whole. He said, 'I am not come to deal with the world as a whole. I am not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' That certainly included the Jews. His ministry for those three and one-half years was primarily to the Jews.

What about the other ten tribes? They are the lost sheep of the house of Israel. How did they become aware of the birth of their Messiah? They did and there is a clear answer on that. Matthew talked about these wise men from the East. The East, as spoken of by Matthew, refers to the area east of the Euphrates River, which was ruled by the Parthian Empire in the last century. It was on the border of the Roman Empire. The lost ten tribes, the Israelites, were

the rulers of the Parthian Empire, which had risen to power about two centuries earlier. The Magi were the leading wise men and counselors of the king. They saw a star and followed it (as prophesied in Numbers 24:17) until coming to Jerusalem. Because of their prominence, they had no trouble coming before King Herod and giving a witness to him and to the Jewish religious leaders. After their return to Parthia, it served as a witness to the ten tribes.

It is interesting that in the tradition of the Eastern churches there were 12 Magi. The tradition of three, as we know it, originated in Rome, but ancient tradition and all Eastern tradition hold that there were 12—one from each of the tribes of Israel. These wise men came to do homage to the Messiah on behalf of the ten tribes in exile and to serve as a witness to the religious leaders of the Jewish nation, as well as the Roman government of Judea. God set the stage for the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom by evidencing that the Messiah had truly arrived.

This was added to by the testimony of elderly Simeon and elderly Anna in the temple. Remember the story when Jesus was brought to the temple to be presented to God? This was 40 days after His birth according to the laws of purification as brought out in Leviticus 12.

Luke 2:25-32, we are told at this point, "And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the Law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.'"

You can imagine a crowd gathered around here. Simeon is a very well-known elderly man and highly respected. This testimony spreads.

Verses 36-37, "Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, ... She was of great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple," She was a very elderly woman who lived there in the temple complex. You can

imagine that Anna had been well known for decades. Everyone who came to the temple was very familiar with Anna. God had given miraculous revelations to her.

Interestingly, it had probably been 100 years since the Urim and the Thummim had worked for a high priest because they had so departed from the truth. At this point in time, God wasn't answering the high priest. The only one that we have record of that God was revealing anything supernaturally through was this elderly widow who lived in the temple by the name of Anna. The way God chose to work certainly was a witness and a condemnation to the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leadership. You can believe she was well known; she was recognized. Everyone who had come into the temple for decades, Anna was there. She lived there in the temple complex for many, many years.

She came over and began to speak to Mary and Joseph. A crowd gathered around, as people do. Everybody wanted to know what's going on, 'Hey, what's happening?' They saw a bunch of people gathered over there and went "stick their ear in" to see what was happening. So, this testimony was given.

God testified in many, many ways. God never leaves His people without a witness of the truth when the time comes for Him to intervene in human affairs. God makes it plain where He is working if we simply have the wit to look and to see.

We are going to go through the Gospels, and you can follow me in your Bible. I **am going to primarily utilize a harmony of the Gospels**. I will give you reference as to where I am going. The starting place, if we harmonize the Gospel accounts, is the Gospel of John because it starts in the beginning.

John 1:1-3, "In the beginning was the Word, the Spokesman; and the Word, the Spokesman, was with God; and the Word, the Spokesman, was God. He was in the beginning with God. The universe and all things were created and came into being through His power and authority, and without Him not even one thing came into existence which has been created." The universe and all things were created and came into being through His power and authority. Without Him, not even one thing came into existence which has been created.

Verses 4-5, "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of all men. And the Light appears and shines in the darkness, but the darkness does not comprehend it or overcome it." Who was

actually the One who did the creating recorded in the Old Testament? It is very apparent it was none other than Jesus Christ. The One who was in the beginning was the Word, the Spokesman. He was with God and He was God. We are given clear record of that.

Verse 14, "And the Word, the Spokesman, became flesh, and He lived among us, and we saw and experienced His glory, the glory as of the only begotten by the Father, full of grace and truth." It is very apparent that the Word was none other than Jesus Christ.

Verse 15, it was testified of by John the Baptist and others that the very One who did the creating recorded in the Old Testament was the One that we know as Jesus Christ. That is made plain in John 1:1-3.

Now as we follow the account down, Luke gives the details.

Luke 1:5-6, "In the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, there was a certain priest, Zacharias by name, of the course of Abijah: and his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous and just before God, and were blamelessly walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord."

This is information that we would often tend to read over. What important information are we able to derive from learning that 'Zacharias was of the course of Abijah'? We are actually able to arrive at the approximate time of the birth of Christ as a result of that information. When we go back to 1 Chronicles 24, we learn that David divided the priesthood into 24 courses. Since there became so many priests, they couldn't all get into the temple and carry out the functions. As the priesthood grew, there were too many of them. Generation after generation the family of Aaron increased. At first there were a few of them. It started out just being Aaron and his sons; after a while, there were dozens of them, scores of them and finally, hundreds of them. It got to where there needed to be some organization. There were too many of them to function all at once, so they were divided in the time of David into 24 courses.

The course of Abijah, we are told in 1 Chronicles 24:10 was the eighth course. Each course served in the temple for two weeks a year. Twenty-four courses at two weeks each would be 48. Forty-eight weeks were accounted for. Then we have the Festival weeks—the weeks surrounding the week of Passover/ Unleavened Bread season, the week around Pentecost, and the two weeks of the

fall festival season which fill in the whole year. Each course served in the temple for two weeks a year in addition to the three festival seasons.

They started with the first course, which began serving the first of the sacred year, two weeks prior to Passover. The second course worked the second week; then all of the courses would serve for a week for Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. Then the third course would serve for a week, and so it would go.

From 1 Chronicles 24, we can put it together. We can go through and calculate how many weeks into the year we were. We are looking at the spring of 5 B.C. The first course began serving at noon on the Sabbath on the first day of Abib, the first day of the sacred month, which was coincidentally a Sabbath. They began serving at noon on that Sabbath that coincided with the first day of the sacred year, which was Abib 1 (April 8) in 5 B.C. The second course began serving a week later, Abib 8 (April 15), at noon; then two weeks later, Abib 15 (April 22), all the courses served for Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. Coming on through, we would track it on down as to when all of the courses would begin serving at Passover. All the courses would serve all the way through the third week. Then the third course would begin its service at noon on the Sabbath, which would be Abib 22 (April 29). The third course would end and the fourth course would begin at noon on Abib 29 (May 6). It would just continue down: the fifth course would begin at noon Iyar 6 (May 13); the sixth course would begin at noon Iyar 13 (May 20); the seventh course would begin at noon Iyar 20 (May 27). The eighth course (Zacharias served in the eighth course—the course of Abijah) would begin serving at noon on the Sabbath, Iyar 27 (June 3). They would serve all through that first week of June, and then the following week was the week of Pentecost when all of the courses would be serving beginning Sivan 5 (June 10). Zacharias would have been free to leave when the ninth course began to serve at noon on the Sabbath of Sivan 12 (June 17). That brings us to the last half of June 5 B.C., which would be the probable two weeks during which Elizabeth conceived.

Remember the account in Luke 1:11-13 where Zacharias the priest entered into the temple, saw a vision and the angel told him, ‘Your wife is going to conceive a child.’ Well, if we track it through, we can lay out these courses. We find that when his term in the temple service was over and he would have returned home, we have an

approximate two-week period that we would allot and say that Elizabeth conceived fairly soon.

Then we track it through as to the months of her pregnancy. When Mary is told that she is with child of the Holy Spirit, that she has conceived Jesus, she is also told about Elizabeth.

Luke 1:36, “‘Now then, Elizabeth your relative, she has also conceived a son, in spite of her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who had been called barren...’” This brings us, if we track it through, to December.

Verse 35, the angel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin Mary. The power of the Holy Spirit enveloped Mary and she was impregnated with Jesus Christ. Mary visited Elizabeth at the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. Her sixth month would end right around the end of December. We have an overlap of Mary’s first month of pregnancy with Elizabeth’s seventh month of pregnancy as being the same. What it comes down to, John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus Christ.

We can calculate from the time of the course of Abijah, the time that Zacharias was in the temple and the subsequent conception of his wife. We come all the way down to March when John the Baptist was born; Jesus was born about six months later in the fall. We can track it back to the time when the course of Abijah would have been serving in the temple, come forward nine months from that, and we’re at John the Baptist’s birth. We come forward six more months and we’re at the birth of Jesus Christ. It is kind of a technical, drawn-out thing, but it is a point. If we put the whole story together and go back to 1 Chronicles 24 to get the layout of it, we are able to clearly see the way that it would work out.

We are also shown from Luke 1:15 that John the Baptist was going to be under a Nazarite vow from his mother’s womb.

Verse 15, “‘Because he will be great before the Lord; but he shall not drink wine or strong drink in any form; moreover, he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.’” John the Baptist was under a Nazarite vow. You can go back to Numbers 6 and read a little more about that.

At this point, I would like to call your attention to something interesting. Did you ever notice the extent to which Zacharias and Mary both reacted similarly when informed by Gabriel of the approaching birth of their sons? Yet they were dealt with in a different way. Let’s notice.

Verses 5-10, “In the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, there was a certain priest, Zacharias by name, of the course of Abijah: and his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous and just before God, and were blamelessly walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. But there had not been a child given to them, because Elizabeth was barren; and both were advanced in years. And it happened that in fulfilling his priestly office before God in the order of his course of Abijah, according to the custom of the priestly office, it fell by lot to him to burn incense when he entered into the temple of the Lord. And all the multitude of the people were outside praying at the hour of the incense burning.”

I think I have mentioned before that the burning of incense in the temple was symbolic of the prayers of the saints. Revelation 5:8 makes that plain. The Jews had adopted a custom of considering the morning and evening sacrifice an hour of prayer. They took one of the coals from the altar of sacrifice, took it inside the temple and put it in the golden censor. They then put the golden sensor on these live coals taken from the altar of burnt sacrifice. This symbolized the prayers of the saints. The Jews had adopted this custom. When you read of “the hour of incense,” that’s what you’re talking about—the hour of the morning and evening sacrifice. Well, people were outside praying and Zacharias was performing the ritual.

Verses 11-12, “And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the incense altar. But Zacharias, upon seeing him, was troubled, and terror seized hold of him.” You better believe it! Here he was walking in there with his incense going through his ritual. All of a sudden, he looked up and out of nowhere was this great, powerful, brilliant, shining being totally clothed in white. You can imagine Zacharias was absolutely stunned. He had never seen anything like this before and terror seized him.

Verses 13-19, “But the angel told him, ‘Don’t be afraid, Zacharias, because your supplication and prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And he shall be a joy, exultation and gladness to you; and many shall rejoice at his birth, because he will be great before the Lord; and he shall not drink wine or strong drink in any form; moreover, he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And

many of the children of Israel shall he turn back to the Lord their God. And he [John] shall go out before Him [Jesus] in the spirit and mighty power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready and provide a people prepared for the Lord. But Zacharias asked the angel, ‘By what means am I going to know this? Because I am an old man myself, and my wife is far advanced in her days.’ And the angel, answering him, said, ‘I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God. Therefore, I was sent to talk with you, and to announce this good news to you...’”

The angel asked, ‘What do you mean, how are you going to know if that’s true? I am Gabriel; who do you think I am? Do you just normally run into somebody standing in there by the incense altar in white shining brilliance? You want a sign? I am going to give you a sign—you are going to be struck dumb.’

Verse 20, “‘But now you shall become mute and shall not be capable of speaking, until the day in which these things shall be accomplished, because you did not believe my words, which are going to be fulfilled in their time and season.’” Gabriel said, ‘I’ll give you a sign, all right. You won’t be able to say anything until all of this is over with. That will be sign enough for you.’

Verse 21, “And the people outside were expecting Zacharias, and they wondered why he was so long inside the temple.” All the people outside were expecting Zacharias; after a while, this was dragging on and people began wondering what happened.

Verses 22-24, “But when he came out, he was not able to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision inside the temple. For he was making signs to them, but he remained speechless and mute. And it happened when the days of his priestly ministrations were finished, he went back to his own home. Now after these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, ...”

Verse 26, then we are told, “Now in the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent by God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth...” So, Gabriel returns.

Verses 27-29, “to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, who was of the house of David; and the name of the virgin was Mary. And coming to her house, the angel said, ‘Greetings, you greatly favoured and honored one! The Lord is with you: you are blessed above all women.’ But seeing him, she was awestruck at

his words, and was wondering what kind of salutation this might be.” Again, the same reaction—just absolutely shocked and dumbfounded. ‘What is this?’

Verses 30-34, “But the angel told her, ‘Mary, don’t be afraid, because you have found favour in the sight of God! Now listen, you shall conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and He shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of David His forefather; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall never be an end. But Mary asked the angel, ‘How shall this possibly be, since I have not known a man?’”

Mary said, ‘I am a virgin.’ Now again, she asked the question just as Zacharias did, ‘How do I know this is going to happen? How can this be? I am an old man, and my wife is an old woman.’ The angel dealt with Zacharias a little more abruptly—‘I will give you a sign.’ Mary asked, ‘How can this be? There must be some mistake here; I am a virgin.’ The angel then explained.

Verses 35-38, “And answering, the angel told her, ‘The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall envelop you; for which cause also the holy, sacred Child born to you shall be called the Son of God. Now then, Elizabeth your relative, she has also conceived a son, in spite of her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who had been called barren; because nothing shall be impossible with God.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold the bondmaid of the Lord; let it happen to me according to your word.’ Then the angel left her.”

I think it’s interesting in reading the account to just understand there was a difference in the way God dealt with an elderly priest whom God expected to know a little better, to exercise a little more faith and not to question in that way. God dealt with him a little more abruptly because he should have known better than to ask a question like that. Here was Mary, a young girl of age 19 or 20. The angel dealt with her very patiently and explained everything to her in more detail. I think that one of the points we get from this is that God does not always deal with everyone exactly the same way. God expects a little more of some than others. He expected a greater level of understanding from an elderly priest than He did from a young girl who was maybe 19 or 20 years old. So, to one He gave a little more detailed explanation; the other one, He dealt with a little more abruptly. Gabriel said,

‘Zacharias you shouldn’t have asked a question like—“How shall I know this?” You shouldn’t have expressed that kind of doubt. You’ve been around long enough Zacharias that you should have known that if I say something, that is the way it is. Where are all these questions coming from?’

Genealogy of Jesus Christ: Luke 3:23-38 and Matthew 1:1-17.

Now let’s take note of the genealogies given in Luke 3 and Matthew 1. The genealogies are different. Luke gives the natural genealogy. He gives the genealogy of Mary and traces it all the way back to Adam. Matthew gives the legal genealogy, which would be the genealogy of Joseph. Joseph was the legal father (though not the literal father), and he traces it back to Abraham, the one to whom the promises were made.

It is made plain if you go through Matthew’s account.

Matthew 1:1-3, “The book showing the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac; and Isaac the father of Jacob; and Jacob the father of Judah and his brethren; and Judah the father of Phares and Zara by Thamar; ...” It goes right on down.

Luke 3:23, “Now Jesus Himself was beginning to be about thirty years old, being—as was supposed—the son of Joseph who was the son-in-law of Heli...” If you will notice in the KJV, the word “son” is in italics. Matthew 1 is worded differently, “so and so” begat “so and so.” It is a literal description of somebody born to somebody, and somebody else born to them, and somebody else born to them. It is a literal step-by-step genealogy, one after another.

Here in Luke 3, we run up against different names. In reality, Joseph was simply the son-in-law of Heli. There is no evidence that Heli had any sons. We know that he had several daughters. Salome, the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John, was a sister to Mary and a daughter of Heli. The wife of Alphaeus was another sister. James, the son of Alphaeus was one of the apostles. One thing that a lot of people don’t realize is several of the apostles were first cousins to Jesus. These were people who had connections in that way.

If Mary only had sisters, when she married, of course, it would be someone in her tribe. She was of the tribe of Judah. She married in the tribe of Judah, and her husband would have been

accounted as though he were a son and would have inherited property from her father.

You can go back to the book of Numbers (Numbers 27:1-7; 36:6-7) and notice the legal requirements in terms of property inheritance. Where there were no sons, the daughters inherited as though they were sons. If they married within the tribe, in effect, their husband equated with a son, legally. Luke uses the term “Joseph, the *son* of Heli” as “son” (as it is applied in italics in the KJV), but it could just as clearly have been “son-in-law,” which is really the sense of it.

Luke traces the genealogy differently than Matthew. Luke traces it back through the natural genealogy through Mary’s family; Matthew traces the legal genealogy through Joseph’s family.

Christ had claim to the throne of David in both directions. He was a descendant of David from both of these. What did the angel tell Mary concerning the destiny of the Son that she was to bear? In Luke 1, we noticed here a few moments ago that the angel told Mary that she would bear the Messiah who would inherit the throne of David and rule over an everlasting Kingdom. This child is going to be called the Son of God.

Luke 1:32-33, “He will be great, and He shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of David His forefather; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall never be an end.” This very clearly shows that Jesus was born to be a King and to sit on a literal throne.

Now what was the mission of John the Baptist? That’s made plain here.

Verse 17, Luke shows, “And he [John] shall go out before Him [Jesus] in the spirit and mighty power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready and provide a people prepared for the Lord.”

We go on a little further; John was born.

Verses 63-64, “Then, after requiring a writing tablet, he wrote, saying, ‘His name is John. And they were all amazed. Then immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed so he could speak, and he spoke, blessing God.’”

Verses 68-75, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has looked upon His people and provided redemption for them, and raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant, according as He has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began; that He would give us salvation from our

enemies, and from the hand of all those who hate us; to fulfill the mercy which He promised our forefathers, and to remember His holy covenant; even the oath which He swore to Abraham our father to give to us, and we, being saved and delivered out of the hands of our enemies, should serve Him without fear; in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.”

Verses 76-80, Zacharias was speaking to John, “And you, little child, shall be called a prophet of the Highest; because you shall go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; to give knowledge of salvation to His people through remission and forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, in which He has visited us as the shining of light from on high, to shine upon those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to direct our steps into the way of peace! And the little child grew and was strengthened in spirit, but he remained in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”

We have the description of what God was going to do through John the Baptist. John was a cousin of Jesus. He was a little more distant cousin of Jesus. He would have been a second cousin; his mother, Elizabeth, and Mary were first cousins. Undoubtedly, since Elizabeth was described as a daughter of Aaron, she was of the priestly line. Mary’s mother was, undoubtedly, a sister to either Elizabeth’s mother or father. In other words, Mary’s mother was of the priestly family of Levi and Aaron and married Heli who was of the royal line of David. Mary, on her mother’s side, traced her genealogy back through Aaron and Levi; on her father’s side, back to David. That’s why she and Elizabeth were cousins even though Elizabeth only was of the priestly line of Aaron. John the Baptist and Jesus would have been related; their mothers would have been first cousins. John was raised up to give a message.

Again, notice how God prepared a witness. You can imagine how word of this big event that occurred in the temple—the priest having seen a vision—you can imagine how that spread. Because this occurred right around the time of Pentecost, you had people there from all over. Word like this must have spread like wildfire. This would have been big news. It set the stage.

We can clearly see that the wise men did not come at the time of Christ’s birth.

Matthew 2 shows the account of the coming of the wise men.

Matthew 2:7-8, “Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and inquired of them the exact time of the star’s appearing. He then sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go, and diligently inquire about the little child; and when you have found Him, bring word back to me, that I may also come and do homage to Him.’”

Verse 11 makes it plain that Mary and Joseph were already abiding in a house by the time they arrived, “And when they [the wise men] came into the house, . . .”

In verse 16, Herod was not taking any chances. When he realized that the wise men had not come back and told him where the child was, he sent word out to put to death all the boys in Bethlehem and surrounding areas who were two years old and younger. This was according to the time in which he had diligently inquired of the wise men, based on the time that the Magi had seen the star. The star hadn’t appeared when Jesus was born. It had appeared *prior* to that time and brought them in that direction. The star, undoubtedly, was an angel.

People talk about “star” or “comet.” Have you ever seen a comet stand over somebody’s house? You see this thing up there? It takes weeks and months to go across the sky and it finally stops over the top of somebody’s house—one that appears and disappears. You’ve never seen a comet like that, have you? A star, as we think of a star, how can you tell if that star is on top of somebody’s house? You go out and look up and say, ‘Boy, that star is right above this building.’ If you were somewhere else, you’d look up and think, ‘That star is right above that building.’ How could you tell? Obviously, it was an angel. They only had to be just a slight distance away. They could see a bright shining light and would follow.

Stars are used as symbols of angels. You can read that in Revelation 12:4. This angel manifested himself that way. All they could see was the bright light, but it was close and vivid enough that they could tell where it was and where it was standing over. That was the way in which they were led.

Herod realized that he had been “had.” He didn’t want to go worship the Messiah, ‘Oh, go find Him and come back and tell me where He is so I, too, can go and worship Him.’ Herod didn’t want to go and worship anything. He didn’t worship anything but himself.

Josephus tells us about Herod’s death. Herod had a very gruesome death. I won’t even go into all the details, but it was a very gory disease in

which God really visited retribution on him. A type of maggot consumed him; just a very gory, gruesome death consumed him. Josephus records how Herod died.

Joseph and family returns to Nazareth:

Matthew 2:19-23 and Luke 2:39.

Where did Jesus grow up? Matthew 2:23 makes it plain that He grew up in Nazareth and was called a Nazarene—not a Nazarite, as of the Nazarite vow. Christ wasn’t a Nazarite. He was a Nazarene and grew up in Nazareth, a little village in Galilee.

There is proof that the Being who dealt with men in the Old Testament in a visible manner (in other words, talked with Adam, walked with Enoch, ate with Abraham, wrestled with Jacob) was not the Father. That’s made plain in John 1.

John 1:18, “No one has ever seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared and revealed Him.” This shows very clearly that no one has ever seen the Father at any time. Any time you read of God manifesting Himself in the Old Testament, it had to have been the One that became Jesus Christ because no one has seen the Father at any time. The Father has not manifested Himself. Jesus came to reveal the Father. Jesus Christ was the Word, the Spokesman and the One who dealt with man.

Ministry of John the Baptist: John 1:6-18, Luke 3:1-6, Matthew 3:1-4 and Mark 1:1-3.

As we read these parallel accounts, all of them start out with the story of John the Baptist and how John the Baptist came for a witness and a testimony.

John 1:6-8, John tells us, “There was a man sent by God, whose name was John. He came for a witness and testimony, that he might bear witness concerning the Light, that through him all might believe. He was not the Light, but he came so that he might bear witness concerning the Light.”

Luke 3:1, Luke adds in the detail, “Now, in the fifteenth year of the government of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and Philip his brother was tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene.”

Scholars have calculated the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar in several different ways. The method of reckoning that Luke used to record is not clearly indicated from the context. But throughout all of his account, Luke uses the Jewish method of reckoning time and events. It would be consistent

for him to use the Jewish method of reckoning in this case—using a spring-to-spring calculation.

It was Biblical for the priests to begin their priesthood at the beginning of age 30. This is found in Numbers 4:3, 30. It is a historical fact that the priesthood under Moses began to function in the first month of the second year out of Egypt, when the tabernacle was set up. This was the only method of reckoning used by priests. Since John the Baptist was the son of a priest, he would have begun his ministry when he became 30 years of age. This means he would have had to begin his ministry no later than the time of Passover, 27 A.D. This would have given him at least a six-month ministry preparing the way for the Lord. He would have continued until just before the Feast of Pentecost in 28 A.D., at which time he was cast into prison.

Luke 3:2, this is the time when, "...the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness."

Verse 3, we are told, "And he went into all the country, from one end of the Jordan River and valley to the other, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

There is one thing I would like to point out to illustrate. The Jews understood and had a concept of what we term "baptism." They had what they termed "*mikvah*," which had reference to immersion in water, to the ritual purifications and washings. That was what a woman went through, the rites of purification; that's what the priests went through prior to entering into the temple. It was gone through at certain times, any time someone was ceremonially unclean.

Now when a Jewish baby boy was born, the baby was circumcised and was then considered an heir of the promises, but if a Gentile converted to Judaism, there was something else that was added. He not only had to undergo circumcision, but he had to undergo the "*mikvah*"—the ritual washing, the ritual immersion—to purify him, in a sense, from the uncleanness. The Jews viewed themselves inherently clean because they were the sons of Abraham. But everybody else was unclean. They were familiar with immersion, but they looked upon it as something that was only necessary for Gentiles and if you became ceremonially defiled. They felt it was not an inherent need for Jews because they were, in a sense, born clean.

John's message really "shook them to their socks." John's message was the fact that they were unclean, too. 'You have to be baptized. You have to have your sins washed away.' That

had never dawned on them before. They thought they were inherently "one up" on everybody else—all they needed was circumcision (the sign of the Covenant) and they were inherently clean. John came preaching the baptism of repentance, performing, in a sense, this priestly ritual, but saying, 'You Jews, you Pharisees, you Sadducees—you're just as dirty. You're just as polluted; you're just as much sinners as any Gentile that you have ever converted or immersed. You better repent and be baptized or you're not going to be forgiven.'

This is the context in which John preached baptism. People wonder where he came up with baptism. It was an adaptation of something. The Jews had never understood it as having applied to them. They viewed everybody else as having a problem, but they were okay. John broke the news to them that, no, they weren't. That was news to them. They had thought they were clean, but John made it plain that they weren't.

John's baptism to repentance: Matthew 3:5-12, Mark 1:4-8 and Luke 3:7-18.

Matthew 3:6-7, when the religious leaders came to John for baptism, it's recorded, "and [they] were then baptized in the Jordan by him, acknowledging and confessing their sins. But seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'You offspring and children of vipers [You bunch of snakes. Now the snake was a symbol of the devil, so it was not a very complimentary term.], who has forewarned you to escape from the wrath to come?'" He really kind of "took the hide off" of them. 'Look, which rock did you slither out from under? Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? You "snake in the grass"!' "

Verse 8 states that if you want to be baptized, go and produce evidence worthy of repentance. Prove a change in your attitude and your life; go and bring forth fruits worthy for repentance. 'Let me see some changes; let me see you shape up.' Change is evidence that you are really repentant if you want to be baptized.

The only reason they wanted to "get on the bandwagon" was because everybody acknowledged John as a prophet. You can imagine that the event that had occurred at the time of John's birth was known. Everybody in Jerusalem, everybody who was there, had been aware of these things when John had been born. They had been in expectation of this, and when he made this appearance, it really created a stir.

Notice briefly a couple of other things. Notice John's advice to soldiers and to tax collectors.

People came to John when they wanted to be baptized and they asked him what to do.

Luke 3:12, the tax collectors said, "...Teacher, what shall we do?" What is the evidence of repentance?

Verse 13, John told them, "...Collect nothing more than that which is appointed to you." "Be honest. You can collect taxes, but you need to be honest, be scrupulously honest. Don't cheat people."

Verse 14, soldiers asked him, "...And what shall we do [The Roman army didn't have conscientious objector status; if you were a soldier, you were a soldier.]"? Then he told them, "Do not intimidate or do violence to anyone, neither falsely accuse anyone, but be satisfied with your wages." Now that's a difficult order for a soldier because you may find yourself in a situation that requires faith. If you're not going to do violence to any man, you may find yourself in a situation where you are going to get killed because you're brought out there and told to fight. John told them, "If you are going to repent, then you have to do violence to no man. You don't falsely accuse anyone; you don't misuse your status. You be satisfied with your wages. You make the best of it, treat people fairly and do violence to no one."

Verse 16, "John answered all of them, saying, 'Truly I baptize you with water, but the One who is coming is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandal I am not fit to untie; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire...'." John said he baptized with water, but One mightier than he was coming who was going to baptize in a different way, which was to baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Christ's baptism: Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-23 and John 1:28-34.

As we continue the account, we find in Luke 3:21 that Jesus came to be baptized at the beginning of His ministry.

Verse 23, He was baptized at 30 years of age, which would have been in the fall of 27 A.D. John had begun his ministry in the spring of 27 A.D. Jesus appeared there in the fall of 27 A.D., and there was a miraculous display.

Luke 3:22 mentions it, "And the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove upon Him; then a voice came out of heaven, saying, 'You are My Son, the beloved; in You I have found delight!'" This was a very miraculous event to point out the uniqueness of this.

The first miracle that Christ worked is clearly shown and referred to in John 2:1-11, the turning of water into wine.

Christ tempted by the devil: Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1-13.

What Jesus did right after His baptism, prior to the formal beginning of His ministry, is recorded in greatest detail in Matthew 4.

Matthew 4:1-2, "Then Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit, to be tempted by the devil, and after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was starving." This was necessary before He could begin His proclamation of the Gospel message because before He could begin announcing the good news of the Kingdom of God, He had to qualify to be King over that Kingdom by overcoming Satan. Adam, who had the first opportunity to rule the world, yielded to Satan and accepted his government. Jesus Christ showed that He would not yield to Satan, but would be totally yielded to God. He would resist and overcome Satan by the power of God.

These events occurred between the fall of 27 A.D. when Jesus made His first public appearance and the spring of 28 A.D. when He came into the temple for the first cleansing of the temple.

I might comment on a couple of things. One of the things made plain in John 1 is that many of the disciples that Jesus later dealt with were previously disciples of John the Baptist. Peter and Andrew were John the Baptist's disciples.

John 1:35-42, "The next day John was standing with two of his own disciples. And looking at Jesus walking, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God! When those two disciples heard him speaking, they followed Jesus. But when Jesus turned around and saw them following, He asked them, 'Whom do you want?' And they said to Him, 'Rabbi (which is, being interpreted, Teacher or Master), where are You lodging? He told them, 'Come and see for yourselves.' They went, and saw where He lodged, and stayed with Him the rest of that day. Now it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard this from John was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, and he followed Him. But first he went to get his own brother, Simon, and told him, 'We have found the Messiah,' which is, being interpreted, the Christ! And he led him to Jesus....'"

You get this account of those that Jesus began to deal with.

We will go through the calling of the apostles in greater detail at a later time. We will come back

and summarize some of this material from a little different standpoint, but I think this gets us started.

There is a lot that is packed into the Gospel accounts. I think, hopefully, over the course of the next few Bible studies, we will come to more clearly see the real impact of some of these things—many of which we have read before. But I think as we really study into them, we will find that God has packed a lot into the Gospel accounts.

We will pick up from there next time and perhaps be able to summarize a few more comments on a little bit of what we covered this evening. I have some questions for the next Bible study, which will primarily concentrate on the Sermon on the Mount and related material. With that, we will conclude this evening.

Chronology of the Courses in the Year 5 B.C.:
The Priest Zacharias (Father of John the Baptist)

First Course begins noon Sabbath	Abib 1 (April 8)
Second Course begins noon	Abib 8 (April 15)
All Courses serve beginning at Passover	Abib 15 (April 22)
Third Course begins noon Sabbath	Abib 22 (April 29)
Fourth Course begins noon Sabbath	Abib 29 (May 6)
Fifth Course begins noon Sabbath	Iyar 6 (May 13)
Sixth Course begins noon Sabbath	Iyar 13 (May 20)
Seventh Course begins noon Sabbath	Iyar 20 (May 27)
Eighth Course begins noon Sabbath	Iyar 27 (June 3)
Zacharias served in the course of Abijah (Eighth Course)	
All Courses serve beginning noon Sabbath	Sivan 5 (June 10)
Zacharias would leave when the Ninth Course began.	
Ninth Course begins noon Sabbath	Sivan 12 (June 17)

Bible Study # 31
February 28, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Matthew 4:12—9:17; Mark 1:14—2:22; Luke 4:14—5:39; John 2:13—4:54

This evening we are continuing our survey of the Gospels and Acts. We are near the beginning portion of that. What we **are covering this evening has to do with the events in the life of Christ from the time of the Passover of 28 A.D. until the Passover of 29 A.D.**

Christ began His public ministry in the fall of 27 A.D., the time of His baptism by John the Baptist. John was preaching by the River Jordan. Jesus appeared there, was baptized by John and was pointed out by John to the multitudes.

Shortly thereafter, Jesus and some of His disciples left. They went back to Cana of Galilee where His first public miracle was performed—the turning of the water into wine at the wedding feast. A short time after (we are not told exactly how long) Christ left and went into the wilderness. He was gone for a considerable period of time. He spent 40 days in fasting and prayer. At the end of that time, He was tempted by Satan the devil. Remember the account of the temptation that occurred? It was very shortly after that incident, as we approach the beginning of the spring of 28 A.D., where we pick up the story this evening.

Jesus publicly began His ministry by suddenly appearing in the temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover season of 28 A.D. The first six months of His ministry were used for private teaching. During that time, He was baptized and made initial contact with His disciples. I might bring out that some of Christ's disciples had known Him and He had known them going all the way back to childhood because, in several cases, they were actually cousins of His.

It is made plain, for instance, that James and John (who were brothers) were the sons of Zebedee and Salome. Salome was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. We find that James and John were first cousins of Jesus. There is another mentioned, James, the son of Alphaeus. It is mentioned that his mother, as well, was a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. There were several of the disciples that He had undoubtedly known all the way back to childhood.

There were others that He had previously had contact with. Andrew (Peter's brother) and

several others had been with John the Baptist. John the Baptist had accumulated quite a number of disciples. A "disciple" is simply "a learner, a student, someone who is seeking to learn the lessons that someone else is teaching." We are given the example, for instance, that Andrew, the brother of Peter, was there with John the Baptist. He had spent at least a certain amount of time there. John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as the Messiah to Andrew and acknowledged Him as such when He came to be baptized.

What we have, as we will find a little bit later, is Jesus coming where Peter and Andrew were and saying, 'Come and follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.' This was not an occasion such as is portrayed in one of the movies, where He comes by and kind of transfixes these two fellows with this hypnotic stare. Then they get this kind of blank look on their faces, drop their nets and just kind of walk out as though they were hypnotized. That was not the situation at all.

These were people who had known Him, had known of Him, were familiar with the ministry of John the Baptist and had some initial contact with Him. Some of those who were there with John the Baptist followed Him back to Cana of Galilee. Some saw that miracle of turning water into wine and returned to their business. They had their own lives; they had their own businesses. For the most part, they were self-employed. They had taken some time off and had spent time there listening to John the Baptist. They had spent some time there as disciples of his.

There came a point, right here at the beginning of this material that we are going to go through this evening, where Jesus told some of them, 'I want you to come and follow Me full time.' They knew who He was and believed that He was the Messiah. They didn't fully understand the role of the Messiah. They were expecting that He would restore the Kingdom to Israel right away. The disciples came out of a variety of backgrounds.

As we pick up the story this evening, Jesus begins His public ministry during the Feast of Unleavened Bread of 28 A.D. We find that immediately prior to Passover, Jesus came to Jerusalem and He showed up at the temple. Now what is the temple called in Scripture? How did Jesus refer to the temple?

John 2:16, He referred to it as, "His Father's house."

What do you do with your house immediately prior to Passover and the Days of Unleavened

Bread? You clean it up, don't you? What did He do to His Father's house right before Passover? He cleaned it up; He unleavened it in the spiritual sense. There is a reason as to why Jesus began His ministry this way.

John 2:13-16, "Now the Jews' Passover was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money-exchangers stationed around. Then, after making a scourge of cords, He drove out every one of them from the temple, including the sheep and the oxen; He poured out the coins and threw over the tables of the money-exchangers. And He said to those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Do not make the house of My Father a house of merchandise!'"

Let me call your attention to a prophecy in the book of Malachi.

Malachi 3:1-2, "'Behold, I send My messenger, and he [John the Baptist] will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,' says the Lord of hosts. 'But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.'"

You know what refiner's fire and fullers' soap do, don't you? A refiner's fire is what you use to refine metal so you can skim off the dross. A fullers' soap will take the dirt, the hide and anything else off of you. It's kind of like "Eagle Eye." Some of you remember old "Eagle Eye" soap. That's about what you are looking at. Pretty strong stuff! It will take anything out—and that's what it says Christ's coming was like. He was going to show up and He was going to clean house—and that's what we find here.

Some of those in the temple had come up with a real gimmick to make a little money on the side. If you came to the temple, you were supposed to offer a sacrifice. That's why the people would come there to the temple. They would offer sheep, goats, doves and various things. Where were you going to get them? If you didn't live right there in Jerusalem, you would have to buy them. You weren't going to drive your sheep hundreds of miles from some far away place. Jews were coming there from all over making pilgrimages. Plus, you not only had to offer the animal, but the animal that you offered had to be approved by the priest as being without spot or blemish—a perfect specimen.

Some had come up with the idea that there was a lot of money to be made in selling these animals for sacrifice. What they did was sublet the concession to sell animals there in the temple. In fact, 'If you don't buy one of my animals, if we look long and hard enough, we can find some kind of spot or blemish on yours. We can find something wrong with it, and it won't do. That one has dirt under its hoof; you can't offer that one. You have to get one of these over here.'

They had a real gimmick going. They had turned it into a real moneymaking thing. You had to buy the animal from them. And you can bet their prices were higher than what you'd pay out of town. Not only that, but they had come up with another deal. They said, 'This money people come in here to spend, that's pagan money. It has pagan inscriptions; it has the picture of the Roman emperor who proclaims himself as god [It was just regular money of the Roman Empire.]. Being that's pagan money, we can't put that pagan money into the temple treasury. Tell you what we are going to do—we are going to have some money exchange. We are going to have our own money. This will be good, righteous money. And you can only spend it right here in the temple. Now, we will sell you our money that you can put into the temple treasury, and you can buy these sheep and goats in here. If you want to make an offering, you have to use our money; we won't accept this pagan Roman money. You give it to me and I will exchange it.'

They considered the money too pagan to put into the temple treasury, but not too pagan to put into their pockets. They really had a deal going—a real moneymaking operation—and some of the priests were getting a "rake" of it. They were subletting all this stuff. All of it was contrary to the law, but after all, who was enforcing the law? They were! There's nothing new under the sun. We also have seen plenty of approaches by those who were supposed to be enforcing the law around here over the years.

This was the situation: Jesus showed up and cleaned house. 'Get this stuff out of here!'

Matthew 21:13, says, "... 'It has been written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer [for all nations].' But you have made it a den of thieves!'"

Tables were flying, coins went scattering and sheep and goats started taking off for the gate. Jesus came here and He did this—and it really stirred things up. They said, 'Who do You think You are, doing this?' If you will notice, nobody tried to arrest Him.

John 3:1-2, in fact, in just a matter of a few days later, “There was a man of the Pharisees, whose name was Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus at night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi [Teacher], we realize and can tell You are a Teacher who has come from God [a Teacher sent by God], because no one is capable of doing these miracles which You are doing, unless God be with Him.’”

Jesus came and He performed certain miracles. Very clearly, God’s stamp of approval was there. The religious leaders did not like it. They resented it, but they knew that He was not just somebody that showed up on His own authority. They considered Him at the least a teacher from God or a prophet because of the miracles that He worked.

Verse 3, “Jesus answered and said to him [Nicodemus], ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God!’” Nicodemus was very puzzled by this. He thought this was a very unusual way to open a conversation. He said, ‘That doesn’t make sense.’

Verse 4, “Nicodemus asked Him, ‘How can it be possible for a man to be born when he is old? Is he able to enter a second time into the womb of his mother, and be born?’”

Nicodemus understood the meaning of the term “born again” and because he understood the meaning of the words, he scratched his head and he said, ‘It doesn’t make any sense.’

Verse 6, Jesus then went on to explain, “That which has been born of the flesh is flesh; but that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit.”

Verse 5, “...‘except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!’”

What are we told in 1 Corinthians 15?

1 Corinthians 15:50, Paul tells us, “...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; ...”

Verse 53, a little bit later he says, “...this mortal must put on immortality.”

“That which has been born of the flesh is flesh.”

Every one of us has been born of the flesh and we are flesh. If you don’t think so, just take the hatpin test. Stick your finger and see if you don’t bleed or if you don’t hurt. You’re flesh! You and I right now are flesh and blood. We have been born of the flesh.

Paul explains that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is eternal; it is going to last forever. What good is something that is going to last forever do for me in the state I am right now? I am going to get old,

deteriorate and I am going to die. A few years will go by and I will be gone, and this eternal inheritance will still be there. The only way that an eternal inheritance is going to do us any good is if we are transformed from flesh and blood that deteriorates, decays, grows old and eventually dies. We must be transformed from mortal to immortal. That’s what Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52, “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep [We’re not all going to die because Christ is going to come back when some are still living.], but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, ...”

Paul says when Christ descends, that is all going to take place.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” Try rising up right now and see how far you rise. You may stand up out of your chair, but that’s about as far as you get. You can jump and you come right back down. You clear the ground a few inches and that will be it. But that’s not going to be the state of things when we are changed, when we are transformed.

John 3:6, “That which has been born of the flesh is flesh; but that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit.” Jesus explained that to Nicodemus.

John 3:3, “...except a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

The miracles showed that Jesus was sent from God, and even the Pharisees recognized that. The miracles were a sign that God used to authenticate the genuineness of Jesus. Jesus went on and explained the matter of being born again. It’s not simply an emotion or feeling. It’s a rebirth, a birth into the spiritual realm just as we have been born into the physical realm. If we are going to inherit eternal life in the Kingdom of God, we are going to have to be born again, born a second time, not of a human mother, not into the physical realm of a physical flesh and blood human being, but born again—born of the Spirit as a born again son of God.

Notice a little bit later what Jesus taught about going to heaven.

John 3:12-13, “If I tell you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I

should tell you heavenly things? (And no one has ever gone up into heaven, except He who came down out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.)” John added that latter part as a parenthetical statement. John is, of course, writing the account maybe sixty years after it occurred. John adds in parenthetically, “And no one has gone up into heaven except He who came down out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.” In other words, Jesus Christ came down from heaven and has ascended up to heaven and He is up there right now. John added that in to modify Christ’s statement because Jesus said, “No one has ever gone up into heaven.” That’s true, except, obviously, for Jesus Himself who came down from heaven and is right now in heaven.

People talk about “when we all get to heaven.” According to John 3:13, no one has gone up into heaven. Peter explained a little later in Acts 2:29, 34 that David wasn’t in heaven and in Acts 13:22, David was a man after God’s own heart. In fact, Jesus said, “no man has gone up into heaven,” and it shows how opposite what most people think is in the Bible and what it really says. People think they get their religion out of the Bible, and when they start reading the Bible, what the Bible says is a lot different than what most people think it says. They think, ‘If the Bible says anything, it certainly says, “If you are good, you will go to heaven.”’

In John 2 and 3, Jesus’ message at that time was the message about Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. What did Jesus teach? The first thing He did was clean out the temple. He was teaching by example what it means to unleaven—to clean out, to get rid of sin, to get rid of that which pollutes or taints.

John 3:16, then He proceeded and He began to talk about how, “...God so loved the world that He gave His Son, the only begotten, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have eternal life!” Isn’t that the message of Passover? Jesus expounded, at that season, the message surrounding Passover.

Then, verse 22, we find that Jesus Himself left Jerusalem; He came into the area of Judea outside Jerusalem and stayed there baptizing. His disciples were the ones actually baptizing; this is made plain a little bit later.

John 4:1-2, “Therefore, when the Lord realized the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although, in fact, Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were)...” Jesus did

not personally baptize anyone. He had His disciples do that, I think, for obvious reasons. What would be the tendency of people later on? If they had been baptized by Jesus personally, the tendency would be to feel like, ‘My baptism is obviously better than yours because Jesus Himself baptized me, and you were only baptized by one of the disciples. Mine is kind of “one step up”.’

There were things He simply chose not to personally do. Since He couldn’t do it for everyone, He just had His disciples do it. It does express it in John 3:22 as though He was baptizing, but John 4:2 explains technically He was not personally doing it—His disciples were doing it. That shows that Christ’s disciples’ baptisms were counted as though He Himself were doing it. In other words, when we come to those who are Christ’s representatives, it is Christ working through them. Christ was working through the disciples, through His representatives; it was as though He Himself was doing it, even though He was not literally, physically present and doing so.

We might notice as we come down through scripture that this was prior to John’s being cast into prison.

Verse 3, “Then He left Judaea, and went again into Galilee.” If you look at a map, Judea is in the south, Samaria is in the middle and Galilee is at the top. Galilee is the area where Jesus grew up. It’s where the city of Nazareth is located, as well as the city of Capernaum and others.

There were two ways of going to Galilee. The Jews normally took the long way and went around because they did not like to go through Samaria. The Jews really looked down on the Samaritans in a “big way.” We discussed some things about the Samaritans at the end of our survey of the Old Testament; you can understand why there was a lot of antagonism. The Jews really looked down on the Samaritans as just “lower than dirt.” They didn’t want to associate with them, talk with them or even walk through their country if they could help it. But Jesus was not that way.

Verse 4, “But it was necessary for Him to pass through Samaria.” It was necessary for Him to pass through Samaria because He was on His way back to Galilee and He wanted to get there. We are going to see that He was on His way back and wanted to be back in Nazareth in time for the day of Pentecost—for the service there. It was immediately prior to Pentecost as He came

through Samaria. This was the most direct route. It only took a few days to go that way.

Verses 5-6, they came through and came to the city of Sychar. Jacob's well was located there.

Verses 7-8, "A woman then came out of Samaria to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give Me a drink': Because His disciples had gone away into the city so they might purchase some food." The Samaritan woman was shocked.

Verse 9, "Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, 'Why do you, being a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, to give You a drink? because the Jews have nothing whatsoever to do with the Samaritans.'" 'Hey, Jews don't want anything to do with Samaritans.' She was really surprised that He would ask her to do Him a favor—'Please give Me a drink of water.'

Verse 10, "Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you had really known the gift of God, and Who it is that says to you, "Give Me a drink;" you would have asked Him to give you a drink, and He would have given you living water!'" That didn't make a whole lot of sense to her.

Verse 11, "The woman said to Him, 'You have nothing with which to draw out the water, and the well is deep; where then did You get the living water?'" 'What is this living water? You don't have anything to draw with. The well is deep. How are you going to get any water?'

Jesus continued, verses 13-14, and He began to expound to her about the Holy Spirit, which is the rivers of living water to which He had made reference.

Verse 16, then He told her, "...Go, call your husband, and come here."

Verses 17-18, "The woman answered and said, 'I do not have a husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You have answered correctly by saying you do not have a husband. Because you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband: this much you have truly spoken.'" She kind of stammered around a little bit and said, 'Well, you see, I am not married.' Jesus smiled and said 'You're right; you are not. You have had five husbands and the one you are living with now is not your husband. You have said the truth—you are not married.'

Verse 19, about this time, "The woman said to Him, 'Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.'" She said, 'Somehow, You know something about me that I didn't tell You, something I had not planned on bringing up. This was not what I had in mind. Suffice it to say that I wasn't married, but now You press for details. You are right—I have had five husbands and I am living with

somebody right now.' She said, 'I think You must be a prophet. Now let's change the subject here from my marriages and my husbands. Why don't we kind of change the subject; we are getting a little bit personal here. I just as soon not discuss the subject of my marriages. Tell You what—let me ask You a Bible question. There is this Bible question that I have really been wondering about.'

Verse 20, "'Our ancestors worshiped in this mountain [Mt. Gerizim], but you Jews claim that Jerusalem is the only place where it has been ordained for people to worship.'" She said, 'I have always wondered and wanted to know: where is the place that men ought to worship?' Now, don't you know, that was really the primary thing on her mind for a long time; obviously, she was a very "devout" woman, right? Human nature hasn't changed. Someone is put on the spot and immediately they start looking to see if there isn't some way to change the subject.

Verses 21-22, "Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, the time is coming, when you shall worship the Father neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem! You Samaritans do not even know what you are worshiping! We Jews know what we are worshiping, because salvation is of the Jews.'" Jesus clearly shows that the Samaritans and the religious tradition that they had preserved were in error. We should not look to the Samaritans or to the text of Scripture that the Samaritans preserved as some kind of an authoritative guide.

Jesus made plain that the Jews were the ones that had preserved what was necessary (Romans 3:1-2). Salvation is of the Jews. They had preserved the correct information.

In verses 23-24, He went on to explain that God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. What is Jesus doing? He is expounding the message of Pentecost—the message of God's Spirit and the rivers of living water, worshiping God in spirit and in truth.

You can prove the time setting was immediately prior to Pentecost because of a statement a little bit later on.

Verses 31-33, "But in the meantime the disciples asked Him, 'Master, will you eat?' But He told them, 'I have food to eat which you know nothing about.' Therefore the disciples questioned one another, 'Did anyone bring Him something to eat?'" In their minds they always took everything in a very literal, physical way.

Verse 34, Jesus said, "...My food is that I should do the will of Him who has sent Me, and that I should finish His work.'" "You guys were hungry and the only thing you could think of was going into town and getting something to eat. That's what was primarily on your mind. What was primarily on My mind was doing the work."

Verse 35, "Didn't you say that it is yet four months, then the harvest comes? Listen, I tell you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields; because they are already white for harvesting."

The harvest would have been at the beginning of the seventh month. That was the time of the great fall harvest. Four months earlier would have been at the beginning of the third month. Since Pentecost always comes in the first week of the third month, we are four months prior to the fall festival season, the fall harvest season. This would then put us in the late spring, the time of Pentecost—and that was Christ's message here.

Verse 43, "But after the two days He left there, and went to Galilee."

Verses 45-46, "Then when He came into Galilee, the Galileans accepted Him, because they had seen everything He had done in Jerusalem during the Feast of Unleavened Bread: because they also had gone to the Feast. Now Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, the same place where He made the water wine. And there was a certain courtier of the king, whose son was sick in Capernaum."

Now we are going to switch over to Luke 4, which picks up the account.

Luke 4:16, "And He came to Nazareth [which is there in Galilee], where He had been brought up: and according to His custom and habit, He entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read." This certainly shows Christ's custom regarding the Sabbath. What was His custom? Well, He went into the synagogue. He assembled with God's people. This particular expression that is translated "the Sabbath day" is more literally translated from the Greek, "the day of the Sabbaths." "Sabbaths" is plural; the "day of Sabbaths" or "the day of Weeks" was the Jewish name for Pentecost. Actually, it was an annual Sabbath.

He stood up and read this portion of Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1-2; 49:8-9), which was a section of Scripture that was normally read at that time by the Jews as it is recorded here in Luke 4.

Verses 18-19, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He sent Me to heal those broken in heart and spirit, to proclaim

deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to send away the crushed and oppressed with liberty, to proclaim an acceptable year of the Lord."

Now this was the year of 28 A.D.; 29 A.D. was a Jubilee year in the Jubilee cycle. In that sense, it was literally this special year, this acceptable year of the Lord, which was looked forward to. It was prophetic of Christ and His ministry, His proclamation of liberty, because that's what the Jubilee was physically in Israel anciently. It was the time when liberty was proclaimed throughout the land. Well, Jesus came to proclaim true liberty, and there was an outcry. People got upset because of this attitude: 'Who do You think You are? Why we have known You since You were a little kid. Why we know Your mother, Your father and Your brothers and sisters. Who do you think You are?'

Verse 24, Jesus said, "...no prophet is acceptable in his own country." That's the tendency of people, 'How can you be anything important? I have known you for years. Therefore, that kind of automatically means that you can't be anything very important because I know you.' That's the way people think. The crowd got very upset. Kind of a big mob scene developed, and He just passed through the middle of the crowd and got away.

Jesus goes to Capernaum: Luke 4:31-32 and Matthew 4:13-17.

He came down to Capernaum and taught them on the Sabbath; they were astounded at His doctrine because His message and His preaching were with authority.

We are told in Matthew 4:13 that He left Nazareth and He came and lived in Capernaum. We will notice a little bit later the fact that He refers to a specific house, a specific home. Jesus came to Capernaum, and following that Pentecost, He began to proclaim and to preach there.

Matthew 4:17, "From that time Jesus began to proclaim and preach, 'Repent: because the kingdom of heaven is drawing near!'"

Jesus calls the disciples: Mark 1:16-20, Matthew 4:18-22 and Luke 5:1-11.

In Mark 1:16-17 and Matthew 4:18-19, we find the account of His walking here by the Sea of Galilee, seeing Simon and Andrew and telling them, 'Follow Me; I am going to make you fishers of men.'

Then, in Mark 1:19-20 and Matthew 4:21-22, a little later He saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee; they left and followed Him.

Luke 5:10 makes plain that James and John were partners with Simon and Andrew. Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist. James and John were first cousins to Jesus. These were men who had known Him, had known things about Him, had known the uniqueness of Him, had seen certain of these things and had spent periods of time with Him in the past. They had been with Him on certain occasions such as the wedding feast at Cana. Now He comes and says, 'I want you to quit what you're doing and come and follow Me because I have a job for you.' They knew who He was and they were prepared to make that commitment at that time.

Jesus casts out demons: Mark 1:21-28 and Luke 4:33-37.

Mark 1:21-27, Christ enters into the synagogue in Capernaum and heals the man with the demon.

Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law: Mark 1:29-31, Luke 4:38-39 and Matthew 8:14-15.

Mark 1:29-31, "And soon after leaving the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. And Simon's [Peter's] mother-in-law was lying in bed sick with a fever, and immediately they spoke to Him concerning her. And He came to her, and took her by her hand, and lifted her up. Then the fever immediately left her, and she served them."

The Catholics teach that Peter was the first Pope, but he was not. It makes it very plain here that he was married. He had a mother-in-law. How can you have a mother-in-law if you are not married? Christ healed her.

After the Sabbath, Jesus heals many: Mark 1:32-34, Luke 4:40-41 and Matthew 8:16-17.

Mark 1:32-34, "Then when evening came (when the Sabbath ended), they brought to Him all who were diseased, and those who were possessed by demons. And the entire city was assembled together at the door. So He healed many that were sick with various diseases, and He cast out many demons. But He didn't allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him." His fame spread far and wide as a result of these things. It's in this context of time that we come to what is called the Sermon on the Mount.

Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5, 6, 7 and Luke 6:20-49.

In reality, the Sermon on the Mount was really more of a private teaching to the disciples.

Matthew 5:1-2, it is made plain, "But seeing the multitudes, He went up into the mountain: and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth, and taught them, ..." What is called the Sermon on the Mount is really

more of a private teaching, as He was seated there on a mountain with His disciples gathered around Him in a small group. He was teaching them.

What is called the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5, 6 and 7) is essential in terms of understanding what the New Covenant is all about. When God made the Old Covenant with ancient Israel, Moses stood on the mountain and gave to those who had accepted the Old Covenant (which was based on the Ten Commandments) the statutes and judgments (Exodus 21, 22, 23). The statutes and judgments were the application of the principles of the Ten Commandments to a physical people and to physical circumstances. It was the physical application of the principles of the law to a civil nation. That was the basis of the Old Covenant. Jesus in Matthew 5, 6 and 7 gives the basis of the New Covenant, the application of the spiritual principles of the Ten Commandments to a spiritual people.

He begins to teach, starting out by showing what real happiness is and where real blessings come from. The word "blessings" here is the Greek word "*makarios*," which can also be rendered "happy." People grasp after happiness; they search for happiness. They are looking for and pursuing happiness, but Jesus explains that what really leads to happiness and blessings is an attitude, a state of mind—a state of mind of being totally yielded to God, of having God's perspective, of recognizing your dependence on God, of recognizing and really desiring God's way, of being yielded and surrendered to God. That's what really brings happiness. When you are completely yielded and surrendered to God, there is a peace and a happiness that is produced.

Jesus makes plain in Matthew 5:17 that He didn't come to abolish or to destroy the law. People think Christ came to do away with the law. But Christ says, 'Don't think that I've come to destroy the Law or the Prophets.' So, people immediately think the law's done away. Where do they get that? Jesus said, 'Don't think I have come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill.' —To fill it up to the full!

Isaiah 42:21, "...He will magnify the law and make it honorable."

Matthew 5:20, "...that except your righteousness shall exceed and be above and beyond that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way that you shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." The scribes and Pharisees lived in

outward conformity to the law. It is not simply to conform to the law. You have to be transformed and renewed in the way you think, on the inside. It is not enough to simply go through the motions of outward obedience. There needs to be a changed heart and mind to accompany it. We have to conform inwardly, as well as outwardly. Jesus then continues and He begins to expand and amplify. He illustrates the principles of the law. Notice here as we go through.

Matthew 5:21, I will just call your attention to, “You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ...”

Verse 22, “But I tell you, ...”

Verse 27, “You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ...”

Verse 28, “But I tell you, ...”

Verse 31, “It was also said, ...”

Verse 34, “But I say to you, ...”

Verse 38, “You have heard that it was said, ...”

Verse 44, “But I say to you, ...”

Christ goes through and picks out six principles that He says, ‘This is what you have always understood; this is what has been taught, but I am telling you, I am amplifying and magnifying.’

Matthew 5:21-22, “You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ‘You shall not commit murder;’ but whosoever shall commit murder shall be subject to the judgment. But I tell you, that everyone who is even superficially angry with his brother shall be subject to the judgment. You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ‘Whoever shall say to his brother, ‘Raca,’ shall be in danger of the council;’ but I tell you, ‘Whoever shall say, ‘You fool,’ shall be subject to the fire of Gehenna.’”

The first thing He addressed was the matter of violence, anger, resentment and hostility to others. He expounded the commandment on murder. He said, ‘You have heard that you are simply not to kill; you are not to do violence to your neighbor; but I am telling you that is not enough.’ It is not enough to simply refrain from picking up a gun and “blowing him away.” You can’t hold this attitude of hostility or resentment. You can’t hold on to resentment.

Verses 23-24, “Therefore if you are going to offer your gift at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go away. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” You have to be willing to make amends; you can’t hold on to those resentments and hostility. You can’t carry that around because the magnification of the

commandment on murder says you don’t harbor the spirit of murder. A lot of people don’t commit murder simply for the reason they are scared of getting caught. They don’t want to go to prison. They have better things to do. Because they are afraid they will get caught, they don’t do it. God wants something that goes beyond just being scared of getting caught. He wants us to come to have an attitude like He has.

Verses 27-28, then Christ continued and said, “You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ‘You shall not commit adultery;’ But I tell you, that everyone who looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” ‘You are not supposed to commit adultery. You thought that simply meant that while you are married to this woman, you are not supposed to go out with another woman. Well, I am telling you that it is not enough. It involves the whole attitude of lust. You don’t let something get in your way of obedience to Me.’

Then He went on even further concerning the matter of divorce.

Verses 31-32, “It was also said, ‘Whoever shall divorce his wife, let him give her a decree of divorcement.’ But I say to you, whoever shall divorce his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever shall marry her who has been divorced, commits adultery.”

‘You thought it was a simple matter that if you wanted to get rid of your wife, you just give her a writing of divorcement, and that’s all there was to it. That’s what the scribes have told you, but I am telling you that if you do that (He is speaking here to His disciples.) except for the cause of sexual immorality (Greek, “*porneia*,” “gross immorality”), you cause her to commit adultery.’ Christ showed here that, in terms of His disciples, those who were His followers, the matter of divorce and remarriage was not something that He permitted. He didn’t permit His disciples to put away their mates.

Now Paul clarified the situation in 1 Corinthians 7 dealing with the Corinthians, where the question arose: what about circumstances that happened before you came into the knowledge of the truth? What happens about circumstances in your past before you became Christ’s disciple?

1 Corinthians 7:17-24, Paul explained, that in a case like that, “every man abides in the situation where he is called.” You can’t go back and start ten years ago. You start where you are when you come into the knowledge of the truth. Christ is speaking to those who knew the truth, those who

were His disciples. He said, 'This kind of stuff that you've heard and you've done—that "won't wash." That is not what I intended from the beginning.'

Matthew 5:33-34, "'Again, you have heard that it was said to the ancients, "You shall not perjure yourself [swear], but shall perform your oaths to the Lord." But I say to you, swear not at all: ..."' 'You've heard that you ought to perform your oath. I am telling you that this is not enough. You shouldn't even be swearing because, by the very fact of swearing, you are making a distinction that, "Boy, I am really telling the truth this time." Well, if you have to make such a big deal that you are telling the truth, what are you doing the rest of the time?'

Verse 37, Christ said, "...let your communication be "Yes," "Yes;" "No," "No;" ..."' As His disciple, you don't have to go around sticking your hand on a stack of Bibles swearing and calling on God to witness, 'Man, I am really telling the truth this time!' Just tell the truth! It's not enough just to tell the truth when you swear that you are not lying. He says, 'I expect you to tell the truth—period.' You don't have to make a big deal of it. If you open your mouth, whatever comes out must be the truth. That's all it means—"yes," "yes" and "no," "no." Verses 38-39, "'You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, "Do not retaliate with evil: but whoever shall strike you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."''

You've seen the bumper stickers, "Don't get mad, get even." Christ did not subscribe to that philosophy. That principle, "an eye for an eye," as was given in the Old Testament was a principle of civil justice. In other words, it simply meant that the punishment had to fit the crime.

If you look in even fairly recent history, European history through the 1700s and early 1800s, you find some horrible punishments being meted out for some very minor crimes. Well, the principle that God gave to ancient Israel was "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." You don't exact more than the value of the crime. It didn't mean they gouged out eyes and teeth. If you go back, you find in Exodus 21-23 that there were actually fines that were levied. It was simply an expression that the punishment fit the crime.

What Christ is telling His disciples is, 'Look, this does not apply in personal dealings. You don't have some kind of personal vendetta to get even. You put your cause in God's hands. That's not a principle that carries over into private feuds and

vengeance. Don't have this attitude that, 'Nobody is going to get by with anything with me.' Be peaceable. I am telling you that you need to have a peaceable attitude and be willing even to suffer loss to keep the peace.'

Verses 43-44, "'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy." But I say to you, "Love your enemies, and bless those who curse you; do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you, and persecute you."''

It's not enough simply to love the ones that love you and hate everybody else. If you do that, you're not "one up" on sinners. That's no big deal; a lot of people do that. You have gangsters who like their friends and hate their enemies. You're not "one up" on anybody else when you do that, but rather, have God's attitude, which is the attitude of love and concern.

Verse 48, Christ magnifies and sums up, "'Therefore you shall become perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.'" In other words, become like God. That's what the New Covenant is all about—the law being written in our hearts and in our minds. Christ is amplifying and expounding it. Chapter 5 is dealing with the way we think and the way we are, which carries over into what we do.

In Matthew 6, He begins to deal with other matters. He deals with things we do—the outward displays of religion, the giving of alms, making offerings and prayer. Christ emphasizes things that are acts of worship need to be private acts of worship between you and God. When you are going to make a gift or give an offering, you do it privately. Don't be as the hypocrites and sound the trumpet before you give an offering to make sure everybody is looking and then drop it in coin by coin. Religion was what they did to impress other people. Christ said your religion needs to be between you and God, not something you put on as a public display to impress others.

It's the same thing with prayer. At the time of the morning and evening sacrifice (roughly at about 9 A.M. and 3 P.M.), a coal from the altar of burnt offerings was taken into the Holy Place and placed in the altar of incense. Incense was sprinkled on it and the odors of incense wafted up and filled the Holy Place into the Holy of Holies.

We are told in Revelation 5:8 this symbolized the prayers of the saints. The Jews understood that symbolism, and they came to regard the time of the burnt offerings as the hour of prayer. Some of the Pharisees took upon themselves the custom of

making a point of praying at those particular times when that ceremony was being carried out in the temple. They thought, 'Well, that symbolizes our prayers going before God, so we'll make a point of praying at that time.'

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with that. The Pharisees, however, made such a fetish out of it that they would make a point of being out on the street at that time. They started into these prayers because, after all, it was the hour of prayer. It was something they wanted, in effect, to impress everybody else with and make them feel kind of spiritually inferior—'I'm praying, why aren't you?'

Christ emphasized, 'Look, when you pray, go to God; go in a private place.' Now there are certainly examples of very brief public prayers. Christ on several occasions gave public prayers such as the blessing of a meal or invoking God's presence at a particular occasion. In the Old Testament, you find Solomon doing that at the dedication of the temple. We find reference to it being done in the Church, but it was very brief public prayer offered by one on behalf of the congregation. It was not the prayer life of the individual. Christ was making reference to people who were doing what they did to be seen of men.

Christ went on to expound about prayer and said, 'This is the way you pray; this is the way you do it.'

Matthew 6:7, "...do not use vain and empty chants, as the pagans do: ..." So, what do people do? They have taken what Christ gave to the disciples as an outline and they memorize it and parrot it out. They just rattled it off and made a vain repetition out of it. There is nothing wrong with memorizing this piece of scripture any more than there is anything else. But when something is just repeated over and over in a meaningless fashion, like an "Our Father" or "Hail Mary," just repeated over and over and over, it becomes meaningless. It is a vain repetition; that's not what prayer is all about.

Prayer is communication with God. You're talking to God. Christ told the disciples this is the way you do it. He gave them the outline and people memorize the outline instead of filling in the details. They just parrot the outline over and over again until it becomes meaningless. He emphasized the way that we should go about it. We are to address God as our Father, praising Him, desiring and acknowledging our need for Him, His Kingdom and the time when His will shall be completely fulfilled on this earth. We

pray about our needs and ask God for forgiveness. We ask God to help us to not be overwhelmed with sore trials, but rather, delivered from Satan's power and influence.

He continued and expounded on the subject of forgiveness in Matthew 6.

Verses 14-15, "Because if you forgive men their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you your sins. But if you do not forgive men their sins, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your sins against Him." The matter of forgiveness is a very important matter to understand. If we want to receive forgiveness, we have to be prepared to give it out. We cannot go around holding a grudge, resentment and animosity, and then expect to receive God's mercy and God's forgiveness.

He continued and discussed fasting.

Verses 16-18, "When you fast, do not be as those sanctimonious pretenders, affecting a gloomy, mournful appearance; because they contort their faces in order that they may show off to men that they are fasting. Truly, I tell you, this is their reward. But when you are fasting, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not give the appearance to men that you are fasting, but rather, fast to your Father who is in secret: and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." Again, it is something that is to be private. It reflects our private worship to God.

He then emphasized the fact that where our treasure is, that's where our heart is going to be.

Verses 19-21, "Do not store up wealth and treasure for yourselves upon the earth, where moth and rust spoil, and where thieves can burglarize and steal: But instead, store up wealth and treasure for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust spoil, and where thieves do not burglarize or steal: because where your wealth and treasure is, there is where your heart will be also." There's a balance in our attitude in terms of our service to God with the material and physical things.

Verse 33, there is recognition that, as it says, "But you should first seek after and strive for the kingdom of God, and His righteousness and character; and all these things shall be added to you." Put God first and everything else will fall in place. It is not a matter that we don't need physical things; it is just a matter of getting our priorities straight.

In Matthew 7:1-5, He showed the kind of attitude that we are to have—not a judging, condemning kind of an attitude.

He sums it all up here. The whole meaning of the Law and the Prophets is summed up.

Matthew 7:12, “Therefore whatever you desire that men should do to you, you should also do to them: because this is the whole meaning of the Law and the Prophets.” In other words, the whole point of God’s law is to treat people the way you want to be treated. It is a matter of love, outgoing concern.

In verse 21, Jesus also went on to make plain that not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” is going to enter the Kingdom. There are those who think that all you have to do is say, “I believe.” James brings out.

James 2:19, “You believe there is one God, you do well. But the demons also believe—and tremble.” If all you do is to believe in God, you are not even “one step up” on the devil. He believes in God. He knows that.

Verse 20, it is a matter that, “...faith without works is dead.”

Matthew 7:21, Jesus brings out, “Not everyone who calls Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but only he who is doing and practicing the will of My Father who is in heaven.” It’s not just a matter of saying “Lord, Lord”; it is a matter of obeying and serving God, of yielding and surrendering to God. That’s what’s involved. If we really believe God, we are going to surrender to Him.

Jesus went on to make a contrast between the way that leads to life and the way that leads to death.

Verses 13-14, “Enter in through the narrow gate: because wide is the gate, and broad is the way, which leads into destruction. And those who are entering through the wide gate and the broad way are the majority of all people. Because narrow is the gate, and difficult is the way, which leads into life. And those who are finding life are few.” There is a distinction that God’s way—the pathway that leads to life—is a narrow pathway. The way that leads to destruction is very wide and broad because that’s the one that most are on. If you’re on the road that everybody else is on, you’re on the wrong road—that is kind of what it comes down to.

A lot of people think, ‘How can all these people be wrong?’ The question is not how can they all be wrong; the question is how can they all be right? Christ made plain that most people weren’t going to be on the right road. If you’re on the road and you look around and, ‘Boy, everybody is headed this way,’ you better go back and look again at the road signs because you made a

wrong turn somewhere. Christ makes a contrast. We can’t just do something because others are doing it. That’s one of the worse reasons in the world to do it. ‘Well, I saw everybody else do it. I saw them do it, and I thought I’d just do the same thing.’

Christ makes it plain we need to be doing what we are doing because we are trying to follow Him. We are trying to be like Him. When you make decisions and choices in your life, they need to be based on the fact that you are trying to become more like Christ, not more like the world or more like somebody else. Jesus Christ is the One we are trying to copy. We are trying to emulate His attitude. We need to examine what we do, the way we are in comparison to Him. He’s our standard.

False prophets known by their fruit: Matthew 7:15-20 and Luke 6:43-45.

Matthew 7:15, he warns us, “But be on guard against false prophets, who come to you dressed as innocent sheep, but within they are extorting and ravenous wolves.” The devil doesn’t show up with a little sign hanging around his neck saying, ‘I am the devil; I am here to deceive you.’ You can always recognize the devil because he has a red suit and pitchfork in his hand, right? He never shows up that way. He shows up as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

As the Sermon on the Mount concludes, we continue the account in Mark 2.

Mark 2:1, “And after some days He again came back into Capernaum, and the news circulated that He was in the house.” In other words, the news circulated that He was back home again. That’s an indication that He had a house; He had His own home there in Capernaum. We saw earlier of a move that He made from Nazareth to Capernaum. When He got back to Capernaum, the news was that He was simply in the house. He was back at home. People knew where to come. It was a specific house where they expected Him to be.

Jesus heals on the Sabbath: Mark 2:3-12, Luke 5:17-26 and Matthew 9:2-8.

In Mark 2:3-4, there were some who had a friend who was paralyzed and they wanted to bring him in to have Christ heal him. But there were so many people crowding in that they couldn’t even get in. They climbed up on the roof, cut a hole in it and let him down that way.

Now I think we understand that the kind of roofs they had were not our steep pitched Acadian-style roofs. Probably all five of them would have

needed to be healed if that was the case. Somebody probably would have fallen off. Roofs are steep-pitched in this area because it is an area where there is a lot of rain. Capernaum was an area where there was very little rain, and they didn't need a steep pitch on the roof. They generally had a flat roof and they would use it as extra living quarters. Often that would be the case or, if you had a shady area, you could pitch kind of a little canopy up there. You could "catch" a breeze and it would be pleasant.

But anyway, they got up on top of this flat roof, dug back and let this guy down. Christ healed him.

Mark 2:5, notice He told the man, "... 'your sins have been forgiven you.'" The Pharisees and scribes got all upset.

Verse 7, "'Why does this man speak blasphemies this way? Who is able to forgive sins except God?'" 'Who do You think You are to forgive sins?'

Verse 9, He said, "'Which is easier to say to the paralytic: 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to tell him, 'Stand up! Pick up your bed, and walk?'" When the guy got up and left, that kind of clenched the argument. See, it is easy to say, 'I forgive you and your sins are forgiven.' How do you know though that they speak with authority? -Well, if they tell you, 'Rise, take up your bed,' and *you walk*. By "bed" He meant like a little bedroll. He was not talking about picking up your Sealy Posturepedic and putting it on your shoulder. It was like a sleeping bag or something. That kind of clenched the argument as to 'who do You think You are to forgive sin?' Obviously God was paying attention.

We might just notice here a couple of other things.

Matthew is called: Mark 2:13-14, Luke 5:27-28 and Matthew 9:9.

Mark 2:14-16 is when Levi (also known as Matthew) the son of Alphaeus was called.

Scribes and Pharisees accuse Christ: Mark 2:16-17, Luke 5:30-32 and Matthew 9:11-13.

In Matthew 9:11-13, the Pharisees were upset when they saw Jesus going in and eating with Matthew and some of his friends. They asked, 'Why are you associating with these sinners?' Christ said He hadn't come to call the righteous (or actually those who thought they were righteous) to repentance, but those who knew they were sinners. Christ said, 'These people, by your definition, are sinners. They are the ones that need to repent. You don't need to repent; why should I take up My time with you? You

don't think you have anything to repent of. You figure they have a lot to repent of; maybe I better tell them about it.' He just put it back on them because they were standing there always ready to carp and criticize because they were jealous. They resented the authority with which He spoke, and they felt like He was going to take away their following.

Parable of the wineskins: Mark 2:21-22, Luke 5:36-39 and Matthew 9:16-17.

Luke 5:36-39, there is an interesting expression that is sometimes not clearly understood, "And also He spoke a parable to them: 'No one puts a new piece of cloth on an old garment; otherwise the new tears from the old garment, and the old does not agree with the new piece of cloth. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst open the wineskins and it will be poured out, and the wineskins will be destroyed. But new wine should be put into new wineskins, and then both are preserved together. Also, no one having drunk the old wine, immediately desires the new wine; because he says, "The old is better."'"

The wineskins were made out of leather and they stretched and expanded. The gases in the fermentation process stretched them out. By the time it was over with, they had been used and the leather was set. It wasn't going to expand anymore; it would burst. Christ said to put new wine in new wine skins and both are preserved. No one having drunk the old wine immediately desires the new, as the old is better.

This is a parable. Christ gives a very important principle. You see, new truth can't be added to an old approach to life. The new and the old don't go together—it won't fit. People are more comfortable with the old because it is familiar, but when you learn God's truth, you can't simply patch it onto your old way of life. It is an entirely new way of life. You can't fit in a few elements of God's truth (the new wine, so to speak); you can't fit that in with the old way because it will just burst it asunder. It won't fit. It takes a new way of life to be conformable to God's truth.

I have already commented on the Sermon on the Mount in regards to Christ's office as Mediator of the New Covenant. The whole basis of the New Covenant is the amplification of the principles of the Ten Commandments applied to a spiritual nation. We find right here in the Sermon on the Mount that Christ amplified the principles in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, just as Moses in Exodus 21, 22 and 23 amplified the principles

in terms of dealing on a physical basis with a physical, carnal nation.

The key word in Exodus 21, 22 and 23, over and over again, was the word “IF.” If a man shall do such and such, this is what you do. That’s what Moses had to be concerned with. Because the people didn’t have a heart to obey, all these “ifs” were given. He finished giving the Ten Commandments, but what do you do if somebody does this or somebody does that? What do you do when this happens? You are dealing with a civil nation. Well, if this happens, then this is what you do; if that happens, then you do this. It goes through Exodus 21, 22 and 23.

Now Christ in Matthew 5, 6 and 7 doesn’t deal with all of these “what ifs” because this is a message directed to people whom God is writing His laws in their hearts and minds—people who have a heart to obey, people who are wanting to surrender to God. He explains the principle: this is what you are supposed to become. This is really the principle of the law magnified. This is what God was really driving at, not simply a list of, “this is what is going to happen if you do this, and this is what you do if you do that.” It was a different approach given for a different people for different circumstances.

I hope this has given you a little bit of insight into this portion of Scripture—Passover 28 A.D. to Passover 29 A.D. We are one and a half years into Christ’s ministry. We are going to pick it up next time at the Passover of 29 A.D. We are going to find that as we get further along, the scripture begins to go into more and more detail, and we will go into greater and greater lengths of detail on some of this.

Bible Study # 32
March 14, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Matthew 8, 11, 12, 13; Mark 2:23—4:20; Luke 6:1—8:15; John 5

This evening we are covering the period from the Passover of 29 A.D. until the Feast of Tabernacles of the same year, 29 A.D. It was during this period of time that Jesus passed the halfway point of His three and one-half year ministry. We want to note some things concerning that this evening.

The last Bible study covered the time between the Passover 28 A.D. and the Passover 29 A.D. Remember Jesus began His public ministry at the fall festival season of 27 A.D. That was when He appeared where John was baptizing by the River Jordan. Jesus came there and was baptized by John. He remained there preaching for a short period of time. We are not told how long. Within a short period of time, He returned to Galilee and went to Cana for a wedding feast that is recorded; His first public miracle is recorded. Then within a short period of time after that, He left, went away into the wilderness by Himself, fasted for 40 days and was tempted of Satan. He went through this period of time and returned from there; we picked up the story with His coming to Jerusalem at the Passover of 28 A.D., which was about six months after He had been baptized by John.

He made a very dramatic appearance in Jerusalem. He came in and chased the money changers out of the temple. We went through the whole thing. You remember the whole story. Last Bible study we focused in on that time period. We picked it up there as He cleansed the temple. Then He began that period of privately teaching His disciples.

Now understand that Jesus had more than 12 disciples. There were 12 of the disciples that were ordained as apostles. We will note that this evening. A disciple was anyone who followed Him. At the end of His public ministry, the time that is recorded in Acts 1, there were 120 acknowledged followers—120 disciples or students. Out of that 120, there were 12 that He singled out and ordained as apostles.

Remember the story in Acts 1, after Judas had committed suicide, Simon Peter and the rest of the 11 were gathered in the upper room. They said they needed someone to take Judas' place and that it needed to be someone who was with

them from the beginning. They singled out two individuals, as recorded in Acts 1, who they said had been with them from the beginning. In other words, the two had been among the disciples; they were not of the twelve, but were disciples or students. They had been there, had seen the things that Jesus had done and had heard firsthand the things He had said. In that sense, they could testify as an eyewitness of the resurrection and of the things that had transpired. During that year we had the private teaching to His disciples, the Sermon on the Mount and various things that are recorded.

We pick up the story this evening around the time of the Passover 29 A.D. This was about a year and a half after Jesus had begun His public ministry. We will focus on a six-month period of 29 A.D. The bulk of this time Jesus spent in Galilee.

The religious establishment, the Pharisees and particularly the Sadducees (the priestly group), was centered in Jerusalem. If you look at a map, you find there are three areas that make up what we call the Holy Land. There was in the southern part around Jerusalem the province of Judea. North of Judea was the Roman province of Samaria; north of Samaria was the province of Galilee. These three taken together plus some territory on the other side of the Jordan River make up the ancient kingdom of Israel.

When they split after Solomon's death, it consisted of Judah in the south and the kingdom of Israel in the north. Israel was taken into captivity; then a little over 100 years later, Judah was taken into captivity. Judah (the Jews) was the only tribe that ever returned. They came back and they settled, not only in the southern area around Jerusalem, but gradually, as time went on, they spread out and settled in some of the other areas that had been anciently the territory of Israel.

The areas of Samaria and Galilee were both parts of what had been the territory of the northern tribes. The northern tribes were moved out. Babylonians were brought in to take their place and were settled there by the king of Assyria (2 Kings 17). These Babylonians became known as Samaritans, taking their name from Samaria, which was the capital city of ancient Northern Israel. In our Old Testament series, we studied them and the great antipathy that was present between them and the Jews. The Jews really looked down on and despised the Samaritans. There had been various problems in the past.

Then north of Samaria there was an area of Jewish settlement known as Galilee. Now the Jews in Judea tended to look down on Galilee and Galileans. The Jews in Judea were a very exclusivist group. They really looked down on anyone else. In Judea they did not have a lot of contact with non-Jews. They didn't have to, other than some of the Roman occupation troops and things of this sort. They really had very limited contact with non-Jews.

Galilee was an area where the population was a little more diverse. There were Jewish settlements, predominantly Jewish communities, but there was a significant Gentile settlement in the area. It tended to be more involved in direct trade and commerce. There was a lot more contact with non-Jews. The Jews in Judea kind of looked down on the Galileans. They viewed or compared the territory of ancient Israel to the temple. They compared Judea as being the Holy Place and Jerusalem to the Holy of Holies. They called Galilee the court of the Gentiles. This was kind of the area on the periphery.

They had a kind of disparaging, patronizing attitude toward the Galileans. That's not uncommon because you can go around the world and can find that virtually anywhere you go, whoever is there, they have someone else they look down upon. That seems to be human nature. People want to look for somebody they can look down upon. The Jews, who looked down upon a number of people, looked down upon the Jews who lived in Galilee. They looked down on the Jews who lived in Diaspora even more because they were really in contact with the Gentiles.

You have to kind of get the picture of it and realize when Jesus came in and began to preach.

John 1:46, they said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth [Galilee]?" That was kind of their attitude—if it was of any value, certainly it originated in Judea and Jerusalem; anything of value, anybody who knew anything originated from right there. 'I mean, obviously, if this guy knew very much, He would be one of us. How could He be anything of value; He comes from way up there.'

We have regional and sectional conflicts in our nation and our society today—same thing. Human nature is basically the same all the way down. Jesus knew that when He began to spend a lot of time in Jerusalem and Judea, He was going to very quickly come into really strong conflict with the religious leaders because He was going to be right there in their territory, on their turf. It wasn't going to be long before they were going to resent it—and how! They were jealous of Him

because, as they viewed it, He came in and did these things, said these things that people were impressed with. They flocked to hear Him and they ignored them as religious leaders.

They worried, 'We are going to lose our status, our position. We have a good thing going. We are the ones that everybody looks to. Then He comes in here and people start paying attention to Him, acknowledge Him and want to listen to Him. They are impressed with Him. He performs these miracles and preaches these powerful sermons; we don't like the effect it is having on the people. What's more, we are afraid that He is going to stir up something, and the Roman government is going to intervene because He is talking about a Kingdom of God. He is talking about being the Messiah, or people are talking about that and saying that He is the Messiah. All we need is something that provokes the Romans, and they will send in troops. They will "smash" us and we are out of a job. We don't want that!'

Jesus knew that when He started spending a lot of time in Jerusalem and Judea, a crisis was going to come to a head very quickly. The result was that Jesus did not stay there in Jerusalem a great deal of the time of His ministry. He would come up there for the holy days, would be there for periods of time and then He would leave—just be gone out of the way. He would be up in Galilee and other areas, preaching and teaching, but He was kind of out on the periphery of Jerusalem.

The Jews there tended to think that anything of significance had to be going on where they were. It's kind of like today. The power centers in our nation are Washington, D.C. and New York City. People who are part of the Eastern power establishment tend to view anything going on in (as they would view it) the "backwater" areas of the country, 'Well, that can't be of any significance. If it were important, it would be going on right here in Washington or New York. How can something of value be going on in Lafayette, Louisiana? Nothing of value could be going on there because, after all, we are the ones who are where the center of power and money and control and everything else is.' People tend to have that kind of shortsighted outlook. That's true in our time today and it's true in other times, other societies. It's the nature of things.

During the time period that we are going to cover this evening, Jesus was going over Galilee, city by city. Galilee, although it was looked down upon, was really the richest part of Palestine. Palestine at the time of Christ was divided into Judea, Samaria and Galilee. Alfred Edersheim in

his classic work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, quotes various ancient sources to prove that Galilee had upwards of 240 cities and towns of 15,000 inhabitants or more. *Josephus* points out that it was a rich area that teemed with agriculture. The climate was described as being the best in Palestine, and there were great forests in that area at that time—dissimilar to what it is today. Anciently the whole land was a land flowing with milk and honey.

As a result of misuse and as a result of God's removal of His blessing, various problems came in. And, of course, we have seen parallels in more modern times. As an area is denuded of its forests, the patterns of rainfall change, the climate tends to change and various problems come in. Things have changed since then, but at that time, Galilee was really the richest area agriculturally in Palestine.

The Sea of Galilee, which was there, was famous for its abundance of fish. The entire area was a rather prosperous commercial area. Caravan routes came through there. It was an area that had a lot of contact with the Gentiles. This is where Christ grew up, and it is also the area where He spent a great deal of His public ministry.

During the time period we are covering this evening, shortly after the Days of Unleavened Bread in 29 A.D., the 12 apostles were selected from among Christ's disciples and ordained. Now, we should take note of the apostles and who they were. Sometimes if you have seen some of the movies, they really don't give an accurate view. It shows one of the accounts we will read this evening of Christ walking by and seeing **Peter and Andrew**. He tells them, 'Come and follow Me; I will make you fishers of men.' As that kind of thing is introduced in the movie, you see Him come by and kind of "lays eyes" on these guys—transfixes them with a stare. It's almost as though there is a hypnotic effect; they drop what they are doing and follow off.

Well, it wasn't that way. He had known Peter and Andrew for a period of time. Andrew and Peter both knew Him. Andrew, in particular, had been a disciple of John the Baptist and was there when Jesus was baptized. John had pointed out Jesus to His disciples. Andrew followed Him because John had pointed Him out. Plus, Peter and Andrew (who were brothers) were in a fishing partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

James and John were the sons of Zebedee and their mother's name was Salome. Salome was a sister to Mary, the mother of Jesus. That meant

that James and John were first cousins of Jesus Christ. They had known about Him from the time of early childhood. Since they did not grow up in the same town, we don't know exactly how much contact they had. But, undoubtedly, they had some contact, particularly at festival times, as they would tend to travel together to Jerusalem to the Feasts and things of that sort.

They certainly knew who He was and there was contact there. On occasion they had spent time with Him, had listened to Him and had been with Him. By the time He told Peter, 'Come, follow Me and I will make you fishers of men,' Peter and Andrew had been with Him on a number of occasions, had heard Him preach and had probably been there at Cana of Galilee and had seen the turning of the water into wine. They had heard the Sermon on the Mount; they had been with Him from time to time at various occasions.

They were in business for themselves and would be gone for periods of time, but they were there spending time with Christ when He was in their locale. They were students as well as disciples, but they had not turned their back on their business. At this point, Jesus told them, 'I have something in store for you that will go beyond what you are doing. You need to leave that and come follow Me full time.' By that time, they knew enough and were convinced enough that they were prepared to do so.

We read also of **Philip** who was a native of Bethsaida. He was a friend of James, John, Peter and Andrew; he was also a disciple of John the Baptist.

Bartholomew was also known as Nathanael. Bartholomew is really a surname. "Bar" in Hebrew or in Aramaic (which is virtually the equivalent of Hebrew) signifies "son of." "Bartholomew" means "the son of Tholomey or Tholomew." The term "bar" was commonly used, like where Jesus referred to Peter as "Simon Barjona." That just meant "Simon, the son of Jonah." Bartholomew or Nathanael, as he was also called, was a native of Cana. Philip introduced him to Jesus Christ.

We are not told much about **Thomas** in terms of his background. According to tradition, he was born in Antioch.

Matthew is also known as Levi. He is described as the son of Alphaeus. He was a tax collector from Capernaum. We have two other individuals who are referred to as the sons of Alphaeus. There is no specific mention of **James**, the son of Alphaeus, and Judas (not Iscariot), also known as **Thaddaeus or Lebbaeus**. He is called

Lebbaeus Thaddaeus in one case or Judas (not Iscariot). That particular Judas that is mentioned here and James, the son of Alphaeus, were brothers.

There was a third brother in the group—**Simon** the Zealot was also a brother of James, the son of Alphaeus. This particular Simon, Judas and James were the sons of Alphaeus. Their mother was another sister of Mary, the mother of Christ. Those three were also cousins. Simon the Zealot is called Simon the Canaanite in one account. The term “Canaanite” in that context refers to “a political faction”; it was a nationalist faction. The Zealots were out to overthrow the Roman government.

Now, note here, the people that Christ called. Christ called individuals out of a wide variety of backgrounds. They came out of divergent political backgrounds. Christ’s disciples did not remain in those backgrounds. They did not remain involved in politics. Simon didn’t keep trying to go out and overthrow the Roman government. If you want the two extremes, you have Simon the Zealot and Matthew who was a Roman tax collector.

Now the Jews really resented Roman occupation. They resented that greatly because, as they viewed it, they said, ‘Look, God gave this land to us. Who are these pagan Romans coming in here “lording it” over us? They really think they are something, but really they are nothing because we are the chosen people, and God gave this land to us. These pagan Romans are coming in here “lording it” over us, oppressing us and taking taxes.’ They really resented that anyone would do such a thing. They despised Jews who worked in cooperation with the Roman government.

For a parallel, go back in American History to the time of the reconstruction after the War Between the States. Nobody was hated worse in the South than the group called the “Scalawags”—Southerners who collaborated with the Carpetbaggers because they could see that was the way to success and money. Their own people hated them because they viewed them as a collaborator, a “turncoat.” You can look at other parallels and examples of history. That’s one that would be more familiar to us, but you can look at other parallels.

Nobody is more unpopular than someone who is viewed as a traitor to his own. ‘You have turned your back on us, your own people, and you are in collaboration with those that we view as the enemy.’ They actually hated them worse than they did the enemy. ‘The enemy is from outside and came in—we can understand that. But you—

you are a “turncoat.”’ That’s the way Matthew was viewed.

You have to understand how the Jews looked down on what they called the “Publicans.” “Publican” simply meant “someone who held public responsibility, public office, an employee of the Roman government,” which meant that they were in continual contact with the Romans. They were viewed as collaborators with the Roman government, plus the fact that many or most of the tax collectors were notorious for being crooks.

The Romans operated on a principle that the tax collector was paid on a percentage basis. The more he collected, the more he made, which gave incentive to be an industrious tax collector. Because the Romans wanted to make sure they got “theirs,” they figured the best way was to pay the guy on a percentage basis. That way he would get a lot more for them. The more he got for them, the more he got for himself, which you can imagine did not endear the tax collector to the people.

You had on that extreme one such as Matthew. On the other hand, you had Simon the Zealot who was a really revolutionary firebrand type. That’s what the Zealots were; they were kind of an ultra nationalist movement. They used everything from guerilla tactics and techniques to drive out and overthrow the Romans. They were involved in various methods of political propaganda and attempts to stir up and incite rebellion. They were ready to go to war to drive out the Romans.

Jesus’ disciples came from both ends and all in the middle. God calls His people out from a variety of backgrounds. We come from a variety of backgrounds, perhaps even a variety of political backgrounds. Some may have no interest whatsoever in politics; others may have been very involved on the one side or the other. God calls us out. And that’s just it—we are called out (John 6:44).

Christ’s disciples did not continue to stay enmeshed in that world’s system. Simon the Zealot had to learn; Matthew had to learn. All of them had to learn that there was a Kingdom coming. It was the Kingdom of God. It was not going to be set up by some revolutionary overthrow; it was not going to be voted in; it was not going to be this or that. It was going to be established by the power of God.

Christ called His disciples from a variety of backgrounds.

The final apostle, **Judas Iscariot**, was the treasurer of the group. He was called the “keeper

of the money bag” (NIV, John 12:6; 13:29) (NKJ, “money box”). That meant he was the treasurer. I would call that to your attention; I think we should see that God sometimes allows things.

Sometimes we wonder why God is allowing this. Sometimes people get upset because they think, ‘Well, surely God wouldn’t allow this.’ Well, Judas was there, right at the top. He was one of the 12 apostles for three and one-half years. He held a position of responsibility and trust. He was the keeper of the bag; he was the treasurer. Not only was he the treasurer, he was also a thief.

Now that’s not speculation. It says so right there in John 12:6. Remember the story when the woman bought the ointment to pour on Christ’s feet and Judas got upset. He asked, ‘Why was this stuff wasted? This is extravagance; this is waste—and it’s ridiculous. This stuff should have been taken out and sold; we could have gotten money for it and given it to the poor. And here you let this woman just waste it, pour it out here on Your feet.’

Boy, he was all upset. He thought that was terrible and, undoubtedly, some of the others standing around thought, ‘Yeah, that’s a good point, why wasn’t it sold? I’ll bet we could have gotten a lot of money for that and given it to the poor and helped people.’

John 12:6, John adds in the parenthetical thought, “But he said this, not because he actually had concern for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the money bag [keeper of the bag], and carried what was put into it.” That’s why he said it. Sometimes what people say and what their motive for saying it is entirely different. John adds that in when he tells the story in retrospect—that way you don’t think that Judas was this altruistic guy. Yeah, he sounded that way. He didn’t say, ‘Give it to me so I can steal it.’ No, he said, ‘This stuff should have been taken and sold, given to the poor and helped all these people.’ He didn’t say it because he cared for the poor; he said it because he was the treasurer and was planning on “skimming some off the top.” He was a thief.

The point I would like to make is: Do you think Jesus knew that Judas was up to “no good” on some of that? Of course He did.

He confronted the woman at the well in Samaria and asked her where her husband was. She said, ‘Oh, I am not married.’ And He said, ‘Right, you are! You’ve had five of them, and the one you are living with now, you haven’t gotten around to marrying. It’s good that you tell the truth. You

definitely are not married.’ Jesus could look into the hearts of people. He knew and could discern the motives.

Of course He knew that Judas was stealing. And you know, the situation dragged on and on for a period of time until, finally, in God’s time, it was dealt with. There’s an important lesson to learn from that: *God does not solve problems based on our time schedule.* There’s nothing you know about that is going to be news to God, nothing you’ve found out that is going to be a shock to God—‘Man, I wouldn’t have known that if you hadn’t told Me.’

Anything that is going on, even a sparrow that falls to the ground, God knows. There is nothing that happens that is news to God. God knows and God doesn’t operate on our time schedule. You see, that is a matter of walking and living by faith, of trusting God to do what He says He will do, when He chooses to do it. That is a very important lesson that all of us must learn.

Jesus shows He is Lord and Master: Luke 6:1-5, Matthew 12:1-8 and Mark 2:23-28.

Luke’s account makes it plain when this happened. The others don’t. The others simply refer to a Sabbath in which Jesus was walking through the grain fields, but Luke makes plain the time setting.

Luke 6:1, “And it occurred on the second first Sabbath [the second Sabbath of the first rank, which is the second annual holy day during the Feast of Unleavened Bread], that He passed along through the grain fields; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands and were eating.” Now the term “the second first Sabbath” (KJV, “And it came to pass on the second Sabbath after the first,”) is a very ambiguous thing. What in the world is that? The more literal translation would be “on the second first Sabbath.” Now what is that? What are the Sabbaths of first rank? Those are the annual Holy Days. A reference to a Sabbath of first rank would be one of the annual Sabbaths, one of the “high-day Sabbaths,” as the Jews termed them. The “second first Sabbath” would be the second annual Holy Day, which would be the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. This is the time setting—on the second Sabbath of first rank, which was the second annual Holy Day of Unleavened Bread.

They were passing through the grain fields and His disciples were picking ears of grain. They weren’t out harvesting. They had spent the night in a house outside of the walled city and that morning they walked a short distance into town. That’s normally the way people got around in

those days. They didn't hop into their car to go three blocks. They walked. And when they walked, it was normally on a footpath other than some of the main Roman roads that connected the major cities. It was a footpath because all that traveled it were people going back and forth by foot. Here was a little pathway that went from the house where they had stayed going into the town, a pathway that cut through a grain field.

Some of you can remember back before all of the highways were fixed up the way they are now with all the road-grading equipment and everything. There were a lot of times the connection between houses out in the country was a small path, a bridle or footpath, maybe a wagon path. It was usually fairly narrow and kept clean by people walking back and forth or people riding an animal or pulling a wagon back and forth. If there was a field of grain next to it, it was right up there at the edge of the path.

They were walking down the path and were reaching out plucking off some heads of grain, rolling them around in their hands, getting the grains off and eating it. There was nothing illegal about that.

Deuteronomy 23:24-25, “When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container. When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain.”

The law made specific arrangement for the fact that a stranger, a sojourner, was welcome as they were walking down the road to anything that was out there at roadside that they could pluck off. They could not harvest in the sense of going out and gathering things to take someplace else, but what they ate as they walked along was permissible. There wasn't a problem with that. It was not a matter of stealing; there wasn't a law of God involved.

What was involved was one of the traditions of the Pharisees, the Rabbis. The fourth commandment says you are not to work on the Sabbath. Well, the Rabbis had asked the question, ‘What is work?’ You and I ought to know what work is, but they wanted to get technical about what work is. They finally defined 39 different categories of work that were prohibited on the Sabbath. And each of those 39 types was sub-divided into other groups. This came under the prohibition of harvesting on the Sabbath. Anything over three heads of grain consisted of harvesting. They had to define harvesting. You shouldn't harvest. Well, all

right, how much is harvesting? They had it figured out.

In Nehemiah 13, Nehemiah reprimanded them because they were coming in bearing burdens on the Sabbath. They were hauling their agricultural produce into Jerusalem. Nehemiah reprimanded them because they were not to be bringing in these burdens on the Sabbath. So, when the Rabbis got through with it, they asked, what constitutes a burden? They finally concluded that anything over the weight of three dried figs consisted of a burden that you should not bring in because you were transporting agricultural produce. They had to “nail it all down.”

You understand now why so many of the top lawyers are Jewish. They have a proclivity for very detailed, technical-minded approaches to things. They have a real proclivity to be technically minded; they had become so technically minded here that, as lawyers often do, they were “straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel.” They missed the whole point of it; they were worried about defining every little thing.

But it gets back to whether or not we have a heart to obey. Is the question we ask, ‘How close can I get to what God really wants?’ Or is it, ‘How close can I get to the edge and not get “zapped?”’ How close can I get to the edge and God not strike me with lightning?’

‘I really don't want to get sent to the lake of fire or anything, but I want to make sure that I don't do anything more than I have to. I want to be right on the edge, dabble my toe over in the cesspool [that is this world] and get just as close as I can but stay out of trouble. I want somebody to draw a line, and I will get right up to it with my toe on it.’

That's not the way God wants us to be. It's a matter of our attitude, of our approach. Are we trying to be as much like God as we can be or are we trying to see how much we can get by with without getting into trouble? These are two totally different approaches.

Well, the approach they had taken that led to all of these lines being drawn was people really didn't have a heart to obey. They didn't want to do anything more than they had to. The Pharisees said, ‘Well, I'll tell you what we will do. We will draw these arbitrary lines and we will really “rope them in.” We will attach so many “do's” and “don'ts” that they won't even be able to get close to breaking the law because we will hedge them about.’ It reflects an attitude.

Matthew 12:7, Jesus said, “But if you had only known and understood what this means, “I desire mercy and compassion, and not sacrifice,” then

you would not have condemned the guiltless.” Not the guilty, but the guiltless.

If you had understood the principle, the spirit of the law, if you had understood what God meant when He said, ‘I want mercy not sacrifice.’ God is more concerned with an inward attitude that is displayed by outward action than He is by somebody who simply goes through the motion of outward ritual and conformity. ‘What you see is what you get!’ There is a contrast, a play on the symbolism.

Jesus utilized that time period and emphasized a part of the spiritual lesson. A little later we find He was in the synagogue and was teaching. Notice why they watched Him; they watched Him to see if He would heal on the Sabbath.

Man with withered hand healed: Luke 6:6-10, Mark 3:1-5 and Matthew 12:9-13.

Luke 6:7, “And the scribes and the Pharisees were carefully watching Him to see whether or not He would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find an accusation and complaint against Jesus.” They were doing it so they could have an accusation. They were looking for a chance to accuse. They were not concerned about helping someone.

Matthew 12:11-12, Jesus pointed out an example to them, “But He answered them, ‘Which man shall there be of you, who shall have one sheep, and if this sheep fall into a pit on the Sabbath, shall not take hold of it and pull it out? How much better then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’” If you have a sheep that’s stuck in the pit, you pull him out. Here this man has his right hand all withered and crippled.

Verse 13, Christ reached out and told him, ‘Be healed.’

He knew that they were watching. They were looking for an excuse to accuse. We see their attitude. They hated Him because they felt He was a threat to their domination over the people.

Jesus prays and selects twelve disciples: Mark 3:13-19 and Luke 6:12-16.

Mark 3:13-16, “And He went out to a mountain, and called to Him those He had chosen: and they came to Him. And He ordained and appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power and authority to heal diseases and to cast out demons. And He gave Simon an additional name, Peter.” Peter is always mentioned first; he was the leader of the twelve. In every listing that you find of the 12 apostles, Simon Peter’s name is always mentioned first. We find here the

listing of them. We have already gone through that.

We find here how Christ went about selecting them. He went out to a private place. He prayed all night. He was facing a momentous decision. Luke 6:12-13 mention that He spent all night in prayer to God concerning the selection of these 12, going over each one of them, talking about it and discussing it with the Father before making that very important decision. He ordained them as apostles, sent them out to preach and gave them authority to heal and to cast out demons.

Jesus heals the centurion’s servant: Luke 7:2-10 and Matthew 8:5-13.

Luke follows more of a direct chronological account. Matthew tends to be topical; he deals with topics or subjects and lumps things together with only the very most general regard for chronology. It’s just that he is writing from a different standpoint.

Luke 7:2-5 bring out that there was a centurion, a Roman soldier, who had a servant who was sick and about to die. This Roman soldier was very concerned about his servant. He was a man that had come to have a certain regard for the Jews. He had knowledge of the Jewish religion, what the Jews sometimes termed a “proselyte of the gate.” In other words, he was not fully converted into Judaism, but he was one who would frequent the synagogues and would seek to learn these things. The Roman soldier heard about Jesus and sent elders of the Jews to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant.

These elders came to Jesus and said, ‘Look, this man is a very deserving man. He loves our nation. He’s been very favorable to us; he built a synagogue for us. We wish you would come and do as he asks.’ Jesus went with them and when he was fairly close to the house, the centurion sent friends to Him.

Luke 7:6-8, “...saying to Him, ‘Lord do not trouble Yourself: because I am not worthy..., that You should even come under my roof. Furthermore, neither did I consider that I was worthy myself to come to You. But just give the command, and my servant shall be healed. Because I also am a man appointed under authority, and having soldiers under me; and I command this one, “Go,” and he goes; and to another, “Come,” and he comes; and to my servant, “Do this,” and he does it.’”

He said, ‘I understand how authority works. I don’t deserve for You to come into my house. I don’t feel worthy to even come up and talk to You face to face and I certainly don’t deserve the honor that You would bestow in doing that. I

don't need that because I understand authority. You don't have to come over here because I know You have authority and all You have to do is give the word. I may not understand a lot of things, but one thing I understand—I understand authority. I am a Roman soldier and I know how authority works. If you have authority, you say it and it is done.'

They didn't put things to a vote in the Roman army. Authority was absolute. When they said go, you went. There was no question about it. You didn't ask to know why you were supposed to go. You took off. This Roman centurion said, 'I understand authority and I know You have authority. So, really, all that is needed is You just give the word and my servant is going to be healed.'

Verse 9, "But when Jesus heard these things, He was amazed: and turning to the crowd that was following Him, He said, 'I tell you, I have not found even in Israel such great faith.'" He marveled. He said, 'You know, I have never met an Israelite that had this kind of faith. Here this Roman soldier has an understanding of faith that puts to shame all the rest of you.' He told His disciples and all of those that were there, 'You know this Roman soldier understands what faith is all about—he grasps that.'

There is an important lesson to learn here, a lesson of what faith is all about. Faith really gets back to the confidence that God can and will do what He says He will do. The centurion had confidence. So often we get our eyes on the "around" and lose sight of the power of God. We live in an age in which we are surrounded with all of the things that man can do, all of the glitter and glamour of man's technology. We are so surrounded with what man can do that we lose sight of what God can do.

Jesus made the observation in Luke.

Luke 18:8, "...when the Son of Man comes, will He truly find faith on the earth?" He gives the indication that He wouldn't find very much.

I think we have to understand—we have to realize—that we live in a faithless age. Maybe part of it is that of all the ages that didn't understand authority, ours is probably the chief. There is a correlation of the understanding of authority and faith. Nobody understood it better than this Roman soldier. We, perhaps, live in an age that has less faith, as well as an age that understands authority less, than any other age. It shouldn't surprise us that there is a little bit of a correlation here. Christ pointed this out, and this example is set down in the Bible to give us some insight as to what faith is all about.

Matthew 8:10, as He was talking to the centurion, Christ told some of the Pharisees around them, "...not even in Israel have I found so great faith."

Verses 11-12, "But I say to you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of this kingdom shall be thrown into the outer darkness:"

He looked around and said, 'You think you have it made. Let Me tell you something; you see that example over there, that Roman centurion. Understand something—when the Kingdom comes, you are going to find that there are people from the east and west and north and south—from all over the world. You are going to find people of every background who come and sit down with Abraham in the Kingdom because they're the children of faith—like this Roman centurion. You're going to find people of every background, people from all over, who are going to be there with Abraham. Some of you think you have it made because of your physical origin, but you are going to find yourself on the "outside looking in" because God looks on the heart.'

God looks on what we are, not simply on what we have or whatever the external trappings are. God looks on the heart, and that is very important.

Scribes and Pharisees accuse Jesus: Mark 3:22-27 and Matthew 12:24-30.

They accused Christ of casting out demons by Beelzebub, and He showed what a ridiculous statement that was.

Matthew 12:30, we note, "Anyone who is not with Me is against Me; anyone who doesn't gather with Me, scatters."

Verse 25, Christ had been talking here, "...Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to ruin and desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand." This should certainly show that Christ is not seeking to work through two or more competing organizations. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Jesus said every kingdom divided against itself is going to fall. Now the Kingdom of God is not going to fall; God is not working through various competing, differing, bickering organizations. He simply doesn't do that. A kingdom divided against itself is going to fall. Jesus said, 'If you are not with Me, you are against Me, and if you don't gather with Me, then you scatter.' So, again, we have an important lesson. We have an insight to help us

realize that God is not divided in such a way as that.

Jesus warns of unpardonable sin: Mark 3:28-30 and Matthew 12:31-37.

Christ then went on to discuss the subject of the unpardonable sin and warned the Pharisees. Let me summarize it. Sin is unpardonable because it is not repented of. It involves a willful hardening of the heart and mind against the workings of God's Holy Spirit. That's why it is called blasphemy against the Holy Spirit because the Spirit is the agency by which God works with our mind. When a person becomes so hardened against God's Spirit, there is simply no longer a means to bring them to repentance.

Christ warned the Pharisees because they knew better than what they were saying. They were very upset and were accusing Him of things out of jealousy and resentment. He knew that they knew better. He told them, 'Look, you are hardening your heart and mind and you had better be careful.'

Matthew 12:32, He mentions concerning this unpardonable sin that, "...it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in the coming age." Now that singles out this sin. It says it won't be forgiven now or in the future. That shows, of course, that some sins will be forgiven in the age to come.

The Catholic Church takes that verse and uses it to support purgatory—the idea that you can pay your way out in the world to come—which is taken out of context. They put it together with another couple of verses, which are also out of context, and use this to support the concept of prayers for the dead and the concept of purgatory. Many of you have come out of that background. You should be aware of the two or three verses they use to support that doctrine. This is not saying that you can say so many masses for someone and somehow help them to work their way out of purgatory because the key to being forgiven is repentance. The individual must repent. It talks about "in the world to come" or "the coming age," not simply that you go on living after you're dead. Ecclesiastes 9:5 says the dead know not anything. You don't know anything until you're resurrected, until you're brought back to life.

The Protestant world says, 'Boy, when you die that's it—your fate is sealed.' Well, they're not right either. This verse certainly shows that there will be sins forgiven. In fact, everything except the unpardonable sin can be forgiven in the age to come, in the time of the resurrection. That is,

as we understand it, the White Throne Judgment period.

Christ then went on to give a sign to the Pharisees.

Matthew 12:39-42, "And answering, He said, 'A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign shall not be given to it, except the sign of Jonah the Prophet. Because in the same way that Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights; so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: ...! The Queen of the South shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it:'"

That is the age to come. It is the time of judgment when the men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South are going to be resurrected at the same time when that generation, with whom Christ dealt with, was going to be resurrected.

So, that's the context, but notice this sign. 'No sign except the sign of the prophet Jonah, three days and three nights.' Do you know why that sign was uniquely a sign to the Pharisees and the religious leaders? In a special way that was the sign of Christ's Messiahship to them. Now think about it.

Remember Matthew 27:57-66. When Jesus was crucified, Joseph of Arimathea got the body, took it and quickly buried it before sunset. The Pharisees and some of the chief priests went to Pilate and said, 'We have a request to make. This deceiver while He was alive said that He would rise from the dead. Now what we are afraid of is that His disciples are going to come and steal the body and then claim He is raised from the dead. Then the latter condition of things will be worse than the beginning. We are really going to have a mess on our hands. What we need to do, at all costs, is to prevent that from happening. What we request from you, Pilate, is that you will give us a detachment of troops. We will set a guard on the tomb and we will seal the rock—nobody is going to be able to get in and steal the body. We will guarantee that. We'll have these soldiers there.' Pilate said, 'Fine, take them.' They ensured that nobody broke in and stole the body—and nobody did. But the body was still gone. You see, they had the witness of their own soldiers they had placed there to guard the tomb. The soldiers told them, 'Hey, this earthquake occurred and the rock rolled back. He's been resurrected. He's gone. Nobody came and stole the body.'

Remember what the Pharisees told them?

Matthew 28:13-14, “Instructing them to say, ‘His disciples came at night, and stole Him away while we were sleeping.’ And if this be heard by the governor, we will convince him, and you will have nothing to worry about.” They said, ‘Look, now don’t you tell anybody. You tell the people that you went to sleep and while you were asleep, the disciples came and stole the body. If Pilate hears of it and you get into trouble, we will take care of it and make sure that nothing happens to you.’”

Verse 15, “So they took the money, and did as they were instructed. And this report is widely circulated among the Jews to this day.” That story went abroad.

Now, if you work up a lie with someone, other people may hear it and may not know if it’s true or not. But there are two people that know it’s a lie—you and the guy you bribed to tell it. Christ being in the grave three days and three nights was a witness, a sign, to them in a unique way because they had the witness of their own soldiers who were there to testify He came out the same time He said He would. It was, in a very direct sense, a sign to them.

John the Baptist hears of the works of Jesus:
Luke 7:19-23 and Matthew 11:2-6.

Matthew 11:2-3, “Now when John was in prison, he heard about the works of Christ; and when he sent two of his disciples, they asked Him, ‘Are You the One who should come, or should we look for another?’” Now understand, John had known and acknowledged Christ to be the Messiah, but he had not fully understood all of the Old Testament prophecies. All of a sudden something happened that he hadn’t anticipated. He was put in jail, and it looked like he was going to be executed. And Jesus hadn’t done anything. The Kingdom was not restored and nothing was being done to stop his execution. John began to wonder and, even more likely, his disciples were wondering if maybe they had misunderstood something. So, he told them, ‘Well, you go ask Him: Is He the Messiah; is He the One that everything points to or is He simply another forerunner? Is someone coming after Him?’”

Verses 4-5, “And Jesus answered them, saying, ‘Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.’” Jesus then simply pointed to the works that He was doing. He told them to go and tell John what they saw and what they heard

and, in that sense, strengthen and encourage John in that final trial that he went through.

Verses 7-11, Jesus began to talk about John and the role that he served.

Verses 12-15, He said, “‘But from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven is taken by violence, and the violent seize it. Because the law and all the prophets prophesied until John. And if you’re willing to receive it, he is Elijah, who was prophesied to come. Anyone who has ears to hear, let him hear!’”

There’s an interesting comment on these verses in the *Adam Clark Commentary*. It says, “The tax gatherers and heathen, whom the Scribes and the Pharisees think have no right to the Kingdom of God, filled with zeal and earnestness, seize at once on the proper mercy of the Gospel and so take the Kingdom as by force from those learned doctors who claim for themselves the chiefest places in that Kingdom.” An earnestness of violent intensity is necessary to make it into the Kingdom. That’s the point! It takes earnestness. You have to thrust in, to really mean it, to go after it with everything in you.

Then he says, “The law and all the prophets prophesied until John.” Prior to John the Baptist, only the Old Testament message was proclaimed. Since that time, the Gospel of the Kingdom was preached and the opportunity to be a part of the Kingdom was now extended. It began to be extended when John began to preach and to proclaim repentance. He was the one who came in fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi, in the “spirit and power of Elijah.”

Luke 1:17, “And he [John (the Baptist)] shall go out before Him [Jesus] in the spirit and mighty power of Elijah,” This was prior to the first coming of Christ.

Are the intellectuals the ones that find it easiest to understand God’s plan and purpose? Not at all!

Matthew 11:25, “...Jesus said, ‘I praise You and fully agree with You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the self-esteeming intellectuals and prudent ones, and have revealed them to babes.’”

In other words, those who viewed themselves as the educated and the elite who looked down on everyone else really did not understand the truth. Some people think the scholars are the ones you have to look to. If all it took was scholarship to understand the truth, why didn’t the scribes and Pharisees understand it? All you would need to understand the truth would be the ability to read Greek and Hebrew. Greece is full of people who

speak Greek and they read it, too. If they read the New Testament, they read it in Greek. It is all “Greek” to them because that is what they speak and read. How many of them understand the truth? How many of them keep the Sabbath? How many of them are converted?

The scribes and Pharisees spoke and read Hebrew. When they studied the Old Testament, they studied it in the original Hebrew. How many of them understood what it was talking about? The point that I make is that it takes a lot more than simply knowing the Greek and the Hebrew to understand the Scriptures. If it didn’t, then why aren’t all the scholars the ones who are converted?

In fact, if you want to read some of the craziest, most “crackpot,” asinine, idiot theories in the world, look up some of the great scholarly writings on the subject of the Bible. You will find every “crackpot” idea that has ever occurred to the mind of man. They look back in the book of Genesis or the first five books of the Bible and find that some verses use the name YHWH and some use the name ELOHIM. Some verses contain certain priestly instructions to the priests. The book of Deuteronomy goes back and restates a lot of things to the final generation that had been stated earlier. Instead of being able to understand what that’s all about, they come to the conclusion that Moses must not have written that. They conclude that must have been written by five different people. They come up with all of these crazy ideas.

They don’t understand and Christ simply said, ‘Father, I thank You that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent ones.’ –In other words, the ones who think they are wise and prudent, the self-esteemed intellectuals, those who really think they know it all. You’ve hidden it from them and revealed it to babes. You’ve revealed the truth to people they look down upon. They look down on people like you and me. ‘What do these guys know—we’re the great scholars; we know it all.’ Well, in a few years they are going to find out how much they know.

All the arguments about the Greek and Hebrew are going to be moot because Christ is going to come back in power and glory and the argument is going to be settled. About that time, none of them standing there are going to want to be arguing about the Greek. So, it’s a matter of realizing that understanding the truth is something that comes because God’s Spirit is working with you.

Psalm 111:10 says, “...a good understanding have all those who do His Commandments.” The

key to understanding is your willingness to obey God, having a humble, teachable attitude, a child-like spirit. Part of the problem with the intellectuals is that they get so “bent out of shape” trying to reason themselves astray.

A child takes things literally. Most of us have had children. You tell something to a little child, and they take it literally. And sometimes they can come out with some statements that just embarrass the “fire” out of you—at just inappropriate times. It’s just a very simple, child-like approach. You say it and they believe it. Babes, just simple-minded enough that if God says that’s what it is, then we say, ‘Well, that’s what it is.’

God makes a promise. We believe it and we reach out and claim it. Then there are those that reason around, reason astray, and get all bogged down in all these things. We never want to lose that child-like simplicity. When God makes a promise, when God tells us that He is our—whatever He is—our Sustainer, our Healer, our Creator, our Ruler, our Master, our Lord, you want to believe those things. Simply take Him at His word and have that simple child-like approach, that child-like teachability, that very simple approach.

Let’s summarize here. We note the feast of the Jews.

John 5:1, “After that, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” This was the fall festival season. Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Verse 19, “...Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son is able to do nothing by Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing: because whatever the Father does, these same things the Son does, in exactly the same way!’” Jesus did not come to do away with His Father’s law. He did not come doing His own thing. This makes plain that Jesus Christ followed the Father completely and totally.

In terms of judgment, is the Father the One that is going to judge us?

Verse 22, Jesus said, “‘Because the Father judges no one, but has given the responsibility of all judgment to the Son.’”

Verse 27, “‘and He has given to Him authority and power also to execute judgment, because He is the Son of man.’” The authority to judge was given and delegated to Jesus Christ. He is the One that came and lived life as a human being; God committed judgment to Him as the One responsible for that judgment.

Matthew 19:28 makes plain that we can share in that role of judgment. It talks about the 12 apostles sitting on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel. So, judgment is assigned out by God to Christ and those who will rule and reign under Christ.

John 5:45, let's note, "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; there is one who is accusing you already, Moses, in whom you claim to trust and have hope." In other words, that generation paid lip service to recognition of Moses as God's prophet. They stood guilty because they weren't doing and believing the very things taught by Moses whom they claimed to follow and believe.

Christ said, 'I don't have to accuse you; Moses accuses you'—the first five books written by Moses. He said, 'Moses accuses you. Moses has left a written record. You pay lip service. You acknowledge it to be the Word of God, but you don't do it. You stand accused by the very one that you acknowledge as being God's prophet. You don't acknowledge Me, but acknowledge Moses—fine. I don't accuse you; Moses accuses you because you're not doing what Moses said. You do not believe the prophecies he gave. You're not keeping the laws he gave.'

Notice that the whole setting here in John 5 is the setting of the fall festival season, the time of God's judgment, the time when those in the graves will come forth.

Verses 28-29, "Do not be amazed at this: because the time is coming in which all who are in the graves shall hear His voice, and they shall come out of the graves:" The whole setting here of John 5 is the fall festival season, the time of the Feast of Trumpets.

Luke 8:1 makes plain, "And afterwards it happened that He made a tour through every city, city by city and village by village, preaching and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God; and the twelve were with Him." He was going through making a tour city by city, village by village. He was going through every place, step by step.

Parable of the sower: Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8.

We are beginning to get into many of the parables that are recorded. He began to teach the parables. The parable of the sower and the seed is the one that He is teaching here.

Matthew 13:10-11, note why He taught in parables, "But the disciples came to Him and said, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' And He answered them, saying, 'Because it has been given to you to know and understand the

mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.'" They hear it, but they don't understand it.

Verse 15, "Because the heart of this people have grown corrupt, and their ears have become insensitive and dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed;" They don't understand; they don't get it. Because they don't really have a heart to obey, it's just simply not being made clear to them.

The parables served two purposes. They obscured the truth from those with whom God was not working, but once you have the key to the parable, it makes the truth plainer. The parables make the truth more understandable to us because we have the key.

Verse 18, notice, "Therefore hear the parable of the sower." Then Jesus begins to go through and explain the parable He told them earlier (vv. 3-8). It is an illustration that those with whom God is not working—those who don't have the key, don't understand it—it just goes in one ear and out the other. If God is working with you, opening your mind and calling you, you have the key to understanding. It made the truth more understandable to those with whom God was really working.

The parable of the sower is explained. Verses 18-23 show basically the different categories of people that hear the Gospel. The word goes out. A lot of it falls by the wayside. Millions of people come into contact with the telecast, with the magazine or however it reaches them; it goes in one ear and out the other. It never takes root. That's the seed that fell by the wayside and the birds gathered up (v. 4). Then there is that which takes root in rocky stony ground (vv. 5-6), that which falls in the thorns and the thistles (v. 7) and finally, that which falls in good ground and bears fruit (v. 8).

Now notice the categories:

- 1) Those who fall by the wayside and never take root.
- 2) Those who take root in stony ground.
- 3) Those that fall in thorns and thistles.
- 4) Those that fall on good ground.

The last three categories would be the ones that we would be concerned about because if you are here, then obviously the word took some root.

Now notice the three categories. Christ explains it.

Verses 20-21, "And he who was sown on the rocky place, this is the one who hears the word, and right away receives it with joy; but he has no root in himself, so this is only temporary: when

tribulation or persecution comes along because of the word, in a short time he falls away.”

The one that fell on the stony ground, that’s the ones that hear the truth, that hear the word and with joy they receive it. They get all excited; it’s all emotion, but they have no depth of root in themselves. When persecution comes because of the word, they wither. You have the stony ground, the hard ground. The problem is that there is a lack of root structure. The root system is what gives staying power to the plant. Here are people that are shallow. It’s all on the surface; it’s all emotion. They emotionally respond very quickly, but they haven’t really proven anything. They don’t really know it and know that they know it! They haven’t deeply proven it to themselves. The result is when things happen, problems arise and difficulties come, they wither away. They don’t have staying power because they’re not deeply anchored and rooted in the truth. Their roots are shallow. It’s “spur-of-the-moment” and emotion; it doesn’t have staying power. That’s the first pitfall of the two pitfalls Christ warned about. One is not being deeply enough rooted in the truth, being too shallow.

The other is where it falls in the ground. The thorns and the thistles come up and gradually choke it out.

Verse 22, Christ said, “And he who was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word; and the cares and distractions of this world, and the delusions of wealth, completely strangle the word, and he becomes unfruitful.”

The cares of this life gradually come in, choke it out and prevent it from being fruitful. What happens? Other things get in the way; other things compete for time, attention and resources.

We plant a garden and we all have to fight the battle of the weeds and all the things that come up. Ever had tomatoes come up and choke out all your weeds? Somehow or other it never works that way. If something is of value, you have to tend it. It takes work. You don’t have to plant your weeds and water them. I never had trouble getting weeds to grow. They just grow. Just leave them alone, don’t do anything and they’ll grow. And if you leave it alone, they’ll choke out everything else. The point is that the cares of this life will crowd in; we only have so much time, so much attention and so many resources. These things crowd in, they compete, choke it out and finally the plant never bears any fruit.

Verse 23, the final category is that it’s in good ground and brings forth fruit—some more, some less. But it’s fruitful.

So, Christ warned us. He says that the word takes root. Two things you have to be concerned about: (1) It better take deep root, not be shallow and on the surface, but deeply rooted where you can stick through the hard times, the tough times. (2) You better keep your garden weeded because if you don’t, the cares of this life will come in and will choke it. This is a very important parable that Christ gave.

Christ showed right here in Matthew 13:17 that we have a more clear understanding of things that the prophets only vaguely comprehended.

Matthew 13:17, “Because of a truth, I am telling you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see what you are seeing, but have not seen; and to hear what you are hearing, but have not heard.” God has revealed and we have the opportunity to understand things that the patriarchs of old didn’t. It’s more clearly explained and understood. That is plain.

You can go to the book of Daniel. Daniel didn’t understand many of his own prophecies. These things were ‘sealed up, shut up, until the time of the end’ (Daniel 12:9). Christ made it plain. He explained things in detail that many of the prophets and righteous men of the past had only dimly seen.

There’s an awful lot that is packed into what Jesus taught and preached. As we go through this series, we come to these parables. We are going to be spending a pretty good bit of time over the next couple of Bible studies in going into the details of many of these things that Jesus taught and said. Many of the details of these messages are recorded. The period this evening basically brought us up until the fall festival period, from the Feast of Unleavened Bread of 29 A.D. to the fall festival period of 29 A.D.

Next time we will pick up the story where we left off, which would be in the late fall of 29 A.D. following the festivals up until the time just before the Passover of 30 A.D. That will bring us up to the final year of Christ’s ministry. One of the things we will note as we go through is that the further that Christ’s ministry progresses, the more details are given—we have more details of what He said and taught.

Go through the chapters we are going to be covering next time. Review it in detail. I think that will conclude it this evening.

Bible Study # 33
March 28, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Matthew 8, 9, 10, 13, 14; Mark 4:21—6:29; Luke 8:16—9:9

Christ had a perfect sense of timing. He recognized that the message He was preaching, the miracles He was working and the things He was doing were going to bring things to a real “head” with the religious leadership in Jerusalem. They resented what He was doing. The more they were exposed to the full force and impact of His message, the more they were going to resent and dislike it, the more they would be driven to do the things they ultimately did that resulted in His death. Jesus came to Jerusalem to preach. But what we will note is that until the final few months of His ministry, He was only in Jerusalem occasionally. He was primarily there at the festival season. Apart from that, He covered other areas—areas that were on the periphery. In other words, He timed it to where He would conclude His ministry in Jerusalem because He knew that the full force of persecution was going to come on Him once He was in Jerusalem on a regular basis.

Word of what He was doing traveled out. Certain of the religious leaders even came out from Jerusalem to check up on Him, but they did not feel as threatened when what He was doing was primarily in the areas that they would look on as the “boondocks.” They were not as concerned with it. It did not bother them in the same way as once He began the thrust of His ministry right there in Jerusalem.

During most of this period that we **are covering this evening, He was in Galilee covering the cities there, city by city.** One of the things that we **are going to note is the extent to which we get into parables.** This evening and the next Bible study as well, we will have a lot of focus on parables that Jesus gave. Parables actually serve both to clarify and to obscure. That may sound contradictory. We find through this time that Jesus was preaching in parables.

Parable of the sower: Matthew 13:1-9, Mark 4:1-9 and Luke 8:4-8.

Matthew 13:3, “And He preached many things to them in parables, saying, ‘Now the sower went out to sow.’” He preached the parable of the sower.

Parables clarify and obscure: Matthew 13:10-17, Mark 4:10-12 and Luke 8:9-10.

Matthew 13:10, the disciples asked Him, “... ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’” Jesus was telling these stories, examples and illustrations; the disciples asked Him the question, ‘Why are You continually giving these illustrations?’

Verses 11-15, “... ‘Because it has been given to you to know and understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.... This is the reason I speak to them in parables: because in observing, they do not see; and in listening, they do not hear, nor do they understand. So that in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, ‘In listening you shall hear, and in no way understand; and observing you shall see, and in no way comprehend: because the heart of this people has grown corrupt, and their ears have become insensitive and dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and they should hear with their ears, and they should understand with their heart, and they should be converted, and I should heal them.’”

Mark 4:10-11, “But when He was alone, those in His company with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, ‘To you it has been given to know and understand the mystery of the kingdom of God: but to those who are without, all things are done in parables.’”

Explains parable of the sower: Matthew 13:18-23, Mark 4:13-20 and Luke 8:11-15.

Then Jesus began to explain the parable of the sower. He began to define for them what this illustration meant. Get the point! There are several things we learn from this. If you were to ask most religious people why Jesus taught in parables, they would say He was trying to make the meaning clear and used all these rural illustrations. No, it didn’t! The parable makes it clear in only one way. The only way is if you have the *key* to understanding what the parable is talking about. Jesus gave that key to His disciples.

He told the story about the sower and the seed, which was a nice story. The people must have thought there must be a point to this, but they didn’t really get the point. You wouldn’t understand exactly what the meaning was until Jesus went through and defined “the seed is the word of God, and the sower goes forth to sow.” He went through and defined what each category of the parable was. What it amounts to is God deals with everyone in His own time, in the time that is best for that individual. And unless God

opens our minds to understand, then we simply don't understand.

God is not trying to call everyone at this time. If God is desperately trying to call everybody and get everybody saved right now, then you have to conclude that He has failed because the vast majority of human beings who have lived and died on this earth have never even heard the name of Jesus Christ.

Acts 4:12, "...there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." You look at all the millions of people in Africa and Asia who have lived and died over the centuries and you have to conclude that the vast majority of human beings that have drawn breath on this planet have never even heard about Jesus Christ, much less comprehended the message He came to bring.

If there's been a great contest between God and the devil, the devil has been winning. If God has been doing His best for the last 2,000 years, how many people believe and practice the message Jesus taught? —A very tiny minority of human beings by any stretch of the imagination.

God has a time schedule, and it's not God's purpose to open the eyes of the whole world to see things right now. God knows they are not prepared to act and follow through. Most people are simply going to have to learn a lesson of human experience and "bottom out" before they are convinced that there's no way to make the devil's way work.

The world, in effect, has been on a 6,000-year experiment trying to see if there isn't some way to make the devil's way work. Over the course of time, we have tried every "ism," every political, economic, social, religious system that you can devise. People have tried all kinds of things and none of them have really produced long-term satisfaction.

Jesus came teaching, preaching and speaking in parables. For those whom He was calling, for His disciples, He went beyond His public message. He spoke publicly and there was a point to what He said, but people understood it only on a certain level. With those that He was working, He began to open up their minds to understand and then he began to explain further. The parables do make the meaning clear if you understand the point of what He is talking about—if you have the key to understand what the parable is about. And it is recorded for us here. We don't have to use our imagination, wondering what that parable meant—maybe it meant this or that. Jesus defined what it meant. We are going

to see quite a few of the parables as we go through here.

Mark and Luke are more chronological. Matthew skips around. Matthew followed chronology in only the most general of terms, but Matthew gives the most detailed account of what Jesus said on many of these occasions. Mark's account is more abbreviated, but is more directly in chronological story flow. Matthew tends to group everything Jesus said on a particular subject. He tended to organize his book by subject matter. When he would come to a particular point that Jesus taught, He would go through in a very general chronological sense; he would tend to bring in not only what Jesus said on the subject on that occasion, but things that Jesus said on that same subject at other occasions. Matthew gives you the most detailed picture of Christ's teaching on a particular subject, but you don't always know exactly *when* He said it. You get the context of when He said it more clearly from Mark and Luke; you get more details of what He said from Matthew. That's why there are different Gospels. They tell the story from different standpoints. God used the natural proclivities of these individuals, and the way they organized the story gives us a more full and complete picture.

Let's go into the material that we have to cover this evening. Jesus had gone through the parable of the sower and the seed. We have commented on that one before.

Secrets revealed; nothing hidden: Mark 4:21-23 and Luke 8:16-17.

Mark 4:21-23, "And He asked them, 'Is a lamp brought in so that it may be put under a basket or under the bed? Rather, isn't it put upon the lamp stand? Because there is not anything hidden, which shall not be exposed and revealed; neither has any secret thing taken place, but that it shall be brought into the light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!'"

The point Christ was bringing out was that some of these teachings that He gave about the parables were private teachings for the disciples at that time; it was not intended to be permanently hidden. God is going to open the understanding of these things to everyone, but He is simply going to do so at the time that is best for them. You don't have a lamp and put it under a bushel basket or a bed. Christ was not teaching these things for the purpose of permanently obscuring it from the masses. It was His purpose that all things are ultimately going to be revealed and made clear. Certain things are not yet for

public understanding, but the ultimate purpose is for all to understand. Those of us who have an advance opportunity to understand and grasp these things will have more required of us. God expects more of us because we have an advance opportunity.

We are responsible for what we hear: Mark 4:24-25 and Luke 8:18.

Mark 4:24, Jesus went on, “And He said to them, ‘Pay attention to what you hear; with whatever standard of measurement you measure, it shall be measured to you. And to you who hear, more shall be given and added...’” He tells us that we are responsible for what we know. In a sense, the knowledge of God is dangerous knowledge. It’s dangerous if we don’t act upon it and use it.

Explaining parables to disciples: Matthew 13:36-43 and Mark 4:33-34.

Matthew 13:36, “When He had dismissed the multitudes, Jesus went into the house. Then His disciples came to Him, saying, ‘Expound to us the parable of the tares of the field.’” They heard the illustration and the example that He gave, but they didn’t really grasp the point He was getting at. He left the crowd to draw their own conclusion; the disciples asked Him to clarify it for them.

Verses 37-42, “And He said, explaining to them, ‘The One who sows the good seed is the Son of man; and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; but the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the adversary who sowed them is the devil; and the harvest is the completion of the age; and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and are totally consumed in the fire; this is exactly the way it shall be at the completion of this age. The Son of man shall send out His angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all sins and wickedness [KJV, “all things that offend, and them that do iniquity”—all things that cause offense, all things that are causes of scandal], and all those who live and practice lawlessness by breaking and transgressing God’s laws. And they shall be cast into the furnace of fire [the lake of fire]: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

What are we told here? Jesus said that the Kingdom of heaven is compared to a man sowing good seed in his field and the enemy came and sowed tares in among the wheat.

Now that’s important to understand. In years past there were problems in the Church. One of the reasons that some became offended and even left as they saw certain problems is because they did

not understand the parable of the tares. They saw individuals—in some cases in fairly high places—that certainly were sources of scandal and offense. They became bothered and offended, even to the point that they left because they really didn’t grasp the point. If they had really understood the parable of the tares, they never would have done that. They would have recognized that Jesus Himself specifically said that the devil was going to sow a few tares in among the wheat. Why should we be shocked if we find a tare here and there? God permitted it. It serves as a test. Here’s what people lose sight of.

The bottom line is not impressing people, fooling people and kind of putting one over on everyone else. The bottom line is *God knows*. And when all is said and done, it’s not other people’s opinion that counts. When the end of the age comes, the angels are going to be sent out with specific instructions; they are going to gather out the tares.

He drew the analogy of the field. You have to understand the way that fields were sown in that time. They didn’t use some of the modern agricultural techniques. Seed was broadcast. They did not have the drill seed planter. Basically seed was broadcast on a field. In the early stages when it began to come up, it was hard to tell which was which. If you went out and started to try and pull up the tares, you could wind up pulling up good wheat. You didn’t always know. The easiest way to know was that as it began to mature, the real thing brought forth fruit and the tares didn’t. As they matured and developed, it became very apparent which was the wheat and which were the tares. The tares were gathered out and burned; the wheat was gathered into the barn. Christ used that analogy.

Then He defined it for the disciples. It was not a matter of putting an interpretation on it. Jesus defined it as to when it was and who the enemy was. He described that there was going to be a few tares sown in among the wheat and some wouldn’t be gathered out until the end came. But the point is *God knows*.

We need the perspective of faith to realize that God is not shocked and surprised at the turn of events. God’s not sitting up there wringing His hands wondering what to do. If we grasp this point, then we are prepared to deal with things as they come and with problems as they come. We don’t know everything or every detail of everything we are going to go through from now until the end of the age, but I think what we have

to understand is that God has allowed things we have gone through for the purpose of teaching us lessons.

There will be other trials and some of them may even be similar. We don't know every detail. We know the broad outline and the way the story ends, but we *are to learn lessons using the principles of Scripture* so that we can understand how we need to deal with things when they arise and not be caught short. These examples and illustrations are for our benefit so we can know how we should handle it and so we can realize that there are tares. They are defined as those that offend and cause scandal, those that do iniquity and practice lawlessness—a lawless approach. They don't have the deep regard for the law of God. God knows. We see this parable of the tares.

Let's look here in this context. In Matthew 13, Christ gave another parable: verses 31-33, He compared the Kingdom to a mustard seed, and then, verse 33, to leavening. The basic point was that what God does among people starts out very small and grows and grows. He compares the Kingdom first to a mustard seed and then to leavening. A mustard seed is a very tiny seed that grows up to a gigantic shrub. The leavening is something that just a little bit is put in with the flour and spreads until it permeates the entire dough. He drew the analogy that the Kingdom of God, what God is doing among people, starts very small. It will ultimately spread out to great magnitude and great size, and it will ultimately permeate everything because that's the way God's truth, His government, the expansion of it, will ultimately permeate everything.

Isaiah 11:9, "...for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

Isaiah 9:7, "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end,"

Jesus went on speaking in parables and explaining these things to the disciples.

In Matthew 13, He drew other parables. In verse 44, He compared the Kingdom of God to hidden treasure, and in verses 45-46, to a pearl of great price. The truth of God's Kingdom is compared to a priceless possession that someone really grasps the value of and they are willing to forsake everything in order to have hold of it. He compares it to a merchant man seeking beautiful pearls; he finds one exceedingly precious pearl and liquidates everything he has to get that one because he knows that it has greater value than everything else that he has. He sells the rest of

his stock in order to get this one because this one is that pearl of great price.

Or there is someone who finds hidden treasure buried in a field; they go and sell everything else so that they can buy that field because they know that the treasure hidden there is of greater value many times over than everything else they have. He draws an example, 'Look, if you really knew that there was a treasure hidden on this acre of ground that was of untold wealth, you would liquidate everything you had in order to buy that acre. You would raise the money to buy that acre because you would know that the treasure hidden there was tremendously more than all the rest of it.' If we really grasp the value of God's Kingdom and God's calling, then we realize there is no price to be put upon it.

Then He compares the Kingdom to a fisherman's net.

Matthew 13:47-50, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is compared to a dragnet cast into the sea, that gathered together fish and sea creatures of every kind: which, when it was filled, was dragged up on the shore; and when they sat down, they gathered the good into containers, and the worthless they threw away. This is the way it shall be at the completion of the age: the angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the righteous, and shall throw them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." There will be a sorting out process.

As we follow the story flow, we have the illustration in Matthew 8.

Matthew 8:18-22, "And when Jesus saw the great throngs of people around Him, He commanded to leave for the other side of the sea. Then a scribe came to him, and said, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever You may go.' But Jesus answered him, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of heaven have nests; but the Son of man does not have any place where He may lay His head.' And another of his disciples said to Him, 'Allow me first to go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me; and let the dead bury their own dead.'"

What did He mean by that? You shouldn't go to funerals or what? That was not the point of it at all. Here was someone who was a disciple, a student of His, and in effect said, 'I believe these things, but let me put off acting on it. Let me go and bury my father.' The idea was, 'I am going to stay at home and take care of things and run the farm as long as my father is alive. Once he is dead, well, then I will come and do these things.'

And Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their own dead." The reference is to the fact that there were other relatives who were likened to being spiritually dead who could take care of the physical duties, but there were none of those that could fulfill the spiritual duties. In effect, this young man was using the fact that he had an elderly father at home as an excuse to not act on the calling that Christ had given him. Christ was saying, 'Let the spiritually dead bury the dead; let them take care of these responsibilities. You have plenty of others in the family who can fulfill those responsibilities, but they cannot do what you are called to do right now.' The man was offering excuses as to why he could not act on the calling he had been given now. He said, 'I'll do it later, after my father is dead—after a few years on down the road.' Jesus wants us to have a sense of urgency. He wanted those He was dealing with at that time to have a sense of urgency, not kind of thinking, 'Well, sometime in the remote distant future I will do these things.'

As we continue on through the account from Mark 4:35-38, we find that as evening was come, He pushed out the boat into the sea after dismissing the multitudes, and a violent wind storm came up. The waves battered against and over the boat and filled it with water. And He was asleep on a cushion in the stern. They aroused Him and said, 'Master, we are dying; aren't You concerned? We are about to perish.'

Mark 4:39-41, "Then He got up, and He rebuked the wind, and commanded the sea, 'Silence! Be quiet!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And He said to them, 'Why are you so afraid? How is it you don't have faith?'"

'What's wrong, fellows; don't you have any faith?' It really impressed them.

This must have been quite a storm. A number of disciples were fishermen. They were men who were accustomed to the sea. They had been out on the sea and had been in boats. They had spent their lives that kind of way. They were not easily frightened every time a little wind blew and the waves came up on the sea. These men had spent their lives on the sea. If this storm was enough to scare them and they were losing control of the boat, you know that it was severe. Because they couldn't understand how He was sleeping through all of this, they finally woke Him up. 'We are about to die and here You are sleeping.' He asked, 'What's wrong; don't you fellows have any faith?' No, they didn't have a whole lot, that's true.

Jesus Christ had a total, deep, complete awareness of God and God's power. He had that closeness, that proximity to God. When He was confronted with something, He reached out in faith and in confidence—He knew God was there. At that point in time, God wasn't that real to the disciples. Faith and sight are opposite.

Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is...the evidence of things not seen." People base what they believe on what they can see. That is not the most significant evidence. We are willing to take people's word; yet, when it comes down to taking God's word, sometimes we really have to puzzle about it and kind of work up faith. Do you work up faith every time your paycheck comes? We can count on God's word.

Jesus casts out legion of demons: Luke 8:26-39, Mark 5:1-20 and Matthew 8:28-34.

They crossed over from the west side of the Sea of Galilee over to the southeast coast of the Sea of Galilee to the area of Decapolis. Decapolis was the Roman province or section that had a certain amount of Jewish settlement, as well as a large portion of Gentiles. This was the area of the Gadarenes. They crossed the Sea of Galilee, and there was a certain man there who had been possessed by demons for a long time.

Luke 8:27-29, "...a certain man from the city met Him, who had been possessed by demons for a long time, and wasn't even wearing clothes, and didn't live in a house, but lived in tombs in the graveyard. But seeing Jesus, he screamed out with a loud voice, and prostrated himself before Him, saying, 'What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most high God? I beg of You that you do not torment me!' For He was commanding the unclean demon spirit to come out of the man. (Because countless times it had seized him; and he had been bound in chains and shackles, and had been kept under guard. But he would break the bonds;")

There was an incredible supernatural strength when someone was possessed that way.

I remember various incidents. One that comes to mind is of a young woman, a fairly small young woman in a very similar situation, in terms of being possessed and going into these things. In one particular case when this came to a head, it was all that four men could do to restrain her. It was everything they could do to try to restrain her, and they couldn't entirely do that in terms of trying to hold her down. Any one of them would have probably weighed twice what she did. There was an incredible amount of strength, and yet,

when the demon was cast out, the problem was resolved.

That kind of thing is described here. When the demon would take over and seize this individual in terms of overt action, the kind of strength and things displayed frightened people and they were scared.

Verse 30, “And Jesus asked him, saying, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Legion’: because many demons had entered into him.” He was actually possessed of more than one demon.

Verse 31, “And he pleaded with Him, that He would not command them to go away into the abyss [the place of restraint and torment for Satan and the demons].” They said, ‘Look, our time isn’t up yet.’ They kind of panicked. The demons recognized Jesus. They knew who He was. They, of course, were fallen angels who had followed Lucifer (who had become Satan). They knew exactly who He was. They panicked when they saw Him. They knew He exercised the authority of God. They said, ‘Our time isn’t up yet; You aren’t going to put us into the abyss are You?’ No, He was not going to do that. He was going to make them come out of that individual.

Verses 32-33, so they asked Him permission, ‘If you cast us out of him, let us go into these swine.’ He did not forbid them to do that. They did and that served to panic the pigs to the point that they went charging down and over the cliff into the sea.

Verse 35, after Christ cast out the demons, the people came out and saw the man clothed and of a sound mind sitting at the feet of Jesus; it just scared them to death. They couldn’t believe it. Here was the guy completely sane. This kind of situation that we have here certainly represents God’s power over demon spirits. They have to be subject to God’s power.

Verse 37, a lot of the people around were so upset and panicked by the power that Jesus had displayed, in terms of casting out the demons, that they asked Him to please leave. They were scared to have Him around.

Verses 38-39, Christ told the individual to go back home (not to come with Him), and to tell the things that God had done. We find that this man, who was undoubtedly well-known and had quite a bit of notoriety, went through that area. As he bore testimony of what Jesus had done, that had quite an impact on the people around.

Jesus returns to other side of sea: Luke 8:40, Mark 5:21 and Matthew 9:1.

Christ crossed back across the Sea of Galilee from Decapolis into Galilee.

Mark 5:21, “And when Jesus came across in the boat to the other side again, a great multitude was assembled to Him: and He was by the sea.”

Jarius requests healing for daughter: Luke 8:41-42, Mark 5:22-24 and Matthew 9:18-19.

We pick up the story here of Jairus. In Luke 8:41-42, a man came, whose name was Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, and asked Christ to come and please heal his 12-year old daughter who was dying.

Woman is healed of hemorrhage: Luke 8:43-48, Mark 5:25-34 and Matthew 9:20-22.

As Jesus went, we find in Luke 8:43, a woman who had a constant hemorrhage for 12 years. She had spent everything she owned on physicians and doctors and could not be healed by any of them.

Mark 5:26, “Now she had suffered many things under the hands of many physicians, and all her means of support had been spent; and she didn’t benefit in any way, but instead became worse.”

Jesus worked very few miracles in Nazareth except, we are told, Mark 6:4-5, that He laid His hands on a very few sick folk and they were healed. This woman came up and God honored her faith.

Luke 8:48, “...‘your faith has healed you.’” You evidenced that faith.

Jarius’ daughter dies and brought back to life: Luke 8:49-56, Mark 5:35-43 and Matthew 9:23-26.

Luke 8:49, a little later as they were on their way to the home of Jairus, “And while He was speaking, one came from the ruler of the synagogue, saying to him, ‘Your daughter has died; don’t trouble the Master!’” He said, ‘Look, don’t bother; there’s no point in coming because the daughter is dead.’

Verse 50, “But hearing this, Jesus answered him, saying, ‘Don’t be afraid: only believe, and she shall have her life restored!’” Jesus said, ‘Only believe, have faith, have confidence.’

Verses 51-52, “And when He entered into the house, He didn’t allow anyone to go in with Him, except Peter, James and John, and the father and mother of the child. And they were all weeping and mourning over her. But He said, ‘Stop weeping! She is not dead, but only sleeps.’” There were all these people in there carrying on, and Christ sent them out; He got them out of there with all of their goings-on.

Verses 54-56, “But after He sent everyone else out of the room, He took hold of her hand, and called out, saying, ‘Child get up!’ And immediately her spirit returned, and she got up:

and He directed that something to eat should be given to her. And her parents were amazed and awestricken: and He commanded them to tell no one what had happened.”

Matthew 9:27-30, “And as Jesus was leaving there, two blind men followed Him, loudly calling after Him and saying, ‘Have compassion and mercy on us, Son of David!’ But after He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him and Jesus asked them, ‘Do you believe and have faith that I am able to do this?’ They answered Him, ‘Yes, Lord!’ Then He touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith be it done to you.’ And their eyes were opened; ...” Again, we see the matter of faith.

Verses 32-33, “And as they were leaving, suddenly they brought to Him a man who was dumb, and was possessed by a demon. But when the demon had been cast out, the dumb man spoke. And the multitudes were amazed, ...” This was incredible to them. In this particular case, this man had been demon possessed and Christ cast out the demon.

The Pharisees were very upset. Some people were impressed with the things that were going on. This really electrified the whole place.

Verse 34, “Then the Pharisees said, ‘He casts out demons by the prince and chief ruler of the demons.’” They said He was in league with the devil. This was their attitude.

Verses 35-38, “And Jesus went all around to all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every bodily weakness among the people. But seeing the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were wearied, and were wandering about, as sheep not having a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘Truly the harvest is great, but the workmen are few. Beseech and supplicate therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He may send out workmen into His harvest.’”

Jesus’ attitude toward the multitudes was one of compassion. He had compassion as He looked and saw people wondering around not knowing the way to go. They were disoriented in their lives. They needed someone to guide and help them. Jesus had an attitude of compassion.

A prophet has no honor in his own country: Mark 6:1-6 and Matthew 13:54-58.

Mark 6:1-3, “And He left there, and came to His own country; and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath came, He started to teach in the synagogue. But when many heard Him teaching, they were startled, and said, ‘Where did

this man get these things? And what kind of wisdom is this which has been given to Him, that even such miracles are performed by His hand? Isn’t this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? And aren’t His sisters here with us?’ And they were offended at Him.”

They were saying, ‘Who does this guy think He is, coming in here doing all these things? Why we know Him. He is the carpenter. I remember when He built that house down the road. Why, His mother lives over there across the village. Why, we know her—been knowing her for years—and we know His brothers. How can He be anything great?’ Notice the attitude of people: ‘I have known Him all of His life.’ What does that prove? I don’t care who it is; somebody has known them all his life.

Verses 4-6, “But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet has honor and respect everywhere, except in his own country, and among his own relatives, and in his own family.’ And while He was there, He was not able to do any miracles, except He laid His hands on a few sick people, and healed them. And He was amazed because of their disbelief and lack of faith.”

Again, we see the factor of faith in miracles. Faith is a prerequisite to experiencing God’s miracles; a lack of faith is a barrier. Even Jesus Himself could do very few miracles because people lacked faith. They didn’t trust.

We have to recognize the extent to which we are in an age which Jesus characterized in Luke.

Luke 18:8, “...when the Son of man comes will He truly find faith on the earth?” We live in an age that is so impressed with the things that man can do that it’s lost sight of the things that God can do; an age that is so impressed with the power and ingenuity of man, that it’s lost sight of how much greater is the power and ingenuity of God. It’s very hard because faith is a simple thing, a child-like quality; the more sophisticated people get, the harder it is, seemingly, to have faith. It sounds like such a simplistic answer, yet we are told this in Hebrews.

Hebrews 11:6, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, ...” Faith is a very important matter. It is simply a matter of taking God at His word—of believing God.

In Mark 6:3, one thing that we should also note is that it is very clear that Jesus had brothers and sisters. This would come as a shock to a lot of people because according to Roman Catholic teaching, Mary was a perpetual virgin. That does not come out of the Bible at all. She had at least

six other children. There are the four brothers that are mentioned, plus sisters (plural, that means a minimum of two). She had at least seven children. She could have had more depending on if there were more than two girls. That's what it says right here. Saying Mary was a perpetual virgin is just a matter of human tradition that people have, but it is not based on what the Bible says.

Jesus sends out the twelve apostles: Matthew 10:1-4, Mark 6:7-13 and Luke 9:1-6.

We pick up the story.

Matthew 10:1, "And when He called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave to them power and authority over demon spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every bodily weakness."

Verses 2-4, He enumerates the twelve and then Jesus commanded them.

Verses 5-11, "These twelve Jesus sent out, and commanded them, saying, 'Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not go into any city of the Samaritans: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out the demons. Freely you have received, freely give. And provide no gold, silver, nor money in your money belts, nor a bag of provisions for the way, nor two coats, nor extra sandals, nor a walking staff: because the workman is worthy of his food. And into whatever city or village you enter, search out who is worthy in it; and remain there until you leave.'" He gave them instructions.

Verse 16, "'Listen, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves: therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves.'" As Jesus sent them out, the commission He gave to the twelve is made clear. They were to go to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. At a later time, the Apostle Paul was called as the apostle to the Gentiles, but the twelve were not sent primarily to the Gentiles. Their responsibility was to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.

Why is it that the twelve disappeared from view in the book of Acts a few years after the day of Pentecost? We read of Paul, but we don't read of where Thomas went, or Phillip, or John, or Andrew, or even Peter. We have a little bit of insight into where Peter went. We are told Paul went into the Gentile areas. Why did the twelve disappear from view? One of the main reasons is they were sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, and if God had clearly recorded where

they went, then everybody would have known where the House of Israel was. Now we can piece together historical records and it's a very intriguing tale. Perhaps we can go into it at a later Bible study. But that's where the twelve went—to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.

They started out by going through the land of Judea in kind of a warm-up, but the real thrust of the commission was where they went in the future. Christ sent them out and told them not to make provision and to go forth.

Understand a little bit as to the setting. How did you reach large crowds at that time? There wasn't mass media or television or radio. When someone would come into town, they would announce a public meeting and people would gather in a village square. The disciples, as they would go out two by two (Mark 6:7), would go into these villages. They would announce a meeting and people would come around. This was the way they would go to the public. And of those who heard them, if someone responded and wanted to find out more, they would ask them to come over to their house and have a meal, etc.

Christ said, 'If you get a response and somebody has questions, you go over there. You will be provided for. Don't feel badly to take their hospitality. A workman is worthy of his hire.' He told them not to put a charge on what they did. "Freely you have received, freely give."

God's Church or ministry does not charge for any of its services—funerals, weddings or whatever. Whatever it is, the principle is: "Freely you have received, freely give." You can't put a price on the truth of God. We don't sell the literature. We don't put charges on the services we render.

Some of the specific instructions that Jesus gave of not providing any expense money and things of that sort, we will find later on toward the end of His life—as He prepared to send the disciples out after His death—that He then modified those instructions. He told them, 'When I sent you out before, did you lack anything?' And they said, 'No.' He said, 'Now I am going to send you out, and this time I want you to provide for those things.' We will get into that a little later.

Christ emphasized that He was sending them out as sheep among wolves. 'Use your head; be wise as a serpent, but harmless as a dove. Don't go out doing damage to people, mistreat or do things that are going to take advantage of people in a wrong way. But be smart; use your head. Don't be gullible; don't be naive. Realize people will

deliver you up. You'll wind up being accused of things.'

Verses 18-20, "And you shall be brought before governors and kings on account of Me, for a witness against them and the nations. But when they deliver you up, do not be worried or anxious about how you shall speak or what you shall say: because it shall be given to you, at that very instant, what you should say. Because it is not merely you who are going to speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in and through you." 'If you are put in that kind of position, I will inspire you at the right time. I will put the words in your mouth.'

Verses 21-23, "But the brother will betray his brother to be killed; and the father, the child; and children will rise up against their parents, and will cause them to be killed. And you will be hated by all people because of My name. But he who endures to the end, he shall be saved. But when you are persecuted in this city, flee into another: because truly I tell you, you shall not have finished preaching in the cities of Israel, until the Son of man appears at His coming." That is looking all the way down to our day.

Verse 25, "It is quite sufficient for the disciple if he become as his teacher; and the slave, if he become as his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call those of his household?" 'Don't worry about it if people criticize you. They have called Me Beelzebub; what do you think they are going to call you? They haven't liked Me, so what do you think they are going to think of you?' They criticized Jesus Christ and accused Him of being in league with the devil. We shouldn't be surprised if we are criticized.

People are sometimes amazed. They have written these things about the Church and say we are a cult. Well, what did they say about Christ? We shouldn't be surprised that people come out and misstate what we believe, take things out of context and accuse us of all kinds of things. They accused Him. We are certainly not entitled to any better treatment than what He received. If people took exception to Someone who was perfect, and Jesus was, how much easier is it going to be for them to take exception to us, who are not perfect? If you can find fault with somebody who's perfect, you can be sure the world can find fault with somebody else. They found fault with Him, so it's no trouble to find fault with the rest of them because they are not perfect.

Verse 27, "What I tell you in darkness, speak in the light: and what you hear in the ear, preach

from the housetops.'" You proclaim boldly what I have told you.

Verse 28, "And you should not be afraid because of those who can kill the body, but are not able to kill the life: but rather you should fear Him who is able to destroy both the body and the life [KJV, "soul"] in Gehenna.'" Some misunderstand this. Some have used this verse to prove there's an immortal soul. Is that what it says? It talks about the fact that God will destroy both body and soul. So, whatever the soul is, it is something that can be destroyed in Gehenna fire. It doesn't say anything about it being immortal. It describes it as something that will be destroyed or that can be destroyed in hell fire. The point is Christ told them not to worry about what people can do, not to be concerned and primarily focused on people and what some human being can do.

You had better be concerned about God and what God can do. Human beings can kill your body, but God will ultimately resurrect you. What you had better be concerned about is not the first death, but the second death. That is the one that not only destroys the body, but it destroys the "psyche." In other words, it destroys that aspect of the person that is the person, the individuality.

There is nothing conscious about the soul apart from the body. There is nothing immortal in that sense. It is used here to refer to that unique individuality that sets apart every individual that God preserves a record of. When they are resurrected, they have the memory and the mind restored. Resurrecting someone is not simply a matter of recreating a body that looks like that person because what is it that makes you, you? —Your mind, character, personality and memories—it's all of the unique things that set you apart, your individuality. God maintains a record of that. A human being can take your life, but God will ultimately restore that life in a resurrection. Jesus said don't be worried about human beings; the most they can do is kill you with the first death. But what you'd really better be concerned about is God. God can render the second death, which is the destruction not simply of the body, but of any potential for eternal life. Destroying your individuality—your psyche—destroys your potential for life eternal. In effect, don't be impressed with people and what they can do; be impressed with God and what He can do.

Verse 34, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring

peace, but a sword.” If Christ came to bring peace on earth, He certainly failed. Some of the most horrendous bloodlettings that have ever occurred in the history of mankind have occurred in the last 2,000 years. He is going to come and bring peace, but He didn’t bring peace at His first coming. In fact, He said, ‘I didn’t come to bring peace, but a sword.’ What does that mean?

As a result of following Christ, people are sometimes going to be alienated from family members—even parents and children. There are times that, in order to follow Christ, you are going to be alienated from those human beings that are closest to you. In some cases, you are going to have strife as a result of obeying Christ; persecution can come by family members.

Verse 37, “Anyone who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; ...” – Putting other people before God. God will not take second place—not to father, mother, husband, parent, child or whomever. The first commandment is ‘you shall have no other gods before the true God.’ Whatever we put first is our god. God says, ‘I won’t take second place.’ God wants first place or none at all.

Verse 38, “Anyone who does not take up his cross and deny himself to the point of death, and follow after Me, is not worthy of Me.” Jesus said, ‘Take up your cross, deny yourself and follow Me. If you don’t do that, you are not worthy of Me. You have to be willing to pick up the load and follow the way I lead, if you want what I offer.’

God’s way of life is not a matter of convenience. On the one hand, Jesus said, ‘Come unto Me all you that are heavy laden and I will give you rest’ (Matthew 11:28). God’s way is a way of release from many of the burdens of this world, but we also have to realize that it is not simply a matter of convenience to be a Christian. Christ did not promise us a convenient religion where everything would always be simple and everybody would think it is just wonderful because you are trying to obey God. That’s not the way it is.

The one point we want to recognize is if we do get persecuted, we want to make sure it is persecution for righteousness sake. Every person who is persecuted doesn’t mean they are persecuted for righteousness sake. Sometimes they are persecuted because they brought trouble upon themselves—they “shot off their mouth” when they should have kept it quiet or they did certain things when they shouldn’t have. We want to make sure we are doing what God says

so that any persecution that comes is there because of our obedience and not because of our disobedience.

Jesus said if you set your attention on trying to save this physical life, you will lose it. If your top priority is trying to hold on to physical life and physical possessions, you are going to lose it. If that is the most important thing to you and if you are trying to hold on to the things in the “here and now,” it will go through your fingers. If you are willing to sacrifice everything for God’s sake, in the long run you’ll prosper.

Matthew 10:39, “Anyone who thinks he has found his life shall lose it; and anyone who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.” People who set their priority on the physical, holding on to the “here and now,” are going to find this age passing away, and the things that have been so important to them, crumbling to dust. But if our priority consists of God and His way, we have a hold of something that will never pass away. It’s not that we shouldn’t take care of and be wise stewards with whatever God has blessed us with, but it is a matter of priorities. What comes first in our life?

Verse 40, Jesus went on to tell His disciples, “Anyone who receives you receives Me; and anyone who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” He said, ‘The way they treat you is really the way they treat Me. And the way they treat Me is the way they treat the Father.’ We show respect to God and to Jesus Christ by the way in which we treat those whom God sends. It’s a matter that the disciples were sent forth and represented Jesus Christ. They were sent forth and commissioned by Him. Respect that was shown to them was not simply to them as individuals, but it really was respect to the One who sent them.

There is the same principle today when an ambassador is sent by the United States to a foreign nation. The way our ambassador is treated is considered the way this country is treated. If our ambassador is treated with respect, that is a token of respect to this country. If our ambassador is mistreated or abused, that is considered an insult to the nation and in some cases, has been a ground for war because an ambassador was abused. The way you treat an official emissary of this country is taken personally. It is either an insult or a compliment to the nation. It’s the same principle here.

Herod thinks Jesus is John the Baptist resurrected: Matthew 14:1-2, Mark 6:14-16 and Luke 9:7-9.

Matthew 14:1-2, “At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and told his servants, ‘This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and because of this the mighty miracles operate powerfully in him.’” Herod, when he heard about all these things, being the superstitious sort that he was, thought John had come back from the dead to haunt him. You remember the story.

How John the Baptist is beheaded: Matthew 14:3-11 and Mark 6:17-28.

John the Baptist had been put in prison. Herod’s wife, Herodias, was very upset. She was angry with John the Baptist because John called things what they were. There had been this immoral situation going on—wife swapping and all that kind of thing. John the Baptist called her by what she was and didn’t make any “bones” about it; this really upset her. Herod didn’t particularly like it, but he knew John was telling the truth and was kind of scared of him. He figured John was a prophet from God and had a certain kind of superstitious respect, not to the point that he was ready to act on it, but ‘this guy has something.’ But Herodias was so angry that Herod had to put John in prison.

Then Herod had his birthday party, a big blowout; everybody was getting drunk and carrying on and Herodias’ daughter Salome was dancing. Now she was not a six-year old doing a tap dance. You read the account. It becomes very obvious that this was a very sensual type of thing. Here he was with his drinking buddies, all about “half-crocked,” and here she came out doing one of these seductive dances—probably Middle East belly dances kind of a thing. Old Herod was getting so “beside himself” that finally he said, ‘Hey, what do you want?’ You get an idea of the corruption and immorality because her mother put her up to this. Her mother got her to seduce Herod, her own husband, in order to get her own way. You get an idea of the immorality of the ruling family.

Matthew 14:8, “But her mother instigated her to demand, ‘Give me, here on a platter, the head of John the Baptist!’” Her mother had already told her what to ask for. She said, ‘I want the head of John the Baptist on a platter,’ and Herod was kind of “caught on the spot.”

Verse 9, “And the king was grieved and upset, but because of the oath and because of those who were with him at the table, he commanded that it be given to her.” It bothered him. He knew that he shouldn’t do that, but he had already “stuck his foot in his mouth.” He had said this and

everybody there heard it. Now he felt he couldn’t back down.

Verse 10, “Then he gave orders, and had John beheaded in prison.” He sent somebody out to execute John the Baptist. A little later when he heard about Jesus, he thought John the Baptist was back from the dead to haunt him. This was the conclusion he leaped to. He was somewhat of a superstitious sort. He figured God was going to “get him.” God did deal with him a little later. That provides an interesting story as to what God finally did and the way Herod met his end.

I think we have an overview here. That brings us up to the point of where we are going to be next time, which is the feeding of the 5,000. This brings us up to the Passover of 30 A.D. This brings us up to the final year of Christ’s ministry. One of the things we will note is that the further along we go, the story begins to slow down and goes into greater and greater detail. As we started out, we found that events were told in more broad and general terms; now it is going into more and more details.

Next time we will pick it up in the Passover season of 30 A.D., continue on through to the time through the summer of 30 A.D. and then right before the fall festivals. We will continue to go through this series in the harmony of the Gospels.

Bible Study # 34
April 11, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Matthew 14:13—17:23; Mark 6:30—9:32; Luke 9:10-45; John 6:1—7:1

Let's focus on the material we are covering this evening. We **are covering events between the time immediately before Passover in 30 A.D. and the fall festival season of 30 A.D. We are covering approximately a six-month period. Jesus remained primarily in the area of Galilee, entirely outside of Jerusalem and Judea.**

We pick up the story in John 6. In this particular occasion, all four of the Gospels have a parallel account.

The feeding of the five thousand: John 6:1-13, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17 and Matthew 14:13-21.

They all start out with the account of the feeding of the 5,000. Now John brings in a detail that the others don't. John focuses in very specifically on the holy days and festivals of God. John emphasizes the holy days and festivals because he is writing at a much later time when some were beginning to question whether or not God's festivals really needed to be kept. John was writing in the 90s A.D. At the time Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote, the Church was primarily Jewish and there was really no question on the holy days; they did not make any special comment on them.

John focused the entirety of his Gospel on the things that Jesus said and did in the context of the festival seasons.

John 6:4, John makes plain, "And the Passover, a Feast of the Jews, was near."

Verses 5-9, it was in that context that Jesus looked up and saw a multitude coming toward Him. He saw this group of people there and He said to Philip, 'Where are we going to get all of the food to feed these people? Where are we going to get enough loaves?' He asked Philip that, not because He didn't know what to do, but He wanted to see what Philip would say. Philip's eyes got big and he asked, 'Feed them? Man, 200 coins worth of bread isn't sufficient for them; each one would just get a little bitty piece. There is no way we can feed this large a crowd.' Andrew said, 'We've already checked, and the only thing we can come up with, the only food out here, is this one little kid whose mother sent

lunch with him. He's the only one who has anything, and all he has is five little barley loaves and two small fishes. What good is that going to do?'

Jesus had an attitude of compassion. We find that the multitudes had followed them, and it was late in the day.

Luke 9:12 tells us that the twelve had already come to Him saying, 'You better send them home so they get something to eat and find provisions and lodging in the surrounding area because this is out in the wilderness.'

We are told there were approximately 5,000 men. It doesn't say exactly how many women and children there were, but this is in addition to the 5,000 (Matthew 14:21). Chances are the group was predominantly male, but there would have been a number of families that would have been included as well. The point is it was a very large group, and the disciples didn't see any way to feed them.

Jesus had mercy; He had compassion. We find that He took the loaves and fishes, gave thanks, divided it among the disciples and the disciples distributed it to those who were sitting.

In John 6:11-12, we are told that when it was all over with, they collected 12 baskets of leftovers. They wound up with a whole lot more leftover than they started out with. Generally, your "start-out-with" is a lot more than your leftovers, but this time the leftovers way outnumbered the "start-out-with." There was a lot more. It was a miracle. It is interesting to note a couple of things.

Luke 9:14-15, "Because they were approximately five thousand men. And He told His disciples, 'Make them sit in groups of fifties.' And they did so, and made everyone sit down."

Mark 6:39-40, we are told, "And He commanded all of them to sit down by groups on the green grass. And they sat down in ranks by hundreds and by fifties." Notice the first thing Christ did was to organize the group. God's not the author of confusion. He had a big group here and He was going to feed them. The first thing He did was to organize it.

John 6:12, notice one other thing He did, "And when they were full, He told His disciples, 'Gather up the fragments which are left, so nothing will be lost.'" Notice that they didn't trash the place. He didn't walk away leaving a mess behind. I think it is a very small point, but it is one of those areas that give us a little insight into the way that Jesus Christ did things. Sometimes I have come into a bathroom

and have seen water splashed all over the place. Particularly in a public restroom, you see paper towels all over the floor and the place has just been trashed. People made a mess. Can you imagine Jesus Christ crumpling up His paper towels and just throwing them on the floor and leaving the place a wreck?

It's just a couple of things to show insight into His character. When He finished feeding the group, they cleaned up the area. They made sure no mess was left. Remember when they came into the cave and found the burial garments, they found the napkin for His head folded separately (John 20:7). Ever stop to think about that? He didn't just leave it in a crumpled heap when He left. He took the time for a mundane task of folding it up and leaving it neatly behind.

You might say, 'What difference does it make? I'd be so excited to leave that I'd just leave the napkin lying in a heap on the floor.' Well, maybe you would, but He didn't. It was simply a point of character that when Jesus Christ left something, He left it neat and clean. It's one of those things that give us insight as we read the Bible. There are all kinds of lessons; there are little lessons and big lessons to draw.

One of the things that we see by example and illustration is simply ways of doing things. We gain insight from that in terms of points of character, and we realize that it is something we can put into practice.

We have had problems even here in our Church hall. Deacons and ushers have a job trying to clean up the mess that's been left behind on the floor. Can you imagine coming in behind Jesus Christ where He had been sitting to clean up the mess He left behind? I know it's generally the children, not the adults, but isn't that a good opportunity to start with a little child—'Okay, now let's pick up. You have this mess here; we can't go off and leave this mess.' It's a good opportunity to teach them that you don't leave the place trashed when you go away expecting that somebody else will come in behind you.

Jesus goes up into a mountain to pray: John 6:14-17, Mark 6:45-46 and Matthew 14:22-23.

After this Jesus sent the disciples across the sea and He went off into the mountains.

Matthew 14:23, "And when the multitudes were dismissed, He went up into the mountain to a private place to pray."

He wanted some time by Himself. He wanted some time to pray. The disciples had gone ahead of Him.

Jesus walks on the water: John 6:18-21, Mark 6:47-49 and Matthew 14:24-27.

John 6:18-20, we are told the sea was turbulent and they had been rowing about three miles; all of a sudden, they were terrified. They looked up and it looked like somebody was walking toward them. And sure enough there was. Needless to say, this really frightened them when they saw somebody walking. Jesus called out to them and said it was He.

Matthew adds in a detail that the others omit.

Matthew 14:28-31, "Peter answered Him and said, 'Lord, if it is You, command me come out to You upon the waters.' And He said, 'Come!' And when Peter climbed out of the boat, he walked upon the waters, to go to Jesus. And seeing the tumultuous wind, he was exceedingly afraid; and as he began sinking, he yelled out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand, and grabbed hold of him, and said, 'O you of little faith! Why did your thought waver?'"

Peter started walking, and then all of a sudden, after a few steps, he looked down at that water, looked out there at all the wind and the waves. He thought, 'What am I doing; I can't do this.' Just about that time, sure enough, he couldn't. Glug, glug and down he went. Christ reached out His hand and pulled him up. He asked, 'Why did you doubt, Peter? Why did you waver?'

Now understand that Peter at least had a little more "going for him" than the others. He was the only one that even tried. You say, 'Peter doubted, didn't have faith.' Well, how far have you walked on water? I dare say he's gone more steps on water than any of the rest of us have. So, we can't cast stones.

There is a point here. When did he get into trouble? —When he took his eyes off of Christ and on to what he could see around. That is the lesson of faith.

Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." If you can see it, touch it and taste it, that doesn't take faith because you have physical evidence. Faith is spiritual evidence. As long as Peter kept his eyes on Christ, he didn't have a problem. When he took his eyes off of Christ and looked on the around, he had problems. The immediate conclusion of when you look at the around is, 'This is impossible,' and there goes faith down the drain. This is a very important lesson: as we keep our eyes on God, on Jesus Christ, on the promises of God, we are focusing on that which will never fail or let us down. As

we get our eyes on what we can see and on the around, as we start focusing in on the other things, then we are focusing on things that will mess us up.

In John 6:22-25, the rest of the crowd wanted to come over, too. They waited there for Christ and figured they would catch Him when He got ready to cross. They waited and He never did cross. Finally some of them went over. We're told that they got aboard boats and came to Capernaum looking for Him. When they found Him, they asked, 'How did You get here? We were watching. We didn't see you take a boat. We saw the disciples leave without You. How did You get here before we did?' Well, He didn't tell them.

John 6:26, but He did tell them this, "Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I tell you, you are not seeking Me because you have seen miracles, but because you ate of the bread and were satisfied.'" He said, 'I know why you are looking for Me. It's not because you have seen a miracle or heard a message. You are here because you ate an enjoyable meal. I fed you and you'd like to get fed again.'

Verses 27-35, "'Do not labor and work for the food which is perishable and temporal. But work and labor for the food which remains and endures throughout eternity, and for eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you: because God the Father has sealed Him with His own stamp of approval.' Therefore they asked Him, 'What should we do in order to work the works of God?' Jesus answered and told them, 'This is the work of God, that you should have complete trust and faith in Him whom the Father has sent!' Therefore they said to Him, 'Then what miracle will you do, so that we may see, and may believe and have faith in You? What are You going to perform? Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'" Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread out of heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread out of heaven. And truly the bread of God is He who comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him, 'Lord, always give us this bread.' But Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life.'"

Notice the context is the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. The miracle in the feeding of the 5,000 occurred immediately prior to Passover. Now by this time, He is back in Capernaum, and it may very well be the message

He gave on the first holy day. It's very possible and it's certainly in the context of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread that Jesus began to explain that He is the bread of life. When we take of that unleavened bread at Passover, as well as throughout the Days of Unleavened Bread, we understand that it is not enough simply to get rid of leavening—we have to replace it with something. Jesus Christ is the bread of life. It is not enough to simply try to get rid of the old habits, the old ways of thinking and the old ways of doing things that have characterized us in this world. We need to have Jesus Christ in us. We need to replace the old things with something new, with something positive, with something right. We need Jesus Christ living His life in us. We are told He is the source of our spiritual nourishment and survival.

"I am the bread of life. Anyone who comes to Me shall never hunger."

Verses 41-43, well, many of the Jews began to be upset because they didn't understand what He was talking about. They began to be offended.

John 6:44, He told them, "'No one is able to come to Me, except the Father who has sent Me draw him: and I will resurrect him....'" Only those that the Father draws can come to Christ.

Verse 48, then He went on to tell them, "'I am the bread of life.'"

Verses 50-51, "'But this is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that anyone may eat of it, and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven! If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live into the ages of eternity: and the bread which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world!'"

Verse 53, "...except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you cannot have life in yourself.'" In other words, 'You have to take Me in.' You have to consume, to absolutely take in Jesus Christ in His entirety. We are told He gave His life; He gave Himself—it was a total and complete sacrifice. We are to live by and through Him.

Verse 59, "These things He said, teaching in Capernaum in the synagogue." If He was teaching in the synagogue, it would have undoubtedly been on a Sabbath or holy day. In the context, it was most likely the first Holy Day of Unleavened Bread. He was giving a message on "What is this Bread?" He had just performed a miracle of multiplying the loaves, and now He began to explain that there was a spiritual analogy.

Verse 60, “After hearing this, many of His disciples said, ‘This is a hard and difficult message. Who is able to understand it?’”

Verses 66-68, “From that time, many of His disciples went back, and didn’t follow Him any longer. Therefore Jesus asked the twelve, ‘Are you also desiring to go away?’ Then Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!’”

Many of those who were listening to His message were offended. Some began to go back and not follow any longer. Peter and the rest of the twelve didn’t really understand the point Jesus was getting at. They didn’t entirely understand what He was saying, but what they did know was that He had the truth. Peter said, ‘I may not understand what You are doing or the point You are making on this. This may strike me as a little strange, but I am not going to go away. Where would I go?’

Once you’ve found the truth, where are you going to go? This principle and the understanding of this certainly have helped some to endure and to make it through some tough times. Sometimes in the past when certain problems and things beset the Church, there was the realization as Peter had: ‘Well, Lord, where are we going to go; You have the truth.’

John 7:1, “And after these things Jesus was traveling throughout Galilee: because He did not desire to travel through Judaea, since the Jews were plotting to kill Him.” He remained in Galilee through this period of time.

Man’s tradition; washing of hands: Mark 7:1-13 and Matthew 15:1-9.

Mark 7:1, “And the Pharisees and some of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem, gathered themselves together to Him.” News of what Jesus was saying and doing was traveling far and wide. He was not coming down to Jerusalem, so they came to where He was. Some of them were very upset.

Verse 2, we are told, “But when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled and supposedly unholy hands, that is, unwashed hands, they criticized and found fault.” Now this really “bent them out of shape.” They had many traditions of this matter of eating with washed hands. With them it wasn’t simply a matter of hygiene; it was a matter of ritual purity. As they viewed it, the problem was when they came in contact with other people, with sinners. That was just terrible. Before they would touch food that would go into their mouth, they had to make sure their hands were washed in case they had come

in contact with sinners. They had made a fetish out of some of the principles of washings and carried it to an extreme. In some cases, they had taken the rituals of Leviticus that applied to the priesthood coming into the temple and had sought to apply it to individuals in their own home at their own table. That was literally the point they had gone to. The table was analogous to the altar, and the individual was to be as holy and undefiled as the priest. This was their thinking; they had taken it to such extremes in all of this. It really “bent them out of shape” when Christ’s disciples were not following all these rituals. They approached Christ about it.

Verses 5-9, “Then the Pharisees and the scribes demanded of Him, ‘Why don’t Your disciples conduct their lives according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating bread with unwashed hands?’ But He answered them by saying, ‘Isaiah has perfectly prophesied concerning you, hypocrites, sanctimonious pretenders; for in this manner it has been written, “These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain they worship Me, teaching for doctrine man-made religious precepts, injunctions and commandments.” As a result you have completely left out the commandment of God, and you cling to and follow the traditions of men, such as the washing of pots and cups: and you do many things like this.’ And He told them, ‘It is true, you have completely rejected and repudiated the commandment of God, in order that you may practice and observe your own traditions!’”

Christ said that the Pharisees were hypocrites. They paid lip service to God, but their actions belied their words. They elevated the importance of their own human tradition above the actual law of God. That still characterizes most of man’s religions to this day—most of what passes as Christianity. People would rather cling to human tradition than to observe the commandments of God. They elevate that human tradition.

Unwashed hands do not defile: Mark 7:14-16 and Matthew 15:10-11.

Mark 7:14-16, “And when He had called all the multitude to Him, He said to them, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing from outside the man, which entering into him, is able to defile him: but the things which go out from of him, these are the things that defile the man. If anyone has an ear to hear, let him hear.”

What comes out of man defiles: Mark 7:17-23 and Matthew 15:12-20.

Mark 7:17-19, "...His disciples asked Him about the meaning of the parable. And He said to them, 'Are you also without understanding? Don't you comprehend that anything which enters into the man from outside is not capable of defiling him? Because it doesn't enter into the heart and mind of the individual, but into the stomach, and goes out of the body into the sewer, purifying all the food.'" In other words, what you eat, what goes into your mouth doesn't enter into your heart and mind. It goes through the digestive system and is eliminated, passed out into the sewer and is gone. It's simply a matter of time and it passes through the body. That is not what defiles and makes you spiritually unclean.

Verses 20-23, "And He said, 'Those things which proceed out of the man, these actually defile and profane the man. Because from inside the hearts and minds of men emanate evil reasonings and imaginations, adulteries, sexual debaucheries, murders, thefts, covetous desires and impulses, wickedness, deceit, evil permissiveness, an evil eye, blasphemy, haughtiness, pride, and foolishness! All these evils proceed from inside of the man, and defile him.'"

It's our attitudes, our thoughts and our covetous desires. It's the wrong thinking that is the problem. Some have tried to take this totally out of context and quote this account as proof that Christ did away with the laws of clean and unclean meats, which is absolutely ridiculous. There's no suggestion here of eating unclean foods. The subject is not even under discussion. It was the subject of the tradition of the elders, of human customs that the Pharisees paid great service to. The subject had to do with washing the hands, and Christ made plain that this was the case.

When you go back to the account in Acts 10, Peter was confronted with the sheet containing the unclean animals; you remember what he said?

Acts 10:14, "... 'Not so Lord! I have never eaten anything common or unclean.'" Now Peter was with Christ for three and one-half years, and there wasn't anything here at any time that made him think that he should eat unclean food. He had never eaten it with Jesus, so it was very plain that Jesus was not doing that.

Christ heals the daughter of a Gentile woman:
Mark 7:24-30 and Matthew 15:21-28.

Mark 7:24-30 tells us He went to the area of Tyre and Sidon and He came into a house. He didn't want anyone to know that He was there, but word

did spread. A woman who heard it appeared with her little daughter who had an unclean spirit. The woman, we are told in Mark 7:26, was a Greek, a Syrophenician by race; she was referred to as a Canaanite in Matthew 15:22. In other words, the term "Greek" is referred to in this context as simply being "a Gentile, a Greek speaker." Specifically, she was a Syrophenician or Canaanite. This had reference to tracing back to the Phoenicians who were descendants of Canaan. She came in and desired that He cast the demon out of her daughter.

She evidently had certain knowledge of Him. Recognize, of course, that the people who lived here in this area were not normally those who practiced the religion of the Scriptures. They were of pagan background. Jesus Christ came specifically and His ministry was to His own—the Jews. He did not come ministering and taking His message out to other areas. Later, He sent the disciples out to these other areas. But God does things in an orderly and organized way.

It was God's purpose and plan to start with Israel, particularly with the Jews. They had retained the Scriptures, the knowledge of the law of God; therefore, in terms of building the Church, it needed to be built around a group that was familiar with, understood and had access to the law—that group served as a nucleus. Then once it was established with them, it would begin to spread out and include others and eventually spread worldwide. But there was a logical reason as to why you start where you do. If you start with a group of people where the nucleus is totally unacquainted with the law and does not have access to the Scriptures, you have engendered confusion before you ever get started. We are told in John 1:11 that Christ came specifically and uniquely to His own and His own received him not. But His ministry was to them. It was not here in Tyre and Sidon.

This woman came in. He, perhaps, had come to visit an individual because certainly there were Jews who lived there a short distance away. He had come into someone's home, and He had sought to keep His presence private. He was not trying to get something started among the Gentile population in that area. But this woman had heard and had certain knowledge. She came there.

Christ, at first, made a statement to her.

Verses 27-29, "But Jesus said to her, 'First let the children be satisfied [I have come to the Jews, the children of Israel.]: because it is not proper to take the children's bread, and cast it

out to the dogs.’ But she answered and said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord! Yet even the little dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.’ And He said to her, ‘Because of this answer, go; the demon has gone out of your daughter.’” The demon was gone out and the problem was solved. There was an attitude of humility.

I think it is interesting to note that perhaps the greatest example of faith and the greatest example of humility that our attention is called to in the New Testament were both evidenced by Gentiles. You know what was said of the Roman centurion that Christ pointed out to His disciples, ‘I have never seen this kind of faith, no, not in Israel’ (Matthew 8:5-13). This woman had an attitude of humility. Christ, in that sense, was testing her. His ministry was not primarily to the Gentiles.

Some Gentiles had a kind of magical or superstitious approach, and anybody that they heard of and would view as having some kind of magical powers and connection with the gods, they would just add in to their collection. They worshiped many gods. They weren’t picky. Christ was not going to get involved in that kind of situation. He was not there to deal with her and that group of people. But because of her persistence, humility and faith, He dealt with her. In a sense, she was dealt with ahead of time because she evidenced persistence, faith and humility. The example is preserved for us.

I think we need to recognize that we live in a society that does not value humility. Can you imagine the response that Jesus would have gotten with a statement like this in our society? This would not have been a very popular response, but there is a lesson here. God values things that people don’t value. God values humility; our society and modern end-of-the-century America do not value humility as being something important. Why no! You have to demand your rights. Don’t let anybody tell you anything. You just go charging on and insist on your way. You don’t take anything off of anybody. And certainly don’t have a humble approach. Well, God values humility, and this woman evidenced that humility. Christ was impressed and touched by her humility, her faith and her persistence; her daughter was healed.

We find that Christ continued to work these healings and these miracles. Mark 7:31-37 mentions Christ healing a deaf man.

Matthew 15:31, “So that the multitudes were awestruck when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the

blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.”

Jesus feeds the 4,000: Matthew 15:32-38 and Mark 8:1-9.

Matthew 15:32, “But when Jesus called His disciples to Him, He said, ‘I am moved with compassion and mercy towards the multitude, because they have continued with Me for three days already, and have nothing to eat. I am not willing to send them away fasting, because they might faint on the way back.’” Again, He had an attitude of compassion in dealing with people. He cared about people and was very much concerned with human beings and their problems, their difficulties and frailties.

Verse 38, “Now those who had eaten were four thousand men, in addition to women and children.” Here we have another account of feeding 4,000 men in addition to women and children.

The Pharisees demand a sign: Matthew 15:39-16:1-4 and Mark 8:10-13.

Matthew 15:39, “Then after dismissing the multitudes, He boarded the boat, and came into the area of Magdala.”

Matthew 16:1, “Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, tempting Him, demanding that He demonstrate a sign from heaven for them.” They said, ‘How do we know You are who You say You are?’

Verses 2-3, “But He answered them, ‘When evening comes, you say, “Fine weather tomorrow, because the sky is red.” But in the morning, “A storm is coming, because the sky is overcast.” You hypocrites, sanctimonious pretenders! You know how to discern the outward appearance of the sky, but the signs of the times you cannot discern.’”

He told them, ‘You can observe the signs of nature; you can tell whether it’s going to rain or not—but you don’t see the signs of the times.’

Verse 4, ““A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; but a sign shall not be given to it, except the sign of Jonah the prophet.’ Then He left them, and went away.” They were going to have that sign impressed upon them in a special way within a matter of months.

Leaven (doctrine) of the Pharisees: Matthew 16:5-12 and Mark 8:14-21.

Matthew 16:5, “And when His disciples arrived at the other side, they noticed that they had forgotten to take loaves.” They had forgotten to take any food with them. They just got on the boat in a hurry and had forgotten to take any bread.

Verse 6, Jesus made the comment, "...Watch out, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Jesus took advantage of physical circumstances to make a point, and His disciples always tended to take everything He said in a very literal, physical way. Many times He was speaking in a figurative sense.

Verse 7, "But they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'He said this because we did not take loaves.'" Immediately they began inquiring about what He meant, 'Maybe He didn't want us to buy any bread from the Pharisees.' They were all murmuring about this.

Verses 8-11, "And knowing this, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you reasoning among yourselves, O you of little faith, because you haven't brought loaves? Don't you comprehend or remember the five loaves for five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered up? Nor the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered up? How is it that you do not comprehend that I did not speak to you concerning bread, in warning you to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?'"

He asked, 'What are you guys talking about? Do you think I am worried about where we are going to get bread? Didn't I just get through feeding 4,000 people, and didn't I feed 5,000 a little earlier? You think I am standing here worried about where I am going to get bread and not want you to buy it from the Pharisees.'

Verse 12, "Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but to beware of the teaching and doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Luke 12:1 we are told that the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. He was using leaven in a spiritual sense. He was contrasting the leaven of the Pharisees with the bread of life. We are to partake of the bread of life and we are told to avoid the leaven of the Pharisees. That is the spiritual lesson we need to have on our minds through the Days of Unleavened Bread as we studiously avoid the leavened bread.

We can get so meticulous in trying to remember, 'No, I can't have a doughnut; no, I can't have a hamburger.' We are thinking and concentrating on this. The spiritual lesson is we need to be spending just as much time throughout the year thinking and concentrating on avoiding the leaven of the Pharisees as we do on trying to avoid physical leaven for seven days. Just as we make it a point to acquire unleavened bread and eat it through the Days of Unleavened Bread, in the same way, we need to be conscious of

partaking of the bread of life, Jesus Christ, throughout our lives. Make it a point to avoid the leaven of the Pharisees and partake of the bread of life. The physical action we go through needs to impress upon us what we need to be doing spiritually.

Jesus' Church built on the Rock: Matthew 16:13-18, Mark 8:27-30 and Luke 9:18-21.

Matthew 16:13, "And when Jesus came into the area of Caesarea Philippi, He questioned His disciples, and asked, 'Whom do men claim the Son of man to be?'" He asked, 'Who do people think I am?'

Verse 14, well, different people had different opinions. Some thought He was John the Baptist. Herod evidently thought that. He was kind of a superstitious sort. He thought that John the Baptist had come back to haunt him. That was his opinion. Some said they thought He was Elijah based on the prophecies in Malachi. Some said He was Jeremiah. Why did they say Jeremiah? Why not? It just shows that people have an opinion.

It may not make sense, may be ridiculous, may not have any point in it, but they have an opinion. 'Oh, I think "so and so"' —A "man-on-the-street" poll. What does that prove? Sometimes you need to take a look at what street you take the poll on—Skid Row or Wall Street. You can have a wide variety of opinions that could be brought out. But the point is people have opinions, and just because they have opinions doesn't mean that their opinion is valid. People take a Gallup poll. 'Who do you think this guy is?' Everybody had an opinion, but their opinions weren't right. They didn't know. But not knowing has never kept people from having an opinion. Far be it from them to let lack of knowledge get in the way of having an opinion. So, Christ asked and He got different ones mentioning different things that they had heard people say.

Verses 15-17, "He asked them, 'But whom do you claim Me to be?' Then answered Simon Peter, saying, 'You are the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of the living God.' And answering, Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah: because flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'"

'You didn't get this from listening to the man on the street. Flesh and blood hasn't told you this. You didn't get this from what other people said, but My Father, which is in heaven, has opened your mind to really understand and grasp this.'

Verse 18, “And I also tell you, that you are Peter [which means “a stone,” and refers to Peter] [Aramaic, “*Cephas*,” “a little rock or stone”; Greek, “*petros*,” “a little stone, rock”]. But on this rock [which means a great massive rock, and refers to Christ Himself] [Greek, “*petra*,” “a great massive rock”] I will build My church, and the mouth of the grave [NKJV, “gates of Hades”; “gates of hell”] shall not prevail against it.”

In other words, ‘I am going to build My Church, and it is not going to be swallowed up in death. It’s going to continue to exist.’ Whom did Jesus Christ build the Church upon? He built it upon Himself.

We are told in Ephesians 2:20 that the Church is built on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles, Jesus Christ being the Chief Cornerstone.

Now Peter described in 1 Peter 2:5 that we are all living stones. In a sense, what He told Peter was, ‘You are a “chip off the old block”—you have a certain rock-like quality.’ He had nicknamed him Peter or “rock” at an earlier time. ‘You have certain qualities; you have certain rock-like qualities. You reflect that and on this ROCK, I will build My Church.’

It is interesting if you look at the location of Caesarea Philippi. Just prior to entering Caesarea Philippi, there is a huge cliff that dominates the scene. At the base of the cliff, during the time of Jesus, a major spring gushed out from under the cliff. It was one of the sources of the Jordan River. It’s interesting. Here is the stream of living water where they were standing. Right there outside of Caesarea Philippi was a great cliff, a great rock, a “*petra*” that dominated the scene, and down at the base, there was a stream that gushed out from the base of the cliff that fed the Jordan River. There was a stream of living water and in that sense, flowing water.

It really kind of set the stage as Christ drew on the physical things that they could see to explain that He was building His Church. He was going to build it with Himself being the chief cornerstone. He was the ROCK on which it was built, and it would never be swallowed up. The disciples, of course, were going to play a part. They were part of the foundation. The prophets and the apostles make up the foundation built around and upon the chief cornerstone, which was Jesus Christ.

Matthew 16:19, then He went on to tell the 12 apostles, “Moreover I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: so that whatever you may bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and

whatever you may loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” “Binding and loosing” was a common legal term used among the Jews. It referred to, specifically, decisions made by the religious arm of the Sanhedrin, called by the Jews, “The Great Beit Din” or “The Great House of Judgment.” It is in this situation, sitting in the “Great Beit Din,” that the Pharisees sat in Moses’ seat. Remember when He told the disciples that the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat (Matthew 23:1-4)?

Luke 11:52, Jesus told the doctors of the law, “Woe and misery to you, the doctors of law! because you have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves did not enter in, and those who were entering in you have hindered!” When He’s talking about the keys of the Kingdom, He’s talking about the keys that unlock the knowledge necessary to go in. He told the apostles, ‘I am giving you the keys of the Kingdom.’ A little later He rebuked the lawyers; He rebuked the keepers of the law—the ones who supposedly had the keys.

He said, ‘You have taken away the key of knowledge. You have locked it up where people can never understand it. Not only have you not acted on it, you have obscured the truth from others who were sincere and looking for it. Instead of unlocking things to their understanding, you have locked them up and made it a closed book.’

He told the apostles that He was giving them the keys. He was giving them what they needed to unlock the knowledge of salvation, and He gave them authority to make binding and loosing judgments. If circumstances arise where the law had to be applied in situations and circumstances, they would have had to make decisions. They would be responsible to God for those decisions. There is a responsibility that those who make the decisions have before God.

Jesus rebukes Peter: Matthew 16:22-23 and Mark 8:32-33.

Christ was clearly not making Peter the infallible Pope. All you have to do is go down a few verses. Christ began to speak about how it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things.

Matthew 16:22, “And Peter took Him aside, and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘God will be merciful to You, Lord. This shall not happen in any way to You.’”

He said, ‘Let’s forget about this. This is not going to happen. I am not going to let anybody

do anything like that to You. This is not going to happen.’

Verse 23, “But turning to Peter, He said, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me: because your thoughts are not on the things of God, but on the things of men!’” Christ asked, ‘What are you talking about? Get behind Me, Satan. You don’t know the things you are talking about. You don’t know what spirit you are because your thoughts are not on the things of God.’ So, again, it shows here that there was nothing infallible in terms of Peter. Peter was a servant of God and one that God used.

You must lose your life: Matthew 16:24-27, Mark 8:34-38 and Luke 9:23-26.

Matthew 16:24-25, “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come in My footsteps and follow after Me, let him utterly disown himself; and let him take up his own cross, and follow Me. Because whoever may desire to save his life shall lose it: but whoever may lose his life for My sake shall find it.’”

He emphasized that if you put “saving your own hide” first, you are going to lose out. He said if the greatest emphasis is on taking care of yourself, you are going to find that you are going to lose out even on what you are trying to do. If your greatest emphasis is on serving God and Jesus Christ, you are going to find God will take care of you. If you try to take care of yourself, you are going to get overwhelmed. If you put your emphasis on doing what God said and let God take care of you, He will certainly do so.

Vision of the transfiguration: Matthew 16:28-17:1-9, Mark 9:1-10 and Luke 9:27-36.

Let’s notice as we come down.

Matthew 16:28, “‘Truly I tell you, there are some of those standing here, who shall in no way experience death, until they have seen the Son of man coming in His kingdom.’” What does He mean by that? All you have to do is go to the very next verse. There is a chapter division here in Matthew. There is not one in Mark 9:1-2, which gives the same account. Man added chapter divisions at a later time. They were added in just to try to make the Scriptures more manageable. They went through and divided into chapters and verses and putting numbers on them. Generally, they are very helpful, but occasionally they obscure the point by making a break where there is really a single thought flow. This is an example.

Matthew 16:28, “‘...there are some of those standing here, who will in no way experience

death, until they have seen the Son of man coming in His kingdom.’”

Matthew 17:1-9, “Then after six days Jesus took with Him Peter, and James and John his brother, and brought them up into a high mountain away from the rest of the disciples. And he was transfigured in their presence: and His face shined as the sun, and His clothing became brilliant and white as the light. And suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to be talking Him. Then, speaking up, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord it is good for us to be here. If You desire, let us make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud enveloped them. And then a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found delight, and whom I have sanctified; listen to Him.’ When the disciples heard it, they prostrated themselves on their faces, and were exceedingly terrified. Then Jesus came touched them, and said, ‘Get up, and do not be terrified.’ When they looked around, they saw no one except Jesus alone. And as they were descending from the mountain, Jesus commanded and charged them, saying, ‘Tell the vision to no one, until the Son of man is resurrected from the dead.’”

It was a vision—that’s all. Moses and Elijah were not literally resurrected at this time. But in a vision they saw the Kingdom; they saw Him coming in His Kingdom. They saw Him in His glorified state with Moses and Elijah standing there.

What does that signify? What are we going to be in the Kingdom? We are going to be kings and priests. Moses was the one through whom God established civil government among human beings. God used Moses to establish His kind of civil government. God used Elijah to restore the knowledge of the true religion in Israel and to establish an educational system. There were three schools of the prophets (2 Kings 2). God used Elijah and Moses in those ways.

We see, in effect, Christ coming in His Kingdom. Here is Moses through whom God organized human civil government, and here is Elijah through whom God established an educational system and restored the knowledge of the true religion. The disciples are standing here with Christ, and they were given in vision insight to see what it’s going to be like in the Kingdom. Undoubtedly, Moses and Elijah will occupy very high positions. Perhaps Moses will be the one who will be over all of the civil government.

Perhaps Elijah will be the one who will be over religion and education. Certainly, religion and education will be tied together in Tomorrow's World because in God's scheme of things, they are very much intertwined. Religion, properly understood, is education, and education has to be based on the true religion. Perhaps Elijah will be the one who will coordinate all of that. That at least could be speculated upon based on Matthew 17.

This is a vision. Peter quotes it later back in 2 Peter 1.

2 Peter 1:16-19, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. We also have the prophetic word made more sure, ..."

The "we" at the time Peter wrote that, referred to Peter and John. James had died years earlier. These two, Peter and John, were actually the ones that God used to put together the New Testament as we have it. This set them aside in a special way. They were given a certain insight into the future—into what God has in store for those who are going to be in His Kingdom and in His Family.

John the Baptist type of Elijah: Matthew 17:10-13 and Mark 9:11-13.

Then a little later, kind of in the aftermath, His disciples brought up the subject of Elijah.

Matthew 17:10, "But His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?'" They had been discussing earlier the fact that they believed Him to be the Messiah, and they asked, 'What is this prophecy about Elijah that the scribes talk about?'

Verses 11-13, "And answering them, Jesus said, 'Elijah shall truly come first, and shall restore all things. But I tell you, that Elijah has already come, and they did not know or recognize him; instead they did to him whatever they intended and desired. In the same way also the Son of man is about to suffer from them.' Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them concerning John the Baptist."

Now notice that He makes a reference here, "Elijah shall truly come first, and shall restore all things [future]." And He also said, "Elijah has already come [past]." John the Baptist came in

the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). John the Baptist fulfilled that before the first coming of Jesus Christ. He fulfilled that prophecy.

Malachi 4:5-6, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." Christ is coming again, coming a second time, coming as King of kings and Lord of lords.

I think that when we look at things, certainly many of us have felt very clearly that God raised up Mr. Herbert Armstrong back in the 20s and 30s to do the work of Elijah and to restore the knowledge of the true religion in Israel. That's what He did. He restored the knowledge of the true religion in Israel to make a people ready and prepared for the Lord. The Church had always existed, but God raised up and revived a work to be done by His Church—in bringing Mr. Herbert Armstrong among His Church and raising him up as His servant in the latter days. God raised up a servant in the spirit and power of Elijah to do that work of which we are, let's say, the result and the continuation of the work that God began in this modern age through Mr. Armstrong. God used him to restore that work.

Jesus casts out deaf and dumb spirit: Mark 9:14-27, Matthew 17:14-18 and Luke 9:37-42.

Mark 9:17-22, "Then someone out of the crowd answered and said, 'Master, I have brought to You my son, who has a dumb spirit.... And I asked Your disciples, that they might cast it out; but they didn't have the power to do it.' Then He answered him and said, 'O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!' And they brought him to Jesus. But when the spirit saw Him, immediately it threw him into convulsions; and he fell down on the ground, rolling about and foaming at the mouth. And He asked his father, 'How long has it been doing this with him?' And he said, 'From childhood. And frequently it has thrown him into fire and into water, seeking to destroy him: but if You are able to do anything, please help us, have compassion on us!'" Jesus had compassion.

Verses 23-27, "And Jesus said to him, 'If you are able to believe, all things are possible to anyone who believes.' And immediately crying out, the father of the little child, with tears streaming down, said, 'I do believe, O Lord; but help my unbelief.' Then as Jesus saw that a multitude was running and surging together around Him, He

rebuked the demon spirit, saying to it, 'You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and you may never enter into him again.' And after screaming, the spirit threw him into convulsions; then it came out. And the boy became as if he were a corpse; so much so that many said, 'He is dead!' But Jesus took him by the hand, and raised him up; and he stood up."

Faith comes through prayer and fasting: Mark 9:28-29 and Matthew 17:19-21.

Mark 9:28-29, a little later, "And when He came into a house, His disciples asked Him privately, 'Why was it that we were not able to cast him out?' And He answered them, 'This type cannot go out by anything, except by prayer and fasting.'" That was the key of faith. The disciples lacked faith.

Mark 9:19, that's what it said, "... 'O faithless generation, ...'" They lacked the faith to cast the demon out. Why did they lack the faith? They lacked the faith because they were not close enough to God.

That's the point. How do we grow in faith? Well, one of the ways is by drawing close to God in prayer and fasting. When we draw close to God in prayer and fasting, we increase our faith; we build our faith. Mark 9 gives the lesson or key to healing faith.

This account brings us right up to the point that we are going to be next time as we pick up the story in John 7 of the Feast of Tabernacles. This was the Feast of Tabernacles of 30 A.D., which brings us up to within six months of the end of Jesus' human life and ministry. As we have gone through, we have noted how, as we close in on the end of Christ's ministry, the account begins to go into greater and greater detail. Increasingly, God focuses in on that detail and on what Jesus said and did. There are many, many lessons that we can derive. There are many things that we can gain insight into—insights into the things that Jesus Christ taught, things that He said, things that He did, things that give us a basis by which we can live our lives, things we can put into practice in our lives and the things we must do.

Next time we will pick up at the Feast of Tabernacles 30 A.D. This will conclude the Bible study for this evening.

Bible Study # 35
May 9, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Matthew 17:24—18:35; Mark 9:33—10:1; Luke 9:46—12:59; John 7:2—10:21

We are picking up the story immediately prior to the Feast of Tabernacles of 30 A.D. This study focuses on the things that Jesus said and did, particularly during the Last Great Day. It is interesting to the extent that John focused in on the actions of Jesus in conjunction with the holy days. This is what we are looking at this evening. Most of His ministry, prior to this time, had been in Galilee. We see that there had been an increase in the time that He was spending around Jerusalem. Once He started spending very much time teaching and preaching in Jerusalem, it was going to bring Him into a confrontation with the religious leaders because of their jealousy against Him.

John 7:2, we pick up the story, “Now the feast of the Jews was approaching, the Feast of Tabernacles.” There was a reason why He used the term “feast of the Jews.” John was writing about 30 years after the other apostles were gone. He was writing after the disappearance of Peter, Paul and those of that generation. The other Gospels had already been written. The holy days were not really an issue at the time the rest was written; the keeping of the holy days was not an issue one way or another. At the time John wrote, at the end of the first century, there had already begun to arise certain heresies after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. He emphasized over and over that Jesus observed the same days the Jews observed.

Verses 3-5, “Then His own brothers said to Him, ‘Leave here, and go into Judaea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. Because no one does anything in secret, but seeks to be known by the public. If You do these things, reveal and show Yourself to the world.’ For even His own brothers did not believe in Him.”

Think for a moment. They had grown up with Him. How difficult would it have been for you to accept that your brother was God in the flesh? Jesus was maybe two or three years older than James. James was the oldest, next to Christ. They were playing with Him, working with their dad and helping in the carpentry business. It was a very difficult thing for them. They had admired

and respected Him, but “God in the flesh!” That was kind of a “tall order”; it had not really sunk in. They did believe after the resurrection. When He appeared to them after the resurrection, they had no question. Then the reality hit them. But at this point, they just didn’t really believe these things and understand them.

Verse 8, the only statement Jesus ever made concerning the Feast of Tabernacles was, “As for you, you go up to this Feast of Tabernacles.”

1 Corinthians 5:8, “Therefore let us keep the feast, ...” –The Days of Unleavened Bread.

Hebrews 4:9, “There remains therefore a rest [a Sabbath keeping] for the people of God.” The New Testament is very plain, ‘Go up to the Feast.’ Some people say the New Testament doesn’t say anything about keeping the holy days. Where does it say to keep Christmas? Where did you ever see that? The world can’t find where it says to keep Easter, Christmas or Sunday.

John 7:10, “But when His own brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the Feast, not publicly, but secretly.” He went up secretly.

Verse 11, “Now the Jews were searching for Him at the Feast, and asked, ‘Where is He?’” The Jews were looking for Him; He knew what they were up to. Actually, they had a contract out on Him, but they were not going to risk a public confrontation. They viewed Him as a threat. They wanted to get rid of Him. He knew if He went up the way everybody was expecting, it would create problems. He just kind of got lost in the crowd. Suddenly, there He was in the temple in the middle of the crowd.

Verse 14, “But about the middle of the Feast, Jesus went up into the temple and was teaching.” Then it was a little late for them to do anything. They would have had to do it in full view and they didn’t want to take that risk.

Verse 24, “Judge not according to the outward appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” This is the crux of the Feast; it pictures the Millennium. What are we going to do in Tomorrow’s World? We are going to judge the world. What is going to be the basis? –Righteous judgment! That is the trouble of serving on the world’s juries and courts. They want to make decisions based on technical matters, on the form of things. Christ said judge righteous judgment based on motive and intent. This is what He emphasized during the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast looks forward to that time of righteous judgment.

Verses 25-31, “Therefore some of those of Jerusalem said, ‘Isn’t this the One they are seeking and plotting to kill? And look, He is preaching publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. When did the rulers truly recognize that this is indeed the Christ? But we know this Man, where He is from. And the Christ, whenever He may come, no one will know where He is from.’ Then Jesus called aloud in the temple, as He was teaching, and said, ‘You both know Me, and you know where I am from. I have not come of Myself alone, but He who has sent Me is true, whom you do not even know. But I know Him: because I am from Him, and He has sent Me.’ Therefore they were seeking to take Him: but no one laid his hands upon Him, because His hour had not yet come. But many of the people believed and had faith in Him, and said, ‘The Christ, when He comes, will He do more miracles than these which this Man has done?’”

Verses 37-39, “And in the Last Day, the Great Day of the Feast, Jesus stood up and called aloud, saying, ‘If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink! Anyone who believes and has complete faith and trust in Me, as the scripture has said, Out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’ (But He said this concerning the Spirit, which those who were believing in Him were going to receive: because the Holy Spirit had not been given, since Jesus was not yet glorified.)” Jesus was speaking concerning the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting if you understand the ceremony that took place at the temple on the day that began the Last Great Day. It was the pouring out of water drawn from the well of Siloam. The priests utilized a particular verse in Isaiah.

Isaiah 12:3, “Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” The Jews had at least an insight and certain understanding because the Last Great Day looks forward to a time when everyone who is spiritually thirsty will have access to the waters of salvation. Jesus, by what He said and did, explained the meaning of the Last Great Day, the eighth day of solemn assembly.

Jesus began His teaching by illustrating the fact that this pictures a time when everyone who is spiritually thirsty will have access to the waters of salvation. That is not the case right now.

John 6:44, “No one is able to come to Me, except the Father who has sent Me draw him: and I will resurrect him at the last day.” The White Throne Judgment is the time when all who

spiritually thirst will be able to come. The Holy Spirit will be available to them.

People were disputing with one another. Some of the officers had gone out there and wanted to take Him.

John 7:43-53, “Then a division occurred among the people. And some of the officers wanted to take Him; but not one of them arrested Him. Then the officers returned to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they asked them, ‘Why didn’t you bring Him?’ The officers answered, ‘Never has a man spoken as this Man speaks!’ The Pharisees answered them, ‘Have you also been deceived? Have any of the rulers and leaders believed in Him, or have any of the Pharisees? But this multitude which does not understand or know the law is accursed.’ Then Nicodemus (he was the one who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, ‘Does our law judge and condemn the Man unless we hear from the Man Himself first, and we understand what He is doing?’ They answered and said to him, ‘Are you also from Galilee? Search and see, that a prophet has never come out of Galilee!’ And every man went to his own house.” This is the evening portion of the Last Great Day.

John 8:1-2, “But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. And early in the morning [morning of the Last Great Day] He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and began teaching them.” There was a crowd that gathered around.

Verses 3-6, “Then the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Him who had been caught in adultery; and after displaying her in the middle of them, they said to Him, ‘Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such persons. Therefore what do You say?’ But this they said, tempting Him, that they might be able to accuse Him.”

They were tempting Him. They were going to argue with anything He said. They had long since ceased to exercise the penalty that the law required. If Jesus had opted out on the side that it was too harsh, then they would have accused Him of ignoring the law. But if He said to stone her, they would have tried to make Him look unjust.

Verses 6-8, “...But Jesus leaned forward, and with His finger wrote on the ground. But as they continued asking Him, He lifted Himself up, and said to them, ‘The sinless one among you, let him throw the first stone at her!’ And again He leaned

forward, and wrote on the ground.” He could have been writing names and dates.

Verse 9, “But after hearing that, and being convicted by their own conscience, they went out one by one, beginning with the eldest, until the last.” They began to slink away.

Verses 10-11, “Then Jesus lifted Himself up, and seeing none of the accusers, but the woman, He asked her, ‘Woman, where are your accusers? Didn’t anyone condemn you?’ And she said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go, and never sin again like that!’”

The evening portion He taught about the Holy Spirit; we will have free access to the Spirit. The next day, the day portion, what was He going to teach them? What was going to occur on the Last Great Day? He was going to sit in judgment. People would be brought before Him in their sin. What was He going to tell them? ‘Go and sin no more! I am going to give you a chance to change.’

Then He began to speak about being the light of the world and about judgment.

Verse 12, “Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me shall never walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.’”

Verses 15-16, “‘You judge according to the dictates of human nature; I judge no one with that standard! And if also I judge, My judgment is absolutely true: because I am not alone, but I and the Father who has sent Me.’” The Pharisees began to get very upset. They didn’t like what Christ was teaching them. They didn’t like what He was teaching the crowd about judgment and His position.

Verses 30-31, “As He was speaking these things, many believed on Him. Then Jesus said to the Jews who believed on Him, ‘If you continue in and live by My word, truly you are My disciples.’” That is what makes you a disciple of Christ—if you continue in His word. Many think all you have to do is believe, but He says, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are My disciple and you have to endure to the end’ (Matthew 24:13).

John 8:34-36, “Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who is practicing sin is a slave of sin. Now the slave does not live in the house forever. The Son lives forever, into the ages of eternity. Therefore if the Son shall set you free, you shall truly be free.’”

Verses 41-44, “‘You practice and do the works of your Father!’ Then they said to Him, ‘We

have not been born from fornication. We have one Father, even God!’ Therefore Jesus said to them, ‘If God were really your Father, you would love Me: because I proceeded forth and came from God; neither have I come of My own self, but He has sent Me. Why don’t you understand My speech? Because you are not able to hear or understand My word. You are of your father, the devil, and you love to practice and execute the lust of your father! He was a murderer from the very beginning, and did not live by or remain in the truth, because there is not truth in him. Whenever he tells a lie, he is speaking from his own heart: because he is a liar, and the father and instigator of it!’”

Those are pretty strong words. ‘You are of your father the devil. You are a “chip-off-the-old-block.” He was a murderer from the beginning, a liar and the father of the lie.’ They were ready to murder Him for this.

Verse 59, “Then they picked up stones to stone Him: but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the middle of the crowd, and in this way escaped.” There was a crowd.

John 9:1-2, “And as He came along, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Master, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” He was blind from birth. People were asking what happened.

Verse 3, “Jesus answered, ‘Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but this man was born blind so that the works of God might be demonstrated in him.’”

Verse 6, “After saying these things, he spit on the ground, and made clay out of the spittle, and applied the clay to the blind man’s eyes.”

Verses 7-12, “And He told him, ‘Go and wash in the pool Siloam,’ which is interpreted, Sent. Then he went, and washed, and returned seeing. Now the neighbors and those who had seen him before, when he was blind, said, ‘Isn’t this the one who was sitting and begging?’ Some said, ‘He is the one:’ but others said, ‘He is just like him.’ He said, ‘I am the one!’ Then they asked him, ‘How were your eyes opened?’ He answered and said, ‘A man called Jesus made clay, and applied it to my eyes, and told me, “Go to the pool of Siloam and wash:” and when I had gone and washed, I received sight and could see.’ So they asked him, ‘Where is He?’ He said, ‘I do not know.’”

Verse 14, “Now it was the Sabbath when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.” It was the Sabbath and the Last Great Day. This was a

weekly Sabbath as well. The Pharisees became upset. They were accusing Christ of breaking the Sabbath because He had performed this healing.

Verses 15-19, “Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight; and he told them, ‘He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see.’ Therefore some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.’ Others said, ‘How can a man be a sinner, and perform miracles?’ And there was a division among them. They asked the blind man again, ‘What do you say concerning this Man, because He opened your eyes.’ And he said, ‘He is a prophet!’ Therefore the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had actually been blind, and had received sight and could see, until they called the parents of the man who could now see. And they asked them, saying, ‘Is this really your son, whom you claim was born blind? Then how is it that he is able to see now?’”

Verses 20-21, “His parents answered them and said, ‘We know that this man is our son, and that he was really born blind. But how he is able to see now, we do not know; and who opened his eyes, we do not know. He is of legal age. Ask him: he can speak for himself.’” ‘If you want to know any more than that, you ask him.’

Verses 24-27, “So they called in the man who had been blind a second time, and told him, ‘Give glory to God. We are sure and know that this man is a sinner.’ Then he answered and said, ‘I do not know if He is a sinner. But one thing I do know: that I was blind, and now I see.’ But they asked him again, ‘What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?’ He answered them, ‘I have told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you wish to hear about it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?’”

‘I already told you and you didn’t want to hear it.’ These were frightening words.

Verses 28-30, “Therefore they ridiculed him, saying, ‘You are His disciple; but we are Moses’ disciples and followers. We know that God spoke to Moses: but this Man, we do not even know where He is from.’ The man answered and said to them, ‘Truly this is a marvelous and wonderful thing, that He opened my eyes, and yet you do not even know where He is from!’”

‘This is a marvelous thing. He opened my eyes and you don’t even know where He is from.’

Verse 32, “‘It has never been heard of, that anyone has opened the eyes of one who had been born blind.’” He really told these guys off.

Verses 33-41, “‘If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.’ They answered and said to him, ‘You were born entirely in sin, and are you teaching us?’ So they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and after finding him, He asked him, ‘Do you believe and have faith in the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Lord, who is He, that I may believe and have faith in Him?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have also seen Him, and the One who is speaking with you is He.’ Then he said, ‘Lord, I do believe and have faith;’ and he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, so that those who do not see might be able to see; and those who see might become blind.’ And those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things, and they asked Him, ‘Are we also blind?’ Jesus told them, ‘If you were really blind, you would not have any sin: but now you claim, “We can see”; therefore your sin remains and continues!’”

Jesus healed the blind man on the Last Great Day. What, again, is going to happen on the White Throne Judgment? The spiritual blindness of the whole world is going to be removed. In Tomorrow’s World, He is going to remove the spiritual blindness of the whole world. Those who really don’t see are not held accountable. He made it plain that people are responsible for what they know.

He told the Pharisees that they had knowledge and they were held accountable. Those who see and don’t act on what they see are going to be held accountable. Those who don’t see will not be held accountable. The point is not whether you are immersed in water and spiritually blind. God is going to give every person a chance to see and understand the truth. It is not a matter of a first or second chance. God looks on the heart. He knows whether the person sees and understands. Nobody ever plays games with God.

John 10:1-7, “‘Truly, truly I tell you, anyone who does not enter in through the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, he is an extortioner, a thief and a robber. But he who enters in through the door is the shepherd of the sheep. The doorkeeper will open to him; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calls every one of his own sheep by name, and leads them. And when he brings his own sheep out, he goes out in front of them, and the sheep follow him: because they know and understand his voice. But a stranger they will never follow in any way, but will run away from him: because they do not

know or recognize the voice of strangers.’ Jesus spoke this allegory to them: but they did not understand those things which He was speaking to them. Therefore Jesus again said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, that I am the door of the sheep.’”

Verse 9, “I am the door:” He emphasizes again.

Verses 10-12, “The thief does not come except that he may steal, extort, kill and destroy: I came so that they might have life, and might have life more abundantly! I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. But the hired servant, who is not the shepherd, and the sheep are not his own, when he sees the wolf stalking the sheep, leaves the sheep all alone, and escapes and runs away: and the wolf seizes some of them and drags them away, and scatters the rest of the sheep.” The hireling is simply in it for the money, for pay. He is not going to put his life on the line.

Verses 14-16, “I am the good shepherd, and I know and understand those who are My own and I am known and understood by those who are My own. Just as the Father knows Me, I also know and understand the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep. I also have other sheep, which are not of this fold: it is also ordained and necessary for Me to bring those to Me, and they will hear My voice; and there shall be one flock, and one shepherd.”

We are the sheep of God’s pasture, but He has other sheep in the Last Great Day. We are the ones who teach as Jesus taught. He has others that He has not yet called. This doesn’t represent the end of what God is doing. It is the beginning, the starting point. It’s not a bunch of competing sheepfolds. There is only one way in. It is through Jesus Christ. He is the door. Christ made it plain there is one way. ‘It is through Me, I am the door. You don’t get to the Father but through Me; I have other sheep.’ He shows the quality of the good shepherd.

Verse 15, “Just as the Father knows Me, I also know and understand the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep.” He knows the sheep. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. There was the spiritual standpoint.

This basically concludes the teachings of Christ on the Last Great Day.

John 7, 8, 9 and 10 has a lot packed in them which ties in with the spiritual emphasis of the Last Great Day. John preserved the details of Christ’s teaching in this information because it

emphasizes the spiritual lessons to be learned from the festival.

Dispute among disciples: Matthew 18:1-5, Mark 9:33-37 and Luke 9:46-48.

Matthew 18:1, “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, asking, ‘Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’”

Mark 9:34, “But they remained silent: because on the way they had been discussing among each other who would be the greatest.” Who would be the most important when He sets up the Kingdom? You want to know who will be the greatest?

Matthew 18:2-4, “Then Jesus called a little child to Him, and He placed him in the middle of them, and said, ‘Truly I tell you, unless you are converted, and become as little children, you shall in no way enter into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore anyone who will humble himself as this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’”

You want to know who will be the greatest? You won’t even be there if you don’t develop this child-like attitude of humility and dependence. A little child is dependent. He needs his mother and daddy. Let a little child get into trouble and they want mommy and daddy.

We need to have this attitude toward God. We need to be going to our Father in heaven realizing how we need to walk with Him. When a child perceives danger, he wants to hang on to mommy and daddy. We need to have that relationship with God and need to be aware of how much we need Him. We must be aware of Him and have confidence in Him. We are to have an attitude that is teachable and humble, dependent on our Father in heaven. Christ brings out and shows us this attitude here.

Man casting out demons in Jesus’ name: Mark 9:38-41 and Luke 9:49-50.

Mark 9:38-39, “Then John answered Him, saying, ‘Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, who doesn’t follow us: and we prevented him, because he doesn’t follow us.’ But Jesus said, ‘Don’t try to prevent him:’” If someone has respect for God’s word, God will deal with it. We should not be trying to undermine someone.

Warning of offending little ones: Matthew 18:6-14 and Mark 9:42-50.

Matthew 18:6, “But whoever shall cause one of these little ones who believe in Me to offend or sin, it is more profitable for him that a millstone [the size turned by a donkey] should be hung around his neck, and he be hung around his neck,

and he be sunk down into the depth of the ocean.” We should be conscious of our example that we do not conduct ourselves in a loose, permissive way. And somebody who is excited about the truth ends up turned off because of God’s people who know better, but are not doing better.

Mark 9:42-47, “But whoever may cause one of the little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. But if your hand should cause you to sin, cut it off: it is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having your two hands and for you to go away into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire: where their worm doesn’t die, and the fire is never quenched. And if your foot should cause you to sin, cut it off: it is better for you to enter into life lame, rather than having your two feet and for you to be thrown into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire: where their worm doesn’t die, and the fire is never quenched. And if your eye should cause you to sin, pluck it out: it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having your two eyes and for you to be thrown into Gehenna fire.”

What does it mean? You don’t let anything get in your way. Nothing! No matter how precious, how close to you or important, don’t hold on to it at the risk of losing salvation. The literal cutting off of a hand is a figure of speech—it does not stop sin. It was to emphasize that you go to lengths to get rid of sin. You don’t hold on to sin.

Matthew 18:15-17, “Now if your brother sins against you, go and admonish him between you and him alone. If he will listen to you, you have won back your brother. But if he will not listen, take one or two more with you, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. But if he fails to listen to them, then tell it to the church. And if he also fails to listen to the church, let him be to you the same as the heathen and the publican.”

‘Go to him and then if he doesn’t listen, take someone with you. Then if he doesn’t listen, go to the Church. If he has to be disfellowshipped, God will back up those decisions.’

The term “binding and loosing” has to do with judgment and making judgmental decisions. If you have a problem with someone, the starting point is to try and settle it with that person if you can. Then get somebody to go with you, individuals that you mutually respect that you can sit down with. Sometimes it is just helpful to have a third party there, someone who can help

you get it resolved. If you are not able to get the problem resolved, go to the Church—go to the ministry—and then the Church becomes officially involved. Then if the individual is unwilling to listen, he has cut himself off. As a part of the Church, we have to recognize that authority.

Verses 18-20, “Truly I tell you, whatever you shall bind on the earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I tell you, that if two of you on earth may come to an agreement concerning any matter, then whatever they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. Because where two or three are assembled together in My name, I am there among them.” Christ said He will back you up.

Verses 21-22, “Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I have to forgive him? Even as many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I tell you, not just until seven times: but until seventy times seven!’” Peter wanted to show that he had gotten the point. He would be willing to forgive him seven times if his brother sins against him—Christ said, “seventy times seven!”

Verses 23-27, “Therefore the kingdom of heaven will be compared to a man, a king, who decided to compute his accounts with his servants. And after he had begun computing, there was brought to him one debtor, who owed ten thousand talents. But when he did not have anything to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, also his wife and his children, and everything, as much as he possessed, and payment to be made. Then the servant prostrated himself, and worshiped him, saying, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay everything to you!’ And being moved with compassion and mercy, the lord of the servant released him, and forgave him the loan.” He was going to write off the debt.

Verses 28-30, “But when that same servant left, he went out and found one of his fellow servants, who owed him a hundred coins: and he seized him, and choked him, demanding, ‘Pay what you owe me!’ Therefore his fellow servant prostrated himself at his feet, and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything!’ But he would not listen: instead he went and threw him into prison, until he would pay everything that was owing.” He had the guy thrown in jail. He was going to get his.

Verses 31-33, “But his fellow servants, when they saw what things had taken place, were

extremely distressed, and went and related to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord called him in, and said to him, “You evil and wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Shouldn’t you also have had compassion and mercy on your fellow-servant, as I had compassion and mercy on you?””

They went and told the king. He said, ‘You wicked servant; I forgave you everything you owed [10,000 talents], shouldn’t you have had compassion on this guy who owed you a dollar?’ Verses 34-35, “And his lord was furious, and handed him over to the tormentors, until he would pay all that was owing to him. In the same way will My heavenly Father also do to you, unless each one of you from your heart forgives your brother his offenses and sins.”

Forgive your brother from the heart. You want God to keep tally on you? ‘I am going to “zap” him.’ How long does it take you to get up to 490 (70 x 7)?

The point is we go to God and ask for forgiveness. He stands ready to forgive us, and if we are going to expect to be a partaker of God’s mercy, we better expect to have mercy. We can’t stand there having an unforgiving attitude. Maybe a person has to bring forth some fruits before they can be trusted, but you should be willing to give him an opportunity to show those fruits. It is a matter of having a merciful attitude—when you see they have changed, you give them a chance. You don’t hold a grudge, a vengeful, retaliatory kind of attitude—I am going to “fix” you! If we want God to forgive us, we need to forgive others. Christ was giving an example of this.

Jesus passes through Samaria: Luke 9:51-56, Matthew 19:1-2 and Mark 10:1.

Matthew 19:1, “...He left Galilee, and came into the area of Judaea on the other side of the Jordan.”

Luke 9:51, “...He absolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem.” He was going back to Jerusalem. We notice that Christ was beginning to come back to Jerusalem more and more.

Verse 52, “And He sent messengers ahead of Him. And they came into a village of Samaritans, to prepare for His arrival.” He passed through a village of the Samaritans.

Verses 53-54, “But they did not welcome Him, because His face appeared as though He would go to Jerusalem. And seeing their reaction, His disciples James and John said, ‘Lord, would You desire that we should call fire to come down out

of heaven, and destroy them, as Elijah also did?”

“The sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17)—they were a stormy bunch. They had some things to learn. Christ didn’t let things “get” to Him. He didn’t brood and let it ruin His whole day.

Verse 62, “But Jesus told him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back on the things left behind, is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

Luke 10:1-3, “Now after these things the Lord appointed and authorized seventy others also, and sent them two and two ahead of Him into every city and place where He Himself was about to come. He therefore said to them, ‘Truly the harvest is bountiful, but the workmen are few. Therefore pray and make supplications to the Lord of the harvest, that He may send out workmen into His harvest! Go! But listen, I am sending you out as lambs among wolves.’”

Verses 4-7, “‘Carry neither purse, nor bag, nor sandals: and greet no one along the way. And into whatever house you may enter, first say, “Peace be to this house.” And truly, if a son of peace be there, your peace will come upon him: but if not, it shall return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking the things supplied by them: because the workman is worthy of his hire. Do not go from house to house!’”

They were to go into those cities and teach. They would come into these villages where there was a public gathering area and they would gather a crowd who was interested. Those who were interested would invite them into their home. He told them they were to enter into the village, make plain what they were there for and when they were invited to someone’s home, they were to stay there and not go from house to house. A long time ago this was the way you reached people.

Even in this country prior to the time of radio and TV, this was the only means to reach people. This was a little bit of entertainment. Today, you don’t get the same response at all. Politicians did that, too. The way to reach the people now is through the mass media. Everybody is pursuing their own business. But there was a time years ago that was how you got the community together. We don’t go from house to house and try to “cram it down their throats.” They went to the public, and if they wanted to hear more, they invited you to their home.

Verse 14, “‘But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the Judgment, than for you.’”

Verses 17-20, "And the seventy jubilantly returned, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us through Your name.' And He said to them, 'I saw Satan falling as a streaking comet out of heaven. Listen! I am giving you the authority and power to trample underfoot serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall harm you in any way! Yet in this do not rejoice, because the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven!'"

'Don't be impressed by that. I saw Satan fall from heaven. What you need to rejoice about is that your names are written in heaven.' Christ sent them to do this work.

Verses 25-28, "And then a certain doctor of the law stood up, tempting Him, saying, 'Teacher, what should I be doing to inherit eternal life?' And He asked him, 'What has been written in the law? How do you read it?' Then answering he said, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your being, and with all your strength, and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' And He said to him, 'You have answered correctly. Be doing this, and you shall live.'" That is right!

Verse 29, "But he was anxious to justify himself. So he asked Jesus, 'And who then is my neighbor?'" "Who is really my neighbor?"

Verses 30-37, "And taking him up on the question, Jesus replied, 'A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers and thieves, who stripped him of everything, and inflicted wounds, and escaped, leaving him lying there half dead. Now by coincidence a certain priest went down that same road: and even though he saw him, he passed by him on the opposite side of the road. And in the same way a Levite also, when he came to the same spot, came over and looked at him, then passed by on the opposite side of the road. But a certain Samaritan journeying along came to him, and seeing him, was moved with compassion and mercy. And he went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring wine and oil on the wounds; then he put him on his own animal and brought him to an inn, and personally took care of him. And the next day as he left, he took two coins, and gave them to the innkeeper, and told him, "Take care of him; and whatever additional expense you may have, I will repay you on my way back." Now then, which of these do you think has been the neighbor to him who fell among the robbers and thieves?' And he answered, 'The one who showed compassion and

mercy towards him.' Jesus therefore said to him, 'Go, and practice the same thing!'"

Who is your neighbor? Your neighbor is whoever you come in contact with, whoever you are able to help.

Verses 38-42, "And it happened that as they proceeded on their way, he went into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. Now she had a sister called Mary, who also sat down at Jesus' feet, listening to His message. But Martha was distracted from listening, because she was doing all the serving; and she came up and said, 'Lord, aren't you concerned that my sister has left me alone to do all the serving? Would You ask her to help me?' But answering, Jesus said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are overly concerned and anxious about many things. But one thing is needful: and Mary has chosen the good and beneficial part, which shall not be taken from her.'" Martha was very concerned about the physical things. She needed to sit down and listen to what was being said.

Luke 11:1-4, "And it happened that as He was praying at a certain place, when He stopped, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.' And He told them, 'When you pray, say, "Our Father, who is in heaven, Your name is sanctified and holy. Let Your kingdom come. Let Your will be done: as in heaven, so also let it be upon the earth. Give us day by day our needed bread. And forgive us our sins; as we ourselves also forgive everyone indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from the evil one.'" The disciples wanted Him to teach them about prayer; He begins to teach the key to answered prayer.

Verses 5-13, "Then He said to them, 'Who among you would have a friend, and would go to him at midnight, and ask him, "Friend, lend me three loaves; because a friend of mine has just arrived from a journey to visit me, and I have nothing that I can give him to eat." But from inside he would say, "Do not disturb me! The door has been shut already, and my children are in bed with me; I am not going to get up and give you anything!" I say to you, even if he would not get up and give him anything, merely because of being his friend, yet because of his importunity and insistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. And I tell you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. Because everyone who asks will receive; and anyone who seeks will

find; and anyone who knocks, to him it will be opened. And which of you who is a father, if your own son asks for bread, will you give him a stone? If also he asks for a fish, will you give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or also, if he should ask for an egg, will you give him a scorpion? Therefore if you, being evil by nature, know how to give good gifts to your own children: how much more will the Father who is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

We have to follow through—the key is persistence.

Verse 14, "And He was casting out a demon, and it was dumb. And it happened that after the demon was cast out, the dumb and mute man spoke; and the multitudes wondered." He cast out the demon.

Verses 24-26, "Afterwards, when the unclean spirit has gone out from a man, it wanders through dry and barren places, seeking and searching for rest; but not finding any, it says, 'I will return into my former abode which I left.' And it comes back, and finds it unoccupied, swept, and ready for possession. Then it goes and brings seven other demon spirits with it, more evil than itself; and they enter in, and possess him, and live there: and the last condition of that man becomes worse than the first!"

When you get rid of something negative, you have to put in something positive. The man had not filled his life with something positive. They weren't involved with the positive. We have to fill our minds with what is right and good.

Verse 29, "And as the multitude grew larger, He began to say, 'This generation is evil and wicked. It is seeking after a sign; and a sign is not going to be given to it, except the sign of Jonah the prophet.'"

Verses 37-44, "Now as He was speaking, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. And he entered and sat down. But the Pharisee, seeing that He sat down, began wondering why He had not washed before the dinner. But the Lord said to him, 'Now, you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish; but the inside of you is full of greed, plunder and wickedness. You fools, did not He who made the outside also make the inside? But you should rather be motivated from within to have real compassion and mercy; and then all things are clean to you. But woe and misery to you, Pharisees! Because you pay tithes of mint and rue and every little herb, but you neglect judgment and the love of God. It is necessary and binding on you to do these things of judgment and love, while not

leaving those other things of tithing undone. Woe and misery to you, Pharisees! Because you love the most important seats in the synagogues, and the greetings in the marketplaces. Woe and misery to you, scribes and Pharisees, sanctimonious pretenders! Because you are just like the unseen tombs, which men walk over without even knowing it.'"

He rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. That was their great sin—they were hypocrites. 'You clean the outside of the cup but not the inside. You clean what people can see, but your attitude and motive on the inside is corrupt. You go through the outward motions.'

Verses 45-46, "And one of the doctors of the law answered, saying to Him, 'Teacher, by saying these things you are also insulting us!' And He replied, 'Woe and misery to you also, the doctors of the law! Because you burden down man with burdens heavy to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of you own fingers.'"

The lawyers misused the law. They paid lip service.

Verses 47-51, "Woe and misery to you! Because you enshrine the tombs of the prophets as monuments, and your forefathers killed them. So in reality, you bear witness that you consent to the works of your forefathers: because they truly killed them, and you enshrine their tombs as monuments! Also, because of this, the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute:' So that the blood of all the prophets, poured out from the very foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias, who died between the altar and the temple. Truly I am telling you, it shall be required of this generation.'"

They became a party to the death of every righteous man who ever lived from the time of Abel. He made that plain.

Luke 12:1, "...Then He began to say to His disciples first, 'Guard yourselves from the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.'"

Verses 4-5, "But I tell you, My friends, you should not be afraid of those who can kill the body, but after this are not able to do anything more. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear Him, who after He has killed also has the authority and power to throw you into Gehenna fire! Truly I am telling you, fear Him!"

Be afraid of what God can do to you. You better be a lot more concerned about pleasing God.

Verse 10, “And anyone who shall say a word against the Son of man, it will be forgiven him: but anyone who has blasphemed against the Holy Spirit of the Father, it will not ever be forgiven!”

The Holy Spirit is the power by which God works with you. We become so hardened by our outlook that we are not receptive.

Verse 15, “Then he told them, ‘Be careful, and keep yourselves from greed and covetousness: because no one has life in the abundance of the things which he possesses.’”

Verse 21, “This is the way it will be for the one who treasures up possessions for himself, and is not rich toward God.” It’s not in the abundance of what you possess. What is really important is that your primary possession needs to be rich toward God.

Then He addressed the subject of worrying. Realize that there is a lot more to life than what you see.

Verses 22-30, “And He said to His disciples, ‘Because of this I tell you, don’t be worried and anxious about your life, what you should eat; nor for the body, what you should put on. The life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens: because they do not plant nor harvest. They have no storehouse or granary; but God feeds them. By how much more, then, are you more excellent and precious than the birds? And which one of you, by worrying or by power of intellect, is able to add one cubit to his stature? Therefore if you are not able to do even the very least, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow. They don’t labor nor do they spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed as richly as one of these! But if the grass, which is in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into an oven, is so beautifully clothed by God, wouldn’t He much rather take care of you, O you of little faith? But you, don’t be all wrapped up in seeking and striving for what you may eat, or what you may drink, and do not be overanxious and worried: because all the nations of the world seek and strive after these things:” This is what the world is all wrapped up in.

Verses 30-32, “...Now your Father knows that you have need of all these things: but seek the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added to you. Do not be afraid, or fear, little flock; because your Father is taking pleasure and delight in giving you the kingdom.” Don’t worry about if you will be in the Kingdom of God. Christ said don’t worry about those things. God

wants you there. It is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. He is not trying to get you out; He is trying to get you in. Just hang on.

Verse 34, “Because where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Luke 12:35-37, “Let your loins always be girded tightly, and your lamps always burning brightly; and be like men waiting and ready for their lord, whenever he shall return from the wedding feast; that when he returns and knocks, immediately they may open to him! Blessed are those servants, who when the lord returns shall be found diligently watching! Truly I say to you, that he shall invite them to sit down at his table, and will come and serve them.”

Be ready, stay alert waiting for your Lord. Be found “so doing.” That is the way to be blessed—to be “so doing.”

Verses 40-44, “And you therefore be ready. Because in the hour you don’t expect, the Son of man is coming.’ Then Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, are You speaking this parable to us, or also to everyone?’ And the Lord answered, ‘Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the Lord will place in charge over His household, to give out the measure of food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes will find doing this very thing. Truly I tell you that he will put him in charge over all His possessions.’” That is the one that is going to be put in charge.

Verse 45-46, “But if that servant should reason in his heart, saying, ‘My lord delays his coming’; and begins to beat and abuse the menservants and maidservants, and to eat and drink, and becomes a drunkard; the lord of that servant will come in a day when he is not expecting him, and in an hour when he thinks it will not be,” He will be caught by surprise. He has the attitude of ‘the Lord delays His coming.’ He is being abusive to others and getting caught up in the lifestyle of this world.

Verses 51-53, “Do you think that I came to give peace on the earth? No, I am telling you; but rather, division! Because from this time forward there will be five in one household divided, three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” He did not come to bring peace, but division. Sometimes it even creates problems in families.

Verses 54-56, “And He said, also to the multitudes, ‘When you see the clouds rising up from the west, immediately you say, ‘A shower

is coming”; and so it happens. And when a south wind is blowing, you say, “It is going to be hot”; and it happens. You hypocrites, you know how to discern the appearance of the earth and the sky; but how is it that you do not discern this time?”

‘You look at the sky and can discern, but you can’t discern the reality of the times. Look and see what is really going on.’ This is an important lesson that we have here.

This Bible study brings us through the Feast of Tabernacles and up through the beginning of December. We pick up the story next time of Jesus being in Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication. As you get closer and closer to the time of the crucifixion, the Scriptures begin to zero in on detail. The last part of His life is the most thorough. There is a lot packed in there as we see the things that our Savior did and taught.

Bible Study # 36
May 23, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Matthew 19;
Mark 10; Luke 13—19:29; John 10:22—12:11

What we are covering this evening is the time between Christ's journey to Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Feast of Lights or Dedication celebrated the 25th day of Kislev (December), 30 A.D., up until six days before the Passover of 31 A.D. We are looking at approximately three and one-half months.

He went to Jerusalem for the period of Hanukkah and went from there to an area near the Jordan River where John was first baptizing. From there Christ was summoned by Mary and Martha to Bethany (a small town near Jerusalem) at the death of Lazarus. Immediately at the resurrection of Lazarus, there were some results of that tremendous miracle. It intensified persecution. It stirred up a hornet's nest. The religious leaders decided this Man was a threat and they must get rid of Him. He went out to the Judean Desert prior to His journey back to Jerusalem for Passover.

When the miracles and works are poured out and intensified in that way, it is setting the stage for great persecution. This is one of the reasons why Jesus spent little time in Jerusalem except for the festival seasons. Christ knew what was going to happen, had to happen. Because of that, He handled things in such a way that it was only when the time came that He then made Himself available in that way and performed that miracle with Lazarus. It set the stage for things to happen.

The Feast of Dedication is not one of God's holy days. The only mention of it is in John 10:22. There is a reason for that, and I will point it out. It is one of the ways we can derive certain principles. It had its origin 164 years prior to the time of Christ (164 B.C.)—250 years after the conclusion of the Old Testament Canon.

Remember, we went through the story of how the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes had done everything he could to wipe out any vestige of God's truth. He did everything he could to show his contempt for the religion of God. He prevented circumcision, offered a pig on the altar and set up the abomination of desolation in the Holy Place in 168 B.C. Mattathias, an aged priest, drew his sword and slew the apostate Jew; the Maccabean revolt began. Just over three

years later (164 B.C.), the cleansing took place. Judas Maccabaeus, the son of this priest, overthrew the Syrian generals and restored Temple worship. The Jews thereafter celebrated this occasion.

In John 10:22-23, Christ was going to Jerusalem for the celebration, their national holiday. It is akin to the Fourth of July or Thanksgiving Day. It was a celebration of independence from the Greeks and a time to memorialize their thanks and appreciation to God for their deliverance—for rescuing them. One of the things we derive from that statement in John 10 is the fact that it is not wrong to take note of national holidays—as long as those days do not commemorate in their origin something that is negative or of pagan origin. That is part of the way we study the Bible. We seek to derive principles from the Bible and how God views some things. Does He mention something in a positive or negative way? In the way He mentions it, we are able to derive what God thinks of it. That is a good rule of thumb. It helps us deal with questions that come up in our own lives today.

Luke 13:10-13, “And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. And there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years, and she was hunched over, and completely unable to lift herself up. Then Jesus, seeing her, called to her, and said, ‘Woman, you have been set free from your infirmity.’ Then He laid His hands upon her: and instantly she was made straight, and she glorified and thanked God.” The woman was crippled and Christ healed her.

Verse 14, “But the rulers of the synagogue answered indignantly, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, and told the people, ‘There are six days in which it is necessary and proper for men to work: in these days therefore come and be healed, but not on the Sabbath day.’” The Pharisees were indignant. They wanted to find fault with everything He did. If somebody was of that frame of mind, even if you were perfect, you couldn't please him. What about you and me? We are not going to please everyone. Even when you are perfect you can't please everybody.

He “pulled no punches.” As things came to this point in time, it was time to speak very plainly. There was a time when He taught in parables. There was a time to lay a foundation and a time to be prepared to speak with boldness and “lay it all out”—“let the chips fall where they may.”

The time is coming in this age when Christ's message is going to be proclaimed in greater

power and boldness, and the power of God will be made manifest. That will result in persecution on a level that will lead into the Great Tribulation. There are serious events that are going to occur that are not occurring right now.

Verses 15-16, “Therefore the Lord answered him, saying ‘You sanctimonious pretender, hypocrite! On the Sabbath doesn’t each one of you loose his ox or donkey from the manger, and lead it away to drink? And shouldn’t this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound these eighteen long years, be loosed from this shackle of the devil on the Sabbath day?’” Christ said, ‘You extend mercy to your animals. Of all your hypocrisy! You turn an ox loose to get a drink and you want Me to wait until sundown to heal this woman.’

Verse 22, “And He went through, city by city, and village by village, teaching, and making progress towards Jerusalem.” –On His way towards Jerusalem, step by step.

Verses 23-25, “And someone asked Him, ‘Lord, are there only a few who will be saved?’ But He answered them, ‘Labor and fight with zeal and diligence to enter in through the narrow gate: because many, I say to you, will desire to enter in, but will not be able. From the time that the master of the house shall get up and shut the door, and you shall stand outside and begin to knock at the door, saying, “Lord, Lord, open the door for us!” And answering He will tell you, “I do not know you, nor where you are from...”’” He went on to describe those who were going to be standing on the outside looking in.

Verses 26-27, ““Then you will begin saying, “We ate and drank in Your presence, and in our streets You taught us.” But He will answer, “I tell you, I do not even know you, nor where you originated. Depart from Me, all you workers and teachers of unrighteousness and iniquity.””

Some of you are going to be told, ‘Depart from Me.’ He was speaking to some of the religious leaders of His day. They had a disregard and disrespect for the law of God. He said, ‘You teach lawlessness.’

Verses 28-30, ““There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves are cast out. And they shall come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And listen, there are those who are last, who shall become the first; and there are those who are first, who shall become the last.”” The

Jews had a first opportunity. They had access to the Scriptures and it was first preached to them. ‘You are going to see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom and every ethnic group, people that you look down on, and you are going to find yourself on the outside.’ Some of those that are last will be first—those with the last opportunity or at a much later time. Those who have had a chance to be in have “blown it.”

This is an important principle for those who grew up in the Church. If you have grown up in the Church, you have had an opportunity to be in on the ground floor. If you have not valued that access you have through your parents and practice iniquity, you are going to find you are on the outside looking in. People God has called will be in the first resurrection; you will be “bringing up the rear” in the second resurrection or later. There is a principle here. We better take advantage of opportunities. We have an opportunity, a first opportunity, but if we don’t utilize it, it will slip from our grasp. It is important that we grasp that. The religious leaders did not grasp that.

Verse 34, ““O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to you; how often would I have gathered your children, in the same way a mother hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you rebelled!”” He describes a mother hen and how she gathers her chicks in times of danger; they get up under her wings. Christ said, ‘I have that kind of protective feeling toward Jerusalem, but you don’t.’ That is a sad state of affairs.

In time sequence it was the Feast of Dedication.

John 10:22, “And the Feast of Dedication was taking place at Jerusalem, and it was winter.”

Verse 40, “And He departed again across the Jordan River to the place where John was first baptizing; and remained there.”

Luke 14:8-10, ““When you are invited to a wedding feast by anyone, do not sit down in the first and most important place; since someone more honorable and distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and the one who invited both of you may come and tell you, “You will have to give your place to this one”; and then with embarrassment you may begin to take the very lowest place. But when you are invited, go sit down in the lowest place; so that when he who has invited you comes, he may say to you, “Friend, come up higher!” Then you will have honor instead of embarrassment in the presence of those who are sitting at the table with you.””

At a wedding, you don't grab the most important spot or you might find yourself embarrassed. Someone else may come that the important spot belongs to. Go sit at a lower place, and then maybe someone will come and ask you to take a better place.

Verse 11, "Because anyone who exalts himself shall be abased; and anyone who humbles himself shall be exalted!" Be willing to step back and not exalt yourself.

Verses 12-14, "And He also said to the chief Pharisee who had invited him, 'When you make a dinner or supper, do not call your friends, nor your brethren, nor your relatives, nor your rich neighbors; since they will also invite you in return, and you will be paid back. But when you make a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind: and you shall be blessed; because they do not have the means to pay you back. Then you shall be rewarded in the resurrection of the righteous.'" It shouldn't be simply a matter of inviting those who can return the favor, but those who can't return the favor.

Verses 16-21, "But Jesus answered him, saying, 'A certain man made a great supper, and invited many. And at the dinner hour he sent out his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; because everything is ready now.' And every one of them in the same attitude began excusing himself. The first one told him, 'I have just purchased a field, and it is imperative that I go out and see it: I beg you to have me excused.'" And another said, "I have just bought five teams of oxen, and I am going to inspect and test them out: I request, have me excused." And another said, "I have just married my wife, and because of this I am unable to come." And after returning, that servant reported these excuses to his master. Then the master of the house became angry, and told his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring back the poor, and the crippled, and the lame, and the blind.""

Those that were invited didn't come. They didn't appreciate and value that invitation. The result was that the servant was finally instructed to bring in the lame and the blind.

Verses 22-23, "And the servant said, 'Sir, it has been done as you have commanded, and still there is room left.'" Then the master told the servant, "Go out into the highways and through the hedgerows, and urge them to come in, that my house may be filled with guests." The point was that many of those who had first opportunity did not value that opportunity.

Revelation 3:11, "...that no one may take your crown." The point is that if we don't respond to the opportunity that God provides us, God is not going to be left empty handed. He will fill the place, but it may not be with us. This is a principle for all of us as well as our children. We are to deeply value the opportunities God gives; if we treat them cheaply and don't value and appreciate it, God will ultimately fill it with someone else.

Luke 14:25-26, "Later, great multitudes were going with Him: and turning to them He said, 'If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate [that is, love God more than] his own father and mother, and his wife and children, and his own brothers and sisters, and besides all of these, his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.'" –Love much less than God, by comparison—even his own life. Obviously, God was not saying you should hate. We are to honor our father and mother and love all men, but by comparison to the love we have for God, what we have for others would be almost the comparison to hatred. Love much less by comparison. God will not take second place. He insists that He comes first. There is a commitment involved.

Verse 27, "And whoever does not carry his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." This discipleship requires that we stand ready to forsake anything and everything in order to follow Him.

Verse 28, "Because which of you, desiring to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and estimate the cost, to see if he has the means for its completion?" It emphasizes counting the cost. If we are going to be Christians, if we are to be disciples, we are to give our all. Many of God's people have had to pay with their lives. The Bible is the obituary of many of the people of God who suffered martyrdom. God expects a commitment.

The parable of the lost sheep is given.

Luke 15:1-7, "All the publicans and sinners were gathering around to hear Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were complaining and grumbling, saying, 'This man welcomes and receives sinners, and eats with them.' Then He spoke this parable to them, saying, 'What man of you, if he has a hundred sheep, and loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and search for the one which is lost, until he finds it? And after finding it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And then he returns to the house, and calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me; because I have found

my sheep which was lost!" I say to you, that in exactly the same way, there shall be more joy in heaven over one sinner who is repenting, than over the ninety-nine righteous ones who have no need of repentance."

Verses 8-10, "Or what woman having ten coins, if she loses one, doesn't light a lamp, sweep out the house, and meticulously search for it until she finds it? And after finding it, she calls her neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me; because I have found the coin which I lost!'" In exactly the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who is repenting." –Joy over one sinner who is repentant. When someone is baptized, that is an occasion of note. God is taking note and is watching; there is joy in the presence of the angels of God. That is what Jesus said and He should know. When you were baptized, it was a celebration of occasion in heaven. We don't want to treat it cheaply and casually. It is of tremendous value.

Verses 11-15, the parable of the prodigal son, "And He said, 'A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the property.'" So he divided the property between them. And a short time after that, the younger gathered together all that he had, and went away into a distant country; and there he squandered his property, and dissipated himself by unrestrained and debauched living. And after wasting everything he had, a raging famine swept throughout that country; and he began to be hungry and destitute. And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine."

He drank it up and threw it away. Hard times came. Finally he got a job feeding pigs. For a Jew, there could probably be no more humiliating job. Christ picked the job for him that would be horrible.

Verse 16, "And he was longing to fill his belly with even the husks which the swine were eating: and yet no one gave him anything." Soon he began sharing their food.

Verses 17-19, "Then he came to himself, and said, 'How many hired servants of my own father have an abundance of food, but I am dying with famine?'" Then getting up, he said, "I will go to my father, and I will tell him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you. And I am no longer even worthy of being called your son. Make me the same as one of your hired servants.'" After a while he came to the

realization, 'You know the hired help on my dad's farm have it much better than this. I am going to swallow my pride and tell him, 'I have sinned against heaven and you. I am not asking to be back as a son, but would you please give me a job.'"

Verses 20-24, "So he got up, and returned to his father. But while he was still at a distance, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion and mercy: and running out to meet him, he embraced him; then with emotion and excitement, he kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you, and I am no longer of fit character even to be called you own son.'" But the father told his servants, "Quickly bring the best robe, and clothe him; and give him a ring for his hand, and sandals for his feet. And go, bring the fattened calf, and kill it; let us have a feast, and celebrate: because this my son was dead, but is alive again; and was lost, but is found!" And they began to celebrate." The father saw him a long way off and made a great preparation.

Verses 25-27, "But the older son had been out in a field. And as he was coming closer to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of his servants over to him, and inquired what was the meaning of these things. And he told him, 'Your brother has returned, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has returned to him safe and sound.'" The older son heard all the great festivities.

Verse 28, "But he became angry, and was not willing to go in. Therefore the father came out, and begged him to join the celebration." He was in a pretty foul attitude about the whole thing.

Verses 29-30, "But answering he said to his father, 'Look, for so many years I have served you, and not once have I transgressed your commandment: but never did you give me even a kid goat that I might celebrate with my friends! But when this son of yours returns, who has squandered your property with harlots, then you kill the fattened calf for him!'" 'I have done everything you wanted me to do. You never even gave me a kid goat to celebrate with my friends. He has used his inheritance on harlots, etc.; now he is coming back. It's not fair.'

I want to point out some things. The father loved the son enough to turn him loose and let him learn his lesson. The natural tendency of the parent is to bail out the child when he is in trouble, protecting him from the consequences of his actions. The father realized that until the son was brought down to a point of humility and

surrender, he couldn't be worked with. He had to leave it in God's hands. He hit bottom. He realized that anything was better than this. He returned with an attitude of humility. How did the father receive him? With open arms! He was happy, thrilled and glad to see him. It wasn't a lack of love. God loves us enough that He allows us to learn lessons.

The other aspect I would call your attention to—notice what he told his older son.

Verses 31-32, “But the father answered him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and everything that I own is yours. But on this occasion, it is right to celebrate and rejoice: because this your own brother was dead, but is alive again; and was lost, but is found!’” You notice they were not going to re-divide the inheritance. ‘Listen, everything I have is yours. It is all yours, but this is something special. We should celebrate.’

Even when you learn a lesson, it will never be simply as though it had never happened. There are penalties of life, some more serious than others. It wouldn't have been fair to take the property and divide it again. A person can learn lessons and repent and God forgives, but sometimes you accumulate battle scars. They will always leave a scar.

We know our children are going to get nicks along the way, but we hate to see them get the battle scars. Forgiveness doesn't turn back the clock. You can repent deeply, and God will forgive you. But you can't go back and start over 20 years ago or five minutes ago. Again, this is an important principle. You can't go and sow your wild oats and come back and everything is okay. Yes, God will forgive, but there can be wounds and scars that can take their toll from which God would like to spare us.

Luke 16:1-2, “And he said also to His disciples, ‘There was a certain rich man, who had a hired administrator; and he was accused to the rich man of squandering his goods. Then he called his administrator and asked him, ‘What is this I am hearing about you? Give an accounting of your administration; because you cannot be my administrator any longer.’” He called him and said, ‘We are going to audit the books.’

Verse 3, “‘And the administrator said within himself, ‘What shall I do, because my master is taking the office away from me? I am unable to dig; I am ashamed to beg.’” He said, ‘What am I going to do?’

Verse 4, “‘I know what I will do, so that when I have been removed from the office, my master's debtors may welcome me into their houses.’” ‘I

have a few days before the auditors come, and I am going to make provision for myself while I still have authority.’

Verses 5-7, “Then calling each one of the master's debtors, he asked the first one, ‘How much do you owe to my master?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ And he told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write fifty.’ Then another he asked, ‘And you, how much do you owe?’ And he replied, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ And he told him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’” He slashed large amounts off their debts.

Verse 8, “And the master praised the unrighteous administrator, because he had acted shrewdly. For the sons of this world and society are in their own time more shrewd and wise than the sons of the light.” He praised him, not for the dishonesty, but for being shrewd. He was looking ahead. There is an expression, “give the devil his due”—he outsmarted me. They look ahead and make provisions. That is what this is saying. He did it in a dishonest way, but the basis of his actions was that he was looking down the road. The lesson is Christ said we also need to be thinking about what the future holds and making provisions for it.

Verse 9, “And I say to you, ‘Make friends to yourselves by the wise use of your physical wealth; so that when it fails, they may welcome you into the eternal dwellings.’”

What is your best investment? The point is that anything in this world that may look like a good deal—don't kid yourself. There is no sure thing; it shall fail. What about money? Money is mammon, physical wealth. Utilize the physical resources in this world in a wise way, looking toward the future because there is coming a time when this economic system is going to collapse. But putting our hearts into this work, there is going to be dividends there.

There are those who will welcome us because of the tithes and offerings that allowed them to come into the knowledge of the truth. We came into contact with the work because others have given. The principle there is to learn a lesson from the unrighteous steward. He only thought in a temporary way, not in a long-term view. We also need to use the physical resources we have access to and get our priorities straight. We set the stage for something that goes way on beyond the here and now.

Verse 10, “‘Anyone who is faithful in the very least is also faithful in much: but anyone who is unrighteous and dishonest in the very least is also

unrighteous and dishonest in much.” If we are unrighteous in a little, we are unrighteous in a lot.

Verse 11, “Therefore, if you have not been faithful with the unrighteous physical wealth, who is going to trust you with the true riches of God’s glory?” The point is to think ahead for a long-term view.

Verse 13, “No servant is capable of serving two masters: because either he will hate the one, and he will love the other; or he will follow one, and he will despise and reject the other.” You are not capable of serving God and materialism. We can’t choose two masters—around what does our life revolve?

Verses 19-21, “Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and satiated himself daily in splendor and luxury. And a certain poor man Lazarus, who was laid at his porch, was covered with open sores. Now he was longing to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. But instead the dogs were coming and licking his sores.”

The rich man was living with every luxury and Lazarus was a poor man. He was hungry, covered with sores and desired to have the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. The dogs came and licked his sores. Get the contrast? A dog showed him more compassion than a human being—a pretty poor contrast when a human being has less concern for his neighbor than a dog has.

Verses 22-23, “And it happened that the poor man died, and he was carried away [at the resurrection of the just] by the angels into the bosom of Abraham. And the rich man also died and was buried. Then in the grave [at the resurrection of the wicked] he opened his eyes, and he became filled with fear and torment, when he saw Abraham in the distance, and Lazarus in his bosom.”

Many get very confused over this story. The idea they get was that Lazarus went to heaven and the rich man went to hell. Christ was not going into a detailed explanation. He summarized it. The poor man (Lazarus) died and at some point after he died (we are not told how long), he “was taken by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.” That is an expression that refers to an intimate relationship with Abraham; it’s where a mother carries a little child.

When was Lazarus taken by the angels to meet Abraham?

Matthew 24:30-31, “...and they shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with

great power and tremendous glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” He is going to send the angels, and they are going to gather together the elect. We live on a round earth and everyone would be resurrected going in a different direction. But the angels go out to gather everyone together to meet over Jerusalem.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

1 Corinthians 15:52, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

John 5:28-29, “Don’t be amazed at this: because the time is coming in which all who are in the graves shall hear his voice, and they shall come out of the graves: those who have practiced good, into a resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, into a resurrection of judgment!”

Lazarus died, but the time is coming when he will come forth out of his grave when the just are resurrected. Lazarus is gathered into Abraham’s bosom. That is a figurative statement—not that everybody is going to spend their time in heaven on Abraham’s lap.

Galatians 3:7, 29, “Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.... And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” When you are a Christian, you enter into a special relationship as a little child to the Father. God made the promise to Abraham. He is the heir of the whole world; he is going to inherit the whole world. We inherit through Abraham. He is the father of the faithful. This is a relationship likened to a child to the father. He was like a little child sitting there, holding him on his lap. Lazarus enters into this relationship at the resurrection.

Matthew 24:31, “And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

The rich man died, and we’re told that he is resurrected. As he opens his eyes (that means they were closed), all of a sudden he is restored

to life. When he wakes up and opens his eyes, it scares him. He sees the Kingdom of God in the distance. This is a picture of the third resurrection. There is no consciousness of the passage of time. Death in the Scriptures is likened to sleep (1 Corinthians 15:6). When you go to sleep, you are not aware of how much time has passed.

Luke 16:24, ““And crying out, he said, “Father Abraham, have compassion and mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip just the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; because I am suffering, standing by this flaming fire!””” The first thing he wants is a touch of water to his tongue. That is what happens when you get really scared. Your mouth becomes like cotton. If he was resurrected in the kind of hell people talk about, he would have wanted a fire truck. He saw the fire in the distance.

Verses 27-28, ““And he said, “I beg you, father, that you would send him to my father’s house: because I have five brothers; that he may exhort and warn them, that they also may not come into this place of torment.””” He wanted someone to go and warn his family. He was not aware of the passage of time.

Luke 17:1-2, ““And He said to the disciples, ‘It is impossible but that offenses will not come: but woe and misery to him by whom the offenses come! It would be more profitable for him if a millstone turned by a donkey were hung around his neck, and he were plunged down into the depths of the ocean, than if he were to cause one of these little ones to be offended and stumble.’”” He warns of offenses.

Verses 3-4, ““Pay attention to what you are doing: and if your brother sins against you, admonish him; and if he repents, forgive him. But if he sins against you seven times in a single day, and turns to you seven times in a single day, saying, “I repent, I am sorry”; you shall forgive.”” The importance of forgiveness!

Verse 10, ““And you also, in the same way, when you have done all things commanded you, say, “We are unprofitable servants: because we have done only that which was our duty to do.”””

An unprofitable servant is one who has to have everything pointed out to him. He will only do his duty. The profitable servant is one who sees the big picture, understands and is going to carry it out. To the unprofitable servant, you have to point out everything. It takes two men to do one man’s work. You can turn a profitable servant loose and he will do it right. He thinks the way you think. He has the big picture. That is

what God wants. God wants us to learn to think like Him. We are to have the mind of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5). We become a profitable servant, one that God can count on. It is the measure of conversion. It goes beyond simply complying with the rules. The unprofitable servants didn’t understand. Nothing was ever internalized. When someone wasn’t there telling them what to do, they reverted back to the world. God wants more than that of us. Those who don’t have the big picture slip back into other things.

Verses 12-19, ““Now as He was entering into a certain village, there were ten leprous men who met Him, and they were standing off at a distance. And they raised their voices and shouted, ‘Jesus, Master, have compassion and mercy on us!’ And looking at them, He told them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And it happened that as they were going, they were cleansed and healed. But one of them, seeing that he was healed, turned back, and crying out with a loud voice was glorifying God; and he came, prostrating himself at His feet, giving thanks to Him, and he was a Samaritan. And answering, Jesus said, ‘Were not ten cleansed? But where are the other nine? Were not any found returning to give glory to God, except this stranger?’ And He told him, ‘Stand up and go your way. Your faith has healed you!’”” Ten lepers—only one was thankful.

Verses 20-21, ““And He had been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come. He answered them, saying, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation and speculation. Neither shall they say, “Look here!” or “Look there!” because look, the kingdom of God is standing among you.’”” KJV, “the kingdom of God is within you.” Some think that is some feeling in your heart. Note who He was talking to; He was talking to the Pharisees. You don’t have to be looking and wondering about these things. Christ said, ‘I am your King, and I am in your midst.’ They needed to look to Him. He was the representative of it.

Verses 26-27, ““And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the very day Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed all.”” He begins to talk about the end times.

Verses 28-34, ““Conditions will be similar to what was happening in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were

building. But on the very day that Lot went out from Sodom, it rained down fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed all. This is exactly how conditions will be in the day the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, anyone who shall be on the housetop, and his possessions in the house, let him not come down to take them away: and anyone who is in the field, let him likewise not return to the things behind. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks and strives to save his life shall lose it; but whoever is willing to lose it shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left." One taken and one left.

Verses 35-37, "Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two men shall be working in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.' And answering they said to Him, 'Where, Lord?' And he told them, 'Where the body is, that is where the eagles will be gathered together.'"

What is He talking about? Christ drew two analogies—the days of Noah and the days of Lot. Everybody was pursuing his normal everyday activities oblivious to God's judgment. Noah and Lot were taken to a place of protection, and then it all broke loose. The time is going to come when there is again going to be a division, and there will be those taken, as Noah and Lot were taken to a place of safety. Everyone else is going to be oblivious to what is going on around them, and when they do see what's happening, it will be too late. It is not referring to the return of Christ. They will be oblivious right up to that time period, until the time that God makes a distinction and takes His people to a place of protection, just as He did Noah and Lot, and then everything breaks loose. It is not referring to the return of Christ.

Read Revelation 8:7-13, the sun scorching, great earthquakes, etc. No one will be eating and drinking, given in marriage during that time.

Luke 17:37, "And answering they said to Him, 'Where, Lord?' And He told them, 'Where the body is, that is where the eagles will be gathered together.'"

Revelation 12:14, "But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished..." This is symbolic of the gathering of God's people. They wanted the physical details. But Christ said that is not important. If Christ gave all the physical details, they would get their minds on that. The body, the Church, everybody will wind up at the right place. We

need to get our minds on the spiritual, and then God will take care of the rest.

Luke 18:1-8, "And He also spoke a parable to them, for the purpose of showing how it is absolutely necessary for them always to pray, and not give up, or falter and get weak; saying, 'There was a judge in a certain city, who didn't fear God, and wasn't a respecter of persons. And there was in that city a widow; and she kept coming to him, saying, "Avenge me of my adversary!" And for a time he would not: but afterwards he said to himself, "Even if I don't fear God, and I am not a respecter of persons, yet because this widow keeps causing me trouble, I will avenge her, otherwise her perpetual coming will wear me out." But the Lord said, "Listen to what the unrighteous judge says, And shall not God execute the avenging of His very own elect, who call out to Him day and night, though He is being patient with them and their problems? I tell you that He will speedily execute the avenging of them. In spite of this, when the Son of Man comes, will He truly find faith on the earth?"'" Persistence!

Verses 9-14, "Then He also spoke this parable to some who were confident and boasted within themselves that they were really righteous, and held all others in contempt: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee was standing and praying with himself this way, "God, I thank You that I am not like the rest of men, extortioners, unrighteous, adulterers, or even as that publican over there. I fast twice in every week, I tithe all things that I gain." But the publican, standing off at a distance, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his chest, saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee: because everyone who exalts himself shall be abased; but anyone who humbles himself shall be exalted.'" —The self-righteous Pharisee and the publican! One didn't lift his eyes to heaven; the other said, 'I am glad I am not like everyone else.' Who do you think God heard?

John 11:14-16, "Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus has died! Moreover I rejoice for your sakes, in order that you may believe, since I was not there. But let us go to him.' Then Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us go also, that we may die with him.'" Notice Thomas said, "That we may die with him." Christ said, 'We are going to go to him.'

Verse 43, “Then after saying these things, He called with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus come out here!’” Christ resurrected Lazarus. Notice the reaction of the Pharisees.

Verse 53, “Therefore from that day they plotted and schemed together, that they might kill Him.” That clinched it in their mind. ‘This is something of a scale that we cannot deny. We have to get rid of Him.’

Verse 54, “So Jesus could no longer appear publicly among the Jews; but left there, and went into the countryside near the desert, to a city called Ephraim; and He stayed there with His disciples.” He no longer appeared publicly before them.

Pharisees question Jesus about divorce: Matthew 19:3-9 and Mark 10:2-12.

Matthew 19:3, “But the Pharisees came to Him, tempting Him, and saying to Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?’” The Pharisees were trying to trip up Christ.

Verses 4-7, “But He answered them, ‘Haven’t you read, that He who created them in the beginning made them male and female.’ And said, ‘Because of this a man shall leave father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife: and the two shall become one flesh. So then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has united and joined together, man is not allowed to separate.’ They retorted, ‘Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to divorce her?’” (Deuteronomy 24:1) They wanted to trick Christ into a technical argument.

Verses 8-9, “He answered them, ‘Moses allowed you to divorce your wives because of your hardheartedness: but from the beginning it was not this way. But I am telling you, whoever shall divorce his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and anyone who marries her that is divorced commits adultery.’”

There is a lot to learn from Christ’s answer. He never answered their question, ‘Is it okay to divorce your wife for any cause?’ He said, ‘If you are really interested in how many wives God wants you to have, see how many He made for Adam.’ He referred back to the beginning. ‘Moses allowed you because of the hardness of your heart. But from the beginning it was not so.’ Things he allowed carnal unconverted people to do should not be found among God’s people.

Verses 10-11, “His disciples said to Him, ‘If this is the case of a man with his wife, it is not profitable to marry.’ But He said to them,

‘Everyone cannot receive this word, but those to whom it has been given...’”

‘Well, maybe we should not get married. That sounds pretty harsh.’

Jesus blesses little children: Matthew 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16 and Luke 18:15-17.

Christ takes up the little children and points out that a child-like attitude is important.

Leave everything and follow Christ: Matthew 19:27-30, Mark 10:28-31 and Luke 18:28-30.

Matthew 19:27-29, “Then Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Look, we have given up everything, and have followed You. What then shall be for us?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, those of you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And anyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for the sake of My name, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life.’” Whatever is given up, you will be rewarded.

Remember in Matthew 20:1-15, the story of some who were hired just before quitting time. What is the point there? Some will have been called earlier in their life—20, 30, 40 years or more. Some are called only with six months or a year left in their life. Different ones come in at all stages—some at the beginning of their life and others in the twilight of their life and have only a short time. The outstanding example of that is the thief on the cross whose Christian life consisted of a few hours. But everyone will get eternal life. There is a reward that is given. Rewards in terms of responsibility are where the distinction is made, but not in terms of that basic distinction of eternal life.

Matthew 20:16, “‘In exactly the same way, the last shall be first, and the first shall be last: because many are called, but few are chosen.’”

James and John ask to sit at right and left hand of Jesus in the Kingdom: Matthew 20:20-24 and Mark 10:35-41.

Matthew 20:20-23, “Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him, with her sons, worshiping Him, and was asking something from Him. And He said to her, ‘What do you desire?’ She said to Him, ‘Give the word that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand, in Your kingdom.’ But answering, Jesus said, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink of the cup which I am about to drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism which I am baptized with?’”

They said to Him, 'We are able.' And He said to them, 'Yes, truly you shall drink of My cup, and you shall be baptized with the baptism which I am baptized with: but to sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but to those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.'" 'To sit on My right hand and at My left is not Mine to give, but the Father's.'

Luke 19:11-12, "But as they were listening to these things, He spoke an additional parable, because He was nearing Jerusalem, and they thought that the kingdom of God was about to appear immediately. Therefore He said, 'A certain nobleman traveled into a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then to return.'" Some thought the Kingdom would immediately appear. The nobleman traveled to a far country. There were things that had to happen yet. It was not going to immediately appear. He was setting the stage for the fact that there is something in between.

John 12:1-8, "Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, who had died, and whom He had raised from the dead. Now they had prepared a supper for Him there; and Martha was serving, and Lazarus was one of those who sat with Him, Then Mary took a pound of very expensive ointment of pure spikenard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the aroma of the ointment. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who was about to betray Him, said, 'Why wasn't this ointment sold for three hundred coins, and the money given to the poor?' But he said this, not because he actually had concern for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the moneybag, and carried what was put into it. But Jesus said, 'Let her alone! Toward the day of My burial has she kept it. Because you will always have the poor with you; but you will not always have Me with you.'" "

Mary anointed Christ with precious ointment. Judas said, 'This waste and extravagance; this could have been sold and given to the poor.' Notice what John said. John said Judas was a thief. Judas was the treasurer; that is why he said what he said. It sounded impressive to others. Yes, that is kind of wasteful. Judas had a problem and Jesus knew it. God allows a problem to exist for a while before He does anything about it.

Verse 9, "Then a great multitude of the Jews knew that He was there: and they came, not on account of Jesus only, but that they might see

Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead." Here Lazarus came forth when Christ appeared. That was kind of hard to deny. When he was walking down the street, he was pointed out as the one who was resurrected. He was quite a celebrity there.

Verse 10, "But the chief priests proposed that they might also kill Lazarus." They were really indignant; 'Let us get rid of him, too.' We can see this kind of mentality that they had.

The next Bible study we will focus in on the three to four days before the Passover when things really came to a head. That's when "no punches are pulled" and things won't last very long. Remember when He told the Pharisees they were snakes in the grass? It didn't last very long.

Bible Study # 37
June 13, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Matthew 20:18—25:13; Mark 11:1—13:37; Luke 19:29—21:38; John 12:12-50

We are picking up six days prior to Christ's crucifixion in 31 A.D. We are picking it up at that point **and bringing it up to just before the crucifixion.**

Christ had been in Jerusalem in December at the Hanukkah celebration. He then went to Bethany, raised Lazarus from the dead and then went into the Judean Desert for a time. He did not come into the limelight until just a week before Passover. He used Bethany as a base of operations. He walked back and forth to Jerusalem each day. These trips began with His triumphant entry into Jerusalem and the final cleansing of the temple that took place. The different factions of the Jewish leadership were trying to trap Him; He denounced them. His address at the Mount of Olives came next. That brings us up to the time of the crucifixion.

John 12:1-3, "Then six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, who had died, and whom He had raised from the dead. Now they had prepared a supper for Him there; and Martha was serving, and Lazarus was one of those who sat with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very expensive ointment of pure spikenard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the aroma of the ointment."

There was a supper prepared. It was the occasion where Mary anointed His feet. If He came six days prior to Passover, that would be on the eighth day of the first month. We are looking at a Thursday (probably that Thursday evening) when a big supper meal was prepared. He probably got there during the day. The next morning (Friday morning) was five days before Passover.

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem: John 12:12-19, Mark 11:1-10, Matthew 21:1-11 and Luke 19:29-40.

He left Bethany to start into Jerusalem. He gave them a job to do.

Mark 11:1-3, "And as they came closer to Jerusalem, into Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you: and immediately as you are entering into it, you will find a colt tied, which no one has ever

sat upon. When you have untied it, bring it here. But if anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it here.'"

'Tell them the Master has need of it and He will bring it back when He is finished.'

The people heard He was coming.

John 12:12-13, "...after hearing that Jesus was coming into Jerusalem, took branches of palms, and went out to meet Him, and were yelling out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!'"

Verses 17-18, "The crowd that was with Him, when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, testified and witnessed about Him. On account of this also, the multitude went out to meet Him, because they had heard that He had done this miracle."

Just a matter of two or three months earlier, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Word had spread among the multitudes. Word had spread very widely. Lazarus was evidently a very prominent person and many had probably come to his funeral. How long do you think it would take for news like that to spread? Many people had seen it. It really stirred up a furor. There had been many miraculous healings. His teachings were well known, but when an event like this occurred, things were electrified.

A couple of months later, He came just a few days before Passover. People are ready to acknowledge Him as the Messiah. They didn't have any trouble acknowledging Him as the Messiah. What they had a problem with was that He didn't do things the way they thought He should.

The bulk of the prophecies about the Messiah related to the second coming. In the book of Isaiah, you would be hard-pressed to realize that there is about a 2,000-year break between the first and last part of the sentence. It wasn't even obvious to the disciples. They really hadn't grasped the time element nor did He clearly explain it to them. The people expected the Messiah as coming to heal the sick, etc., but also to chase out the Romans.

Isaiah 2:2-3, "...and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law," The Law will go out of Jerusalem, all nations will go up to Mount Zion and the Messiah is going to rule at

Jerusalem. They had it all figured out. The crowds came out to acknowledge Him.

John 12:19, “The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, ‘Don’t you see that we are gaining nothing? Look, the world is going after Him!’”

The Pharisees did not like this. Christ received this public acclaim in His entry into Jerusalem. Christ was not impressed with all the glitter and glamour and the things that they were impressed with, but He came with a realization of the destruction that was to come.

Luke 19:42-44, “...‘If you had known, even you, at least in this your day, the things which are for your peace. But now they are concealed from your eyes, and kept secret. Because the days are coming upon you, when your enemies shall erect a rampart of war about you, and shall completely surround you, and besiege you on every side. Then they shall totally raze you, and level you to the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not leave in you a single stone upon a stone; because you didn’t know the season of your visitation!’”

As Jesus looked at the city, He recognized the absolute total destruction that was going to come upon the city in the lifetime of many of those people. They didn’t grasp His message. He looked out and felt compassion for them.

Let’s understand about His entry into Jerusalem. There was significance to that. Remember what occurred on the tenth day of the first month? The lamb was chosen out of the flock, set aside and utilized at the Passover. What did the Jews do if that day came on a weekly Sabbath, which this year it did? Their practice was that they went out into the field and whatever physical work was involved, in terms of dealing with the flock and getting a lamb, they did on the Friday. They didn’t pen it up until the next morning, but the actual separation from the flock was done on that Friday. Who was the Lamb of God? –Jesus Christ! At the same time that the lambs were being selected from the flocks in the fields by the farmers, Jesus was being acknowledged as the Messiah by the multitudes who lined the road.

Matthew 21:9, “...crying out, saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David: blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’” It’s interesting the timing of it. He finally came to the temple about the time of sundown, at the time when the lamb would have normally been pinned up.

Mark 11:11, “And Jesus came into Jerusalem, and entered into the temple; but after looking around at everything, the hour already being late

toward evening, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.”

Jesus curses fig tree; casts out money-changers: Mark 11:12-19, Matthew 21:12-22 and Luke 19:45-46.

Mark 11:12-13, “And in the morning, after they had left Bethany, He was hungry. And from a distance, He saw a fig tree which had leaves. And He went up to it, if perhaps He would find something on it. But as He came to it, He found nothing except leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then Jesus spoke to it, and said, ‘Never again will anyone eat fruit from you forever.’ And his disciples heard him say this.”

He spent the night in Bethany and early the next morning, on His way back, He saw the fig tree and cursed it. It was not the season for ripe figs. It was all green and leafy, but it was apparent that no fruit would be on it. It was not bearing fruit. It looked good from a distance. Since there was nothing but leaves, He put a curse on the fig tree. We will see what that symbolized.

Matthew 21:43, “‘Because of this I am telling you, that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and it shall be given to a nation producing the fruits of the kingdom of God.’”

That fig tree was symbolic of the nation. Outwardly it had the appearance of being viable, of being the people of God. The people of God are compared to a fig tree. It had the appearance, but it didn’t have any fruit being borne. That tree was being shriveled up and would be replaced by a viable, living tree that would bear fruit. It was fulfilled, in the sense, when the Old Testament Church was replaced by the New Testament Church.

Israel and Judah had ceased to bear fruit. He cursed two fig trees. One did not wither immediately, but the other one withered immediately. On the way in, on the Sabbath, one tree was cursed and another one was cursed on Sunday morning. It was symbolic of Israel and Judah. Israel withered over a period of time. It was a more gradual decline that occurred. Judah, in a moment, was taken away with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. God does not want something that gives a deceptive appearance. If we are going to claim to be the people of God, we better *be* the people of God and yield Godly fruit in our lives.

Mark 11:15, “Then they came into Jerusalem: and after Jesus entered into the temple, He began to throw out those who were selling and buying in the temple, and He turned over the tables of the money changers, and turned upside down the

benches of those selling the doves.” He entered the temple. What did He see there? He was absolutely infuriated by what He saw. He had probably taken note of it the evening before. He turned upside down the tables of the money changers and the seats of those that sold doves.

You have to understand what a racket they were running. There was the necessity of offering sacrifices. The sacrifice had to be without blemish, approved and accepted by the priests. What had developed was a real racket. Some were not farmers and some Jews were dispersed all over the known world. They would come to Jerusalem. You brought your money and bought the animal there. But since it had to pass inspection (which put the priests in a position to run a racket), odds were they would find something wrong with it if you didn’t buy it from them. And they commanded higher prices.

That was bad enough, but they also had money changers. What was on Roman coins? –Pagan pictures. They said they couldn’t use this money in the temple. It had pagan insignias. They said, ‘You can’t use this money to buy an offering for God. We have a money changer table; we will exchange your pagan money for temple shekels. We set the exchange rate; you take the clean money and pay two prices for the sheep.’

They had a real racket set up here, and Jesus cleaned house. What do you do just before Passover? You clean house. Well, He unleavened His Father’s House. He chased the cows and doves out. Some have misused this account for civil disobedience. He did not break the law. The priests were breaking the law, and they knew it. None of them went after Him.

Verses 28-29, the only thing they did was to ask, ‘What is the source of Your authority?’ But they didn’t press that very far.

Verses 30-33, “‘The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men? Answer Me!’ And they argued among themselves, saying, ‘If we should say, “From heaven”; then He would say, “Why didn’t you believe him?” But if we should say, “From men”; then we would be afraid of the people’: because everyone was convinced that John truly was a prophet.’ And replying, they said to Jesus, ‘We do not know.’ And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Neither am I going to tell you by what authority I do these things.’”

They didn’t answer His question. ‘If we say His authority was purely human, the people will be mad because the people accept John as a prophet. If we acknowledge to Him that this authority derived from God, He will say, “Why didn’t you

follow him?’” So, they said they didn’t know the answer. He had to do it authoritatively.

The people had greeted Him hours before and He had worked miracles. God had placed His stamp of approval on Him to the point of raising the dead, and they had acknowledged Him just before He came in, took charge and really enforced the law. Everybody knew it was right. The people didn’t have much love for the “shysters.” They thought it was about time somebody did something about it. Even though many didn’t understand His office, they did recognize that He was a prophet of God. The religious leaders did recognize Him.

John 3:1-2, “There was a man of the Pharisees, whose name was Nicodemus, ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus at night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we realize and can tell You are a teacher who has come from God, because no one is capable of doing these miracles which You are doing, unless God is with Him.’”

Who were the “we”? Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin. There wasn’t any question of civil disobedience. He was exercising His lawful authority that God had placed His stamp of approval on—the authority the entire population had acknowledged hours previously. It was an exercise in lawful authority of a prophet of God and attested to by God. It set the stage for these events. He left, but there was tremendous resentment. After taking this authoritative action, He began to heal the sick.

Matthew 21:14-15, “And the blind and crippled came to Him in the temple; and He healed them. But when the chief priests and scribes observed the miracles which He accomplished, and the children shouting aloud in the temple, and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’; they were indignant.” They hated Him. They began to plot His murder.

Mark 11:18, “Then the scribes and the chief priests heard about it, and they began plotting how they would kill him: because they were afraid of Him, since all the people were amazed and astonished at His doctrines and teachings.” They resented Him greatly, but they were not going to challenge Him openly. He drove the cattle out, but there is no indication that He hit anyone. He had a very commanding presence. He meant business and it was very obvious He meant business. They were mad because He had made them look bad.

John 12:20-21, as we continue you see, “And there were certain Hellenist Jews among those who were coming up so that they might worship

at the feast. Then these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee; and they asked him, saying, ‘Sir, we desire to see Jesus.’” We find that there were Hellenist Jews who had come up and wanted to see Jesus.

Verse 27, “‘Now my whole being is filled with turmoil and anxiety; and what shall I say? ‘Father, save and deliver Me from this hour.’” But this is the very reason and purpose I have come to this hour.” He was filled with anxiety and turmoil because things were closing in. He prayed about it.

Verses 28-29, “‘Father, glorify Your own name.’ Then a voice came out of heaven: ‘I have both glorified My name, and will glorify it again!’ Therefore the people who were standing there, and heard this, said, ‘It has thundered.’ Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to Him.’” Some said they heard thunder or an angel spoke.

Verse 30, “Jesus answered and said, ‘This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes.’” ‘This voice came not because of Me, but for your sakes.’ God publicly backed up the authority of Christ and showed His support and approval.

Verse 37, “But even though He had done miracles and signs in their presence, they still did not believe in Him.” The people believed on a certain level. If they saw a miracle, then they would believe. There is a lot more to faith than simply seeing a miracle.

One of the most outstanding miracles that occurred in this era of the Church was back at a time in the mid-50s—one of the last things Mr. Dick Armstrong did prior to his death in an automobile accident. A man was a total quadriplegic, and to be baptized, his entire wheelchair apparatus had to be put down into the water. He asked for Mr. Armstrong to pray for him. Mr. Armstrong prayed for him; he stood up and was healed. He served on the faculty, etc. You would look at him and never believe that he had been a quadriplegic. It was a case of “rise up and walk.” And yet, sadly, at a later time, he eventually left the work and the Church. You would think that if you experienced something that dramatic, you would never leave.

In another incident, this young man called me up. His child was stricken with appendicitis. He was about 150 miles away. I told him I would pray where I was and he could pray. The child was healed immediately. About 12 unconverted relatives showed up at services that week. They were greatly impressed for about two weeks. I could recount event after event, many, many over the years, things that happened instantly and

people who were greatly impressed for a short time. That is the point. Faith has to be anchored to something more than a physical sign. You can’t find something more dramatic than the Exodus.

Here the people were shouting, “Hosanna, praise to God”; a few days later they were shouting, “Crucify Him.” They had a shallow belief. They were impressed with what they could see, but there was no depth. Faith is the substance hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. They still didn’t really believe Him. They knew He was going to come and heal, but they also expected Him to send out the Romans and restore independence.

But what if Christ told them some things they didn’t want to hear and weren’t prepared to believe? They expected Him to fit in with what they wanted Him to do. And when He didn’t do it, they became upset. You can’t put parameters on God. When He doesn’t dance to your tune, you get mad. They became disillusioned and upset with Him. They weren’t willing to change their ideas. Christ knew that their loyalty was very fickle. They didn’t have depth of faith; what they had was superficial. They were impressed with Him, but they became quickly disillusioned when He didn’t meet their expectations.

There are some lessons to learn in that. Faith and confidence must go beyond some physical manifestation. I don’t care how impressive it is—it will fade.

Luke 19:47-48, “And He was teaching day by day in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading people were seeking to destroy Him, but found no way that they might do it: because all the people were attentively listening to Him.” He came day by day into the temple. This was the problem. The people were paying attention.

Priests and Pharisees challenge Jesus’ authority: Mark 11:27-33, Matthew 21:23-27 and Luke 20:1-8.

Mark 11:28, “Then they asked Him, ‘By what authority do You do these things? And who gave you this authority, that You should be doing these things?’” They asked, ‘By what authority?’ That is when He asked them the question about John the Baptist. That was the response.

Verse 29, “And answering, Jesus said to them, ‘I will also ask you one question, and answer Me; then I will tell you by what authority I do these things.’” He answered them with a question about John the Baptist. He didn’t involve

Himself in arguments. He just gave it back to them and left them on the spot.

We should answer people differently in different circumstances. If somebody asks a sincere question, they deserve an honest and sincere answer. But to ask a question to try to argue, you never found Jesus involved in that. He would answer them with a question or respond in a way that would squelch the argument. He didn't bring it down to squabbling.

Matthew 21:28-31, “But what do you think about this? A man had two sons; and he came to the first one, and said, ‘Son, go work today in my vineyard.’ And answering he said, ‘I will not.’ But later he repented, and went to work. Then he came to the second son, and said the same thing to him. And answering he said, ‘Sir, I will go:’ but he didn't go. Now then, which of the two did the will of his father? They said to Him, ‘The first one.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, I am telling you, that the publicans and the harlots are going into the kingdom of God before you.’”

This was the example that Christ gave of the parable of the two sons. One said, ‘Yes sir, I am on my way.’ But he didn't go. The other said, ‘No,’ but then felt bad and went. So, which one did the will of the father? They had to acknowledge that it was the one that did it.

Verse 32, “‘Because John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him: but the publicans and the harlots believed him. But you, having seen this, did not repent afterwards to believe him.’” A lot of them changed their lives. They went the other way. They believed what he said. ‘The harlots and publicans will enter the Kingdom before you. They turned their life around, but you didn't.’ It became obvious which son they were, which son was the harlot and publican.

Parable of the vineyard: Mark 12:1-11, Matthew 21:33-44 and Luke 20:9-18.

Mark 12:1, “And He began speaking to them in parables. ‘A man planted a vineyard...and leased all of this out to farmers [NKJV, “vinedressers”], and left the country.’” He leased it out to keepers.

Verses 2-5, “‘And he sent his servant to the farmers at the harvest, so that he might receive from the farmers the vineyard's crop. But they took him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. Then again he sent another servant to them; but they stoned him, wounded him in the head, and, after insulting him, sent him away. And again he sent a third one, but they killed him; a great many others were also sent.

They beat some, and they killed others.’” He sent his servants to collect the rent, and they robbed and mistreated them.

Verses 6-7, “‘Therefore, he had yet one more to send, his own beloved son. Last of all, he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will surely have respect for my son.’ But those farmers said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come now, let us get together and kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’” He sent his son, and they said, ‘Let us kill the son. He is the heir.’

Verses 8-9, “‘So they seized him, and killed him, and threw his body outside the vineyard. What therefore will the owner of the vineyard do? [Now what do you think he is going to do?] He will come and will destroy those farmers, and will give the vineyard to others!’” He will slaughter them. ‘You are right—that is what he is going to do.’

Verse 10, “‘Didn't you ever read this scripture; ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this same one has become the head of the corner.’”

Matthew 21:43, “‘Because of this I am telling you, that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and it shall be given to a nation producing the fruits of the kingdom of God.’”

Verse 45, “‘But when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they knew He was speaking about them.’”

‘Hey, fellows, you are the wicked vinedressers. You are the ones. You think God is going to let you get by with this? Every prophet God has ever sent, you and your forefathers have mistreated. Now you want to kill Me.’ They knew He was speaking about them.

Verse 46, “‘And they plotted against Him, to lay hold of Him; but they were afraid of the multitude, because they looked upon Him as a prophet.’” They plotted against Him. They wanted to embarrass or humiliate Him. But they were afraid to come in with soldiers and arrest Him for fear there would be a riot.

John 12:42, “‘Although, truly, even among the rulers and leaders many believed in Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it publicly, so they would not be excommunicated from the synagogue.’” Many believed Him, but because of the Pharisees, they were afraid to confess it publicly.

Verse 43, “‘Because they loved the praise and flattery of men more than the glory and honor of God.’” That was more important to them.

In Matthew 22:1-14, He compared the Kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast. Those who had first chance at the invitation didn't value that

invitation; others were invited in their stead. It refers to the Jews who had the first opportunity and others took their place.

Spies are sent to trap Jesus: Mark 12:13, Matthew 22:15 and Luke 20:20.

Mark 12:13, “And they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, in order that they might trap Him in His speech.”

It was the Herodians that the Pharisees teamed up with. They were a political faction that backed Herod as king. Normally, they were looked on as renegades. Herod was a descendant of Esau, an Edomite. He had “finagled” the throne. He had married the widow of the last Jewish king. There is a saying, “politics makes strange bed fellows.” They all saw their office and status threatened. ‘This Man is a threat to us. If He gets rid of the Romans, the Herodians will be out of a job, and the Sadducees will be out of a job. This Man is a threat to us.’

Render the things of Caesar to Caesar: Mark 12:14-17, Matthew 22:16-22 and Luke 20:21-26.

Mark 12:14-15, “...Now then, is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, or not? Should we pay it, or should we not pay it?” The Pharisees put the Herodians up to ask the trick question. The Jews did not want to pay tribute to the Romans. The Jews said, ‘God gave us this land.’ They paid the taxes, but they resented it and didn’t like it. They thought it was illegal—it wasn’t right.

People didn’t like to pay taxes then and still don’t now. But they paid them. They had to. There were the Roman soldiers. The zealots were on the fringe of society. The trick question was that they didn’t want to do that. They didn’t want to lose favor with the people. Either He will make the people mad or the Romans will come in and arrest Him.

Verses 15-16, “Should we pay it, or should we not pay it?” But knowing their hypocrisy, He told them, ‘Why do you tempt Me? Bring Me a coin, that I may look at it.’ And they brought it to Him. And He asked them, ‘Whose image and engraving is this?’ And they replied to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’” Christ said, ‘Give Me a coin. Whose picture is on this?’

Verse 17, “And answering, Jesus said to them, ‘Render the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God.’ And they marveled at His answer.” He didn’t even define what belonged to Caesar and what was God’s. They let the issue drop. They were stunned at that answer. They didn’t know how to answer.

Questions about marriage in resurrection:

Mark 12:18-27, Matthew 22:23-33 and Luke 20:27-40.

Mark 12:18, “Then the Sadducees, who claim there is no resurrection, came to Him. And they questioned Him, saying...” The Sadducees came. They didn’t believe in the resurrection. They liked to argue with the Pharisees about the resurrection. They knew He taught about the resurrection.

Verses 19-22, they came up with this far-fetched story about the seven husbands.

Verse 23, “‘Therefore in the resurrection, when they shall be resurrected, which one’s wife shall she be? Because the seven had her as wife.’” It wasn’t a question that bothered them because they didn’t believe in it.

Verses 24-25, “And answering, Jesus said to them, ‘Aren’t you therefore in error, not knowing or understanding the scriptures, or the power of God? Because when they are resurrected from among the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels who are in heaven.’”

This is talking about the first resurrection. Since they didn’t believe in one, there was no point in going into the three. The fact is there is going to be a restoration of life.

Verses 26-27, “‘But concerning the dead, proving that they rise: haven’t you read in the book of Moses, in the section about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living.’” That is why He speaks of them that way. That is why He brings it up that way.

They said, ‘Maybe we better ask Him because the Sadducees and Herodians didn’t fare very well.’ So, they decided to ask Him which was the most important commandment.

Two Great Commandments: Mark 12:28-34 and Matthew 22:34-40.

Mark 12:28, “And one of the scribes, listening to them discussing this together, and perceiving that He answered them perfectly, began questioning Jesus, asking Him, ‘Which is the first commandment of all?’”

Matthew 22:36, “‘Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?’”

Verses 37-40, when they asked Him, Christ said, “And Jesus answered him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second

one is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Upon these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” He summarized the whole thing.

Mark 12:32-33, “And the scribe said to Him, ‘Correct, Master, You have spoken according to the truth, that God is One, and there is not any other God besides Him at all. And loving Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the being, and with all the strength, and loving one’s neighbor as himself, is greater than all the burnt offerings and the sacrifices.’”

Verse 34, “And when Jesus observed that he answered Him intelligently, He told him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’” Christ took note of that man’s attitude. ‘That is right; that is the most important. You have really answered well.’ Christ told him, ‘You are not far from the Kingdom of God. If you keep that attitude of being impressed with the truth, you are heading in the right direction.’

Verse 34, continuing, “...And no one had enough courage any more to ask Him questions.” This “took the starch out.” Nobody wanted to ask the next question.

Some try to say that He replaced the Ten Commandments with the two. The two are the principles on which every commandment hung. The first four tell you how to love God; the last six, how to love your neighbor.

Christ is son of David: Mark 12:35-37, Matthew 22:41-46 and Luke 20:41-44.

‘You guys have been asking Me questions.’

Mark 12:35-37, “Then Jesus asked, while He was teaching in the temple, ‘How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David? Because David himself said, inspired by the Holy Spirit, ‘The Lord said to My Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make Your enemies as a footstool for Your feet.’” Therefore if David himself calls Him “Lord,” then how can He be his son?’ And the great multitude gladly listened to Him.”

Matthew 22:46, “But no one was able to answer Him a single word, nor did anyone dare to question Him any more from that day on.” They couldn’t respond to that.

In Matthew 23, He begins to say, ‘woe unto the scribes and Pharisees’ over and over. He really begins to “nail their hides to the wall.”

Matthew 23:24, ““You blind guides, who filter out a gnat, but swallow a camel!””

Verse 33, ““You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how are you going to escape the judgment of Gehenna?”” ‘You are snakes’; He really told

them what they were. ‘You are going to burn like fire.’ He “pulled no punches.”

Verse 35, ““So that upon you may come all the righteous blood poured out upon the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous, to the blood of Zachariah, son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”” He summarized who was slain on the altar. They really became guilty of the murder of every righteous man because they stood ready to murder the One who sent all the others. He gave this scathing denunciation of the Pharisees and then He left.

Olivet prophecy: Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

Matthew 24:1-2, “And walking out, Jesus went away from the temple: and His disciples came to Him, and pointed out the buildings of the temple to Him. But Jesus said to them, ‘Don’t you see all these things! Truly I tell you, there shall not be left here one stone standing upon another stone, which shall not be thrown down.’”

Verse 3, “And as He was sitting upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, asking, ‘Tell us, when shall these things take place? And what is the sign of Your coming, and of the completion of the age?’”

‘We want to ask You about that. When is that going to be, the stones being thrown down and Your coming and the end of the age?’ They thought this addressed the same subject, but in reality, they asked Him two different questions: (1) Jerusalem would be destroyed and (2) then the end of the age.

Verses 4-14, “And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Watch out, and be on guard, so that no one deceives you! Because many are going to come in My name, saying “I am the Christ;” and they shall deceive the vast majority of people. But you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you be not afraid: because it is necessary that all these things occur, but the end is not yet. Because race shall rise up against race, and nation against nation. And there shall be famines, and plagues of diseases, and earthquakes in different places. But all these things are just a beginning of sorrows, devastations, and upheavals. Then they will deliver you up into tribulation, and will kill you. And you will be hated by all the nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, and they will betray one another, and will hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will deceive the majority of all people. And because of lawlessness and sin shall be multiplied, the love

of the majority of all people will grow cold. But anyone who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the habitable earth for a witness and testimony to all the nations; and then shall the end come.”

The Olivet prophecy was spoken to the disciples. Verse 34, “Truly I tell you, it is not possible for this generation to perish or die out, until all these things have taken place.” Clearly, the generation to whom He was speaking did not live to see His return. The generation that is being addressed is the generation in whose lifetime these events were going to occur.

Verse 14, NKJV, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come.”

Verse 22, “And unless those days of tribulation had been shortened, there would not be any living thing left alive.” Now He is talking of events that are going to culminate in His return.

Verses 31-34, “And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. But learn this parable from the fig tree: when its branches have already become tender, and the leaves are budding out, you know that summer is near. In exactly the same way also, when you see all these things taking place, know that it is near, even at the doors. Truly I tell you, it is not possible for this generation to perish or die out, until all these things have taken place.”

This is in the context of His return. The generation that sees these events will culminate in the lifetime of a single generation. It will occur quickly and not stretch out over centuries. It will happen in the lifetime of a single generation.

How long is one generation? Is your generation passed? It hasn't entirely; you are here. Whether you are 20, 40, 60 or 70, your generation has not passed because you are still here. It will be occurring in a lifetime of a single generation. We are simply looking at things that will not stretch out on toward the end of the next century. Things have been building.

When did the gospel go forth as a witness to the whole world—a worldwide impact? The true Church continued to exist, but the gospel of the Kingdom did not go forth to the world in power until Mr. Herbert Armstrong was raised up. It didn't really begin to reach the world with worldwide impact until the 50s. It had begun to go out, but had not reached the world previously.

“And unless those days of tribulation had been shortened, there would not be any living thing left alive.” That was not possible until the advent of the nuclear age. Until it became possible to annihilate life off the planet, it was a meaningless statement. Disease epidemics, earthquakes, and other things have been characteristic of many times. They are not unique to prove that this is the end time. But this generation, the gospel has gone out to the world for the first time and the ability to annihilate man off the planet—those are things unique to this generation. It will culminate in the lifetime of one generation.

Matthew 24:3, “And as He was sitting upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, asking, ‘Tell us, when shall these things take place? And what is the sign of Your coming, and of the completion of the age?’” He gave these signs for the disciples. The world would not understand.

Luke 21:36, “Therefore keep watching at all times, praying that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things which are about to come to pass, and that you may be able to stand in the presence of the Son of man!”

There are two types of salvation: physical and spiritual. (1) Pray that you may be accounted worthy to escape, to be saved physically from the tribulation and (2) to ultimately stand before the Son of Man. Christ warned of what would happen. The tendency was going to be to “go to sleep at the switch.” Over and over the warnings are that the tendency at the end time was to slow down and lose any sense of urgency.

We need to focus on the warnings because the warnings are for us. We need to see what is the likely tendency and that it doesn't have to happen to us. This age is going to be a lot more suited to producing Laodiceans than Philadelphians. We have a lukewarm, watered-down society, and the Church has always had the tendency to reflect the society around and its problems. Our society is a liberal, lukewarm, watered-down society—we have to be on guard against those influences.

Matthew 25:1, “Then the kingdom of heaven will be compared to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom.” The virgins typify the Church.

Verses 2-5, “Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps, but did not take oil with them. But the wise took oil in containers with their lamps. But while the bridegroom delayed his coming, they all became drowsy and went to sleep.”

They all slumbered and slept. The Church “went to sleep at the switch” in the first century.

Verse 6, “Then at midnight there was a shout, “Look! The bridegroom is coming! Get ready to meet him!”” The beginning of the “midnight cry” was when God raised up Mr. Herbert Armstrong back in the 20s and 30s.

Verses 7-8, “Then all those virgins got up, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; because our lamps are going out.’” There is a distinction of those who are wise and those who are foolish.

Verses 9-10, “But the wise answered, “No”; explaining, “Perhaps there may not be sufficient for us and you: but go instead to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.” But as they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast: and the door was shut.” They ran out of oil.

Verses 11-13, “Then afterwards the other virgins came also, crying out, “Lord, Lord, open to us.” But answering he said, “Truly I tell you, I do not even know you!” Therefore watch, because you do not know the day nor the hour in which the Son of man comes.” We have a responsibility to lay in a proper supply of God’s Holy Spirit.

We will break here. This brings us down to late Sunday afternoon prior to Christ’s observance of the Passover on Tuesday afternoon. Notice all the events and actions; the culmination of things came to a head very quickly. Ultimately, that will be so with this world. Things will come to a head and come to a head quickly. We are in a time that we’d better take advantage of. If we don’t use the opportunity to get spiritually prepared for the events ahead of us, we will be caught in a bad way. These examples are admonitions and they are there for our benefit.

Bible Study # 38
June 27, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Matthew 25:14—26:75; Mark 13:37—14:72; Luke 22:1-62; John 13:1—18:27

We are almost to the end of our survey—at least, the Gospel part of it. We will be getting into the book of Acts as we finish the Gospels. This Bible study and our next Bible study will complete the Gospels portion of it, and then we have three studies in the book of Acts.

We are picking up the story at the time just immediately before Jesus' final Passover. One of the things that I think we have seen is the way things have really begun to come to a climax at the very end of Christ's ministry.

One of the things to note is that Jesus had been in Jerusalem earlier. He had been there at the time of the Hanukkah celebration (25th day of Kislev), which is in the latter part of December. He had been there at that time and a little while afterward, had come back. In John 11, Lazarus had gotten sick and had died by the time Christ got there. Jesus had intentionally waited until He knew Lazarus was dead. Mary and Martha had sent word asking Him if He would please come. He came there, perhaps in January, maybe February, but probably right around the latter part of January. Lazarus had been dead and buried for several days. When Jesus came, He resurrected Lazarus. Needless to say, that created no small uproar.

Think of the timing. He waited. He didn't just show up when Lazarus was sick. Then people, who want to discount God's hand, could always say he just had the flu and would have gotten better anyway. He waited until Lazarus had been dead and buried in the grave for days. Then there wasn't any question.

Lazarus was a prominent member of the community. He lived in Bethany, which is right on the outskirts of Jerusalem within less than a mile of the city gates. We would think of it, really, as a part of town, but Jerusalem had definite walls—and Bethany was outside the walls. Lazarus was a prominent individual. He owned a home where he and his sisters lived. There had been a lot of people at the funeral. They knew he was dead. They had seen him buried. Jesus came and resurrected him. There were a lot of people there when Jesus came and Lazarus was resurrected. There were multiple

witnesses to that, and it created no small stir. You can imagine that word spread like wildfire. Remember, Jesus came to the tomb and told them to roll the stone back. Martha said, 'Don't do that; don't go in there. You don't want to open up the tomb because he's been dead for days—the place stinks.'

Well, He had them open it up. And I'm sure at that point there wasn't any question that Lazarus was dead. Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth," and Lazarus came forth. Well, you can imagine that it created a tremendous furor in the area and word spread.

Jesus left immediately afterwards and went out to the Judean Desert where He was difficult to find. He went there for a period of time, out around the Jordan River, and out into the Judean Desert. He stayed out of the mainstream.

In the meantime over a period of weeks, word travels, news spreads, the story grows and people are stirred up. This is the talk of Jerusalem because Jesus had been known. He had been there and miracles had been performed. He was an authoritative teacher. He was someone who had built a certain reputation. But when He did this, this was really the "final straw"—this was monumental. It created such a furor, at that point, many of the religious leaders began to plot how they could murder Jesus and get rid of Him.

John 12:10, they also wanted to get rid of Lazarus. They were not comfortable with having him walking around because that just kind of called attention to the fact that Jesus had raised him from the dead.

It was in this context that Jesus showed up six days before the Passover. In other words, if the Passover came on Wednesday, then He showed up on the Thursday six days before. He showed up sometimes during the day on Thursday, and by Thursday evening when the evening meal was fixed, you could imagine there was quite a crowd that had gathered around. Word began to spread, and it says people came to see not only Jesus, but to see Lazarus also (John 12:9). This was quite a thing. It had gotten a lot of peoples' interest. They had the meal that Thursday evening.

The next day, on Friday, Jesus sent the disciples for a donkey. They got the donkey, and He started riding into Jerusalem—the place went wild. They began putting palm branches down and throwing their coats down so that the donkey's feet wouldn't even touch the dust of the ground. This was the idea. This huge crowd was shouting, "Hosanna to the King." They were acknowledging Him as the Messiah.

But you also have to understand what their concept was of what the Messiah was going to do. What it talks about in Isaiah, Micah and all the other places is very plain. The Messiah is going to set up a Kingdom. He is going to set up a government. They had read those scriptures. They were chafing under Roman rule. So, in their mind, this had to be the Messiah. No one could teach and preach and do the miracles that He did and not be the Messiah. He did miracles, right to the point of having raised the dead. What more could the Messiah do? The Messiah was going to throw the Romans out and establish the Kingdom. They were lining the streets, yelling and cheering and shouting. They were all excited. It is in this context that He came into Jerusalem.

Friday evening He came to the temple and saw the mess things were in. He left, went back to Bethany and spent the night. Sabbath morning He came back, and when He did, it was in that context that He walked into the temple.

Mark 11:17, He said, "...Hasn't it been written, 'My [Father's] house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers and thieves!" "Get this junk out of here!" He started heaving tables here and there, cutting loose oxen, sheep and goats and flipping open dove cages. All of a sudden, there was quite a scurry of activity.

Again, you can imagine how resentful people had been about the "rip-off" that was going on there in the temple with these priests running nothing more than just a "racket" with the sacrifices. You can imagine how people resented that. People always take note when those in authority are doing things like that. They resent it now and they resented it then. That was a very popular move. Everybody knew they shouldn't have been doing it, but nobody had done anything about it. Nobody challenged the priests and the Pharisees on it.

The whole city had just gone wild acknowledging Him as the Messiah the previous day. Nobody was prepared to come up and arrest Him. No way! He was being acknowledged, at the very least, as a prophet and many were acknowledging Him as the Messiah. They had expectations. They had decided how God was going to act.

It is interesting, as we will note, how on the one hand, they believed Him and on the other hand, they really didn't. There really wasn't faith because when He didn't conform to their expectations when He didn't do things exactly

the way they thought that He would do it, the mob very quickly turned against Him. It was only a matter of days that some of that same group were standing in a mob outside Pilate's palace yelling, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." Why the variation? He didn't fit their image. He didn't do things the way they anticipated it being done. They had it all figured out in their minds as to how He had to do it. And when He didn't do it that way, they took great exception. Oh, they didn't like that at all, but this hadn't come up yet.

Of course, the Pharisees and the religious leaders all had a vested interest. Jesus came in and they were in a panic at the reception He was getting. They very quickly got together as politicians do. You hear the saying, "politics makes strange bed fellows." Well, it did back then the same as it does now. The Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians who normally can't stand one another, got together. It was worse than the "left wing," the "right wing" and the other "wings" in between. These were the various political factions, but they quickly got together. They had things divided up; each one had their sphere of influence. 'But if this guy keeps "muscling in," we are all going to be in trouble.'

Matthew 22:15-22, the Pharisees put the Herodians up to coming in and asking Him the questions. They came up there to confront Him on this issue of taxes. You remember He addressed that and very quickly put them in their place. They didn't have any more questions to ask.

Verses 23-33, the Sadducees came and they had their trick question on the resurrection, which they thought was the real clincher. He very quickly put them in their place and they began to slink away.

Verses 34-46, then the Pharisees showed up. They heard that the Sadducees and the Herodians had been put to shame, so they decided that they would try to "show Him up". After a couple of statements from them, His response "took the wind out of their sails". They didn't have a whole lot of other comments to make.

Matthew 21:23-27, they asked Him, 'Where do You get Your authority?' And He said, 'Let Me ask you one question—where did John get his?' This really put them at a quandary because they didn't know how to respond to that without antagonizing the crowd.

Then in Matthew 22:36-40, there was a question that came up—what's the most important part of the law? He very quickly addressed that subject.

He summed it up and explained the principles upon which the whole law hung: love God and love your neighbor. That summarized everything there was to say on the subject. None of them had any response to that.

Now He begins to set the stage.

Matthew 23:2-3, “Saying, ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in the seat of Moses. Therefore whatever they may tell you to keep, keep and do. But do not according to their works: because they command, but do not practice it themselves.’”

Verse 33, He proceeded to go through and tell them, “‘You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how are you going to escape the judgment of Gehenna?’” “‘You sons of snakes, you sons of the devil, you hypocrites—you are going to burn in hell fire.’” Boy, He began to really read them the “riot act.” There were no more questions. Needless to say, by the time He finished with that, a crowd had gathered around because He just really “laid it out” to them.

Matthew 21:43, He told them, “‘...the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and it shall be given to a nation producing the fruits of the kingdom of God.’” They were in authority, but He was in ultimate authority as God in the flesh. Here they were purporting to represent Him as the God of the Old Testament. They had so distorted and abused the responsibility they had, that they really deserved to be corrected sternly and strongly. He told the people, ‘As long as they occupy this office, respect them in it. Listen to what they say, but don’t follow their example.’

As I have mentioned before, that is advice that goes so totally “against the grain” when it comes to human nature. When people find out that someone is not practicing what he preaches, they immediately say, ‘That hypocrite!’ Well, yes, he is! He’s not practicing what he preaches. But then the response of human nature is, ‘Why should I do that? He doesn’t even do it himself. He’s been telling me to do that and he’s been doing the opposite. Why, I am not going to pay any more attention to what he says.’

Isn’t that the response that people so often have? Christ said that even if he’s a hypocrite, if he tells you the truth, do the truth; just don’t follow his hypocrisy. His problem is not that he’s preaching the wrong thing and doing the right thing. His problem is he is preaching the right and doing the wrong. What people want to do is ignore the message and follow the example. Then they get mad because they think somebody’s gotten by with something they’ve wanted to get by with

and didn’t dare try it. Then they get resentful about it. Christ made it plain as to the perspective.

This was on a Sunday. This was the day of confrontation and when all these events had occurred.

Matthew 24:1-3, He left and went back out to the Mount of Olives. As they were leaving Jerusalem going back to Bethany, He went through the Olivet prophecy with the disciples.

Matthew 25, we pick it up that Sunday evening, or late Sunday afternoon, as He is speaking to the disciples. We see here the parable of the ten virgins that Christ gave in the first 13 verses of Matthew 25. It’s apparent that the ten virgins symbolize the entire Church.

Verse 5 describes them all “going to sleep at the switch.” The bridegroom delayed His coming, and they all slumbered and slept.

Matthew 25:6, “‘Then at midnight there was a shout, “Look! The bridegroom is coming! Get ready to meet him!”’” What do we have? Christ is giving a parable. It applies and is descriptive of what happened to the Church. The Church is described here and pictured as ten virgins. It became apparent that Christ did not come immediately as they expected that He would, and by the time the destruction of Jerusalem had come, it was apparent that the Messiah was not coming back in that generation. Effectively, the Church “went to sleep at the switch.” They all slumbered and slept. The Church continued, it existed, but they went to sleep—that sense of zeal and urgency was lost.

Then when God raised up Mr. Herbert Armstrong in the 1920s and 1930s, the midnight cry began to go out, “Behold the bridegroom is coming!” Mr. Armstrong was raised up to cry out that, ‘Behold the bridegroom is coming! Get ready to go meet Him. Be prepared.’ That, of course, was part of the commission of John the Baptist—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Then we come forward in our time now and the earlier part of this century. We find the story is that the virgins got up and began to trim their lamps. Then we find a distinction here—five were wise and five were foolish. There has been some speculation in terms of perhaps symbolizing the Laodicean and Philadelphia eras. There are various points, but certainly the point of it is that we had better be adequately prepared with God’s Spirit because that’s what is needed to be ready.

Verses 14-30, then Christ gave the parable of the talents. The man called his servants and left property entrusted to them. He gave to them on the basis of what they were able to handle. Then after a while he came back and evaluated what they had done. Two of the servants had been diligent. They had been faithful. One had been unfaithful, unprofitable. It's made apparent here that the difference between the profitable and the unprofitable servant was that the unprofitable servant was one that was incapable of carrying out the master's expectation. He needed total, constant supervision. He didn't think like the master thought. The two who took the five talents and the two talents went out and doubled it.

The term "talent" is an old English word. It is a translation of a word that has reference to "a unit of money." The "talent" was a unit of money in the Middle East at that time. It is simply an analogy of money having been entrusted to individuals who took and used what they had been given. They did things as the master would have done had he been there and he was very well pleased. He was pleased at the way they had the big picture. They sought to be responsive to his way of doing things.

We have the contrast that is given of how we take and use what God gives us now and the growth that we bring forth. This determines our reward.

Verse 21, look at the statement, "...Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful over a few things, I will appoint you over many things: enter into the joy of your lord."

Right now, whatever our area of responsibility, it's over a few things. We have to learn to use them properly. Use the small opportunities we have right now, and God will ultimately give us great things in the Kingdom. It's a principle: if we're faithful with a little, we'll be faithful with much; if we're unfaithful on a small scale, we'll be unfaithful on a grand scale. I saw a sign the other day that I thought had an interesting point. It said, "If you can't do great things, then do small things in a great way." That's part of what it's saying right here.

Most of the things we are involved in right now are not great earth-shattering, world-moving events. The world news does not particularly take note of what you and I are doing in our daily lives. We are not making decisions that are impacting thousands and millions of people. Maybe we are only making decisions that impact us and our immediate family or a few people that work with us. What we do is on a small scale, but

if we learn to do it right on a small scale, then we have the promise of greater things.

Christ says, 'I want to see that you are learning to be a faithful servant and that I can count on you to handle things the way I would handle it. I want to see if you're developing My mind. I want to see if you are learning to think like Me. You don't need somebody to just stand there and point out every single rule, and all you do is conform to the rules.' We must be transformed to think like God.

Now if the master had been over there and said, 'Take this dollar, go over here and do this with it; take that one, go over there and do this,' then I'm sure he would have carried it out. 'You take this one, go to the bank with it and deposit my dollar.' He would have probably done that. It didn't say he was a thief. He gave the man back what he had. He had buried it. It was just that he was incapable of exercising any independent thought or action unless somebody was standing there giving him a long list of rules, spelling out every detail. He simply couldn't take and apply the principles he had learned and do it the way the master would. He didn't do that.

As we come through, Matthew 25:31-32, Christ makes plain that when the Son of Man comes in all of His glory and all the holy angels are with Him, that's when He is going to sit on the throne of His glory. That's when He is going to separate the sheep from the goats. That is a judging process. Again, an agricultural analogy is used.

If you have ever been around sheep and goats, you understand there is a distinct difference. They are not animals of the same temperament at all. It was a figure of speech that would have been easily understood to people at that time and to some of us who've had occasion to be around sheep and goats. Sheep are known for their willingness to follow the leader. Goats don't follow anyone. They tend to have a very definite mind of their own. We even use the expression of somebody being "stubborn as a Billy goat." All you have to do is have a Billy goat, and you realize how stubborn that is.

The distinction that Christ describes in Matthew 25 are those who willingly follow Him and those who are stubborn, self-willed and go their own way. What it ultimately comes down to is converted and unconverted. Are we willingly yielding ourselves and trying to follow Christ? The sheep follow the shepherd. Christ is the Good Shepherd. The sheep are the ones that try to follow Him. The goats are the ones that go charging off in their own direction. If they are

dragged back, they may come, but every time you look around, they go wandering off somewhere else. They don't want to follow.

Christ went on to make it plain that He has not been ruling and judging during the last 1900 years. He has been in heaven.

Verse 31, He says, "But when Son of man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit upon the throne of His glory." That's when He's going to sit on the throne.

Verse 32, that's when He is going to judge the nations. The judgment process is going to begin at the second coming.

Verses 35-40, "Because I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to see Me.' Then the righteous shall answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and fed You something? Or thirsty, and gave You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and took You in? Or naked, and clothed You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and came to You, and visited You?' And answering, the King will say to them, 'Truly I tell you, as long as you have done it to one of these, the very least of My brethren, you have done it to Me.'"

We demonstrate our real attitude toward Christ by the way we treat one another. You know, Christ takes it personally the way we treat one another. Look around. Anyone that we would consider the least of Christ's brethren, maybe they're someone who is elderly, maybe they're "this or that," maybe they're having a problem. Whatever the circumstance, do you realize that the way we treat them, Christ says, "inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, you've done it to Me."

He goes through and talks about this distinction of those that are going to say, 'I was hungry' or 'I needed help' or whatever it is. 'I needed a ride to Church'; 'I needed somebody to come and encourage me'; 'I needed somebody to help me' or do whatever—'And you wouldn't come.'

They will say, 'Lord, we never saw You. Boy, if I had ever seen You needing help, why surely I would have come and done it!' He says, 'No, you have not done it to one of these the least of My brethren. You wouldn't go across the street to help him; you wouldn't do it to help him. If you didn't do it to him, you didn't do it to Me.'

When we serve one another, it is the same as if we have done it to Christ personally. Maybe you

don't think of it that way. Jesus takes it personally the way we treat His brothers and sisters. That's what He calls us—His brothers and sisters. He takes it personally. It is important that we have that concept in mind. The way we treat one another, Christ is taking it personally. It's as though He were there. The next time you do something for someone realize that as God looks at it, it is the same as if you had done it personally for Jesus Christ.

We read in the New Testament about different ones that did different things for Him. Sometimes we think, 'I wish I could have been there and could have done some of those things, had that contact, had the honor of serving Him a meal, giving Him a place to sleep, doing certain of these things'—whatever it may be. Realize that if you have done it to His brethren, you have done it to Him. He takes it personally.

Then on the other hand, if we have opportunities to do something for someone and we don't, then it's just like we didn't do it for Christ. We have to look at it that way. If that were Jesus Christ there, would I go do it? Would I help Him out? Would I be willing to serve? Would it be too inconvenient? That's the point that He goes through here, "as long as you have not done it to one of these, the very least of My brethren, you have not done it to Me." He takes it personally, and I think that is an important concept.

If you really grasp that, how would there be problems and friction? How would there be gossip? Would you say that about Christ Himself? Do you realize that if we go around and say bad things about people, we are doing it to Christ? We do things and we might as well be doing it to Him. It's an important concept. If we really grasp the extent to which Jesus Christ takes it personally, then we'd have that concept in the way we treat one another. Treat one another exactly as you would treat Jesus Christ. That is a very important principle.

Two days before Passover: Matthew 26:1-5, Mark 14:1-2 and Luke 22:1-2.

Matthew 26:2, "You know that after two days the Passover takes place, and the Son of man is to be betrayed and to be crucified." This would have been Sunday evening; one day later would have been Monday evening; two days later would have been Tuesday evening—and that's when Christ and the disciples kept the Passover. This is Sunday evening.

Verses 3-5, "Then the chief priests and the scribes and the elders of the people were assembled together in the court of the high priest,

who was called Caiaphas. And they consulted together, in order that they might find a way to seize and arrest Jesus by deceit, and kill Him. But they said, 'Not during the Feast [of Unleavened Bread], lest there be a riot among the people.'" They were afraid of a riot. They wanted to do it quietly. They wanted to betray Him, to get rid of Him "on the quiet." They did not want a public outcry. They were afraid of trouble.

Jesus is anointed in Bethany: Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9.

Matthew 26:6, "Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon..." That Sunday evening there was a dinner there at the home of Simon.

Verse 7, "A woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of ointment which was extremely expensive, and poured it on His head, as He was sitting at the table." You remember a few days earlier when He had gotten there, Martha had anointed His feet with oil and Judas had gotten very upset. Judas said, 'That's just wasteful and extravagant. Why this stuff could have been sold and the money given to the poor. It could have helped people. Look at that!' He began to talk around among some of the others and stir things up.

Verse 8, well, this time, this other woman came in and poured this ointment on His head; some of the disciples began to be indignant. You can imagine Judas is the instigator of it. He had evidently stirred up a few others, and they began to think that it was awfully wasteful and extravagant. 'Why does He encourage extravagance like that?' You know what Judas' motive had been; John made it plain.

John 12:6, "But he said this, not because he actually had concern for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money bag; and carried what was put into it." He was keeper of the bag; he was the treasurer. He wanted it sold and the money put in the "pot" because he planned on "skimming" some off the top. That was the real motive. He wasn't interested in the poor, one way or the other. He had stirred things up and it got some others stirred up.

People have done that. I remember years ago, Mr. Herbert Armstrong was getting ready to build the auditorium. There were people that were all upset. 'That's extravagant! Why does he have to go out and have that carpet specially made; I know some he can get on special down there at Wal-Mart. Why doesn't he put some of that in?' Well, he didn't do it that way. And I think anyone who has ever had opportunity to be

out there and has seen it realizes that he did it just the way God inspired him to do it. In fact, if you really get back to it, the ones that were stirring it up were at the top, and they were stirring because they had the same motives as Judas. They stirred up things down through the ranks and eventually some got bitter and accusative. It's unfortunate. When people start being accusative of things, you better kind of wonder what their motives are. Judas managed to get some upset.

Matthew 26:11, Christ said, 'If you're so interested in the poor, you have plenty of opportunity to help them because they will always be here,' "...but you will not always have Me.'" 'I am not going to be here much longer.'

Verses 12-13, "'For this woman, in pouring this ointment on My body, did it toward My burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel shall be preached in all the world, what this woman has done shall also be spoken of, for a memorial of her.'"

He said, 'Leave this woman alone; she's doing a good thing. This is going to be remembered. This is an act of faith on her part, and you will have plenty of opportunity to do other things.' Christ undoubtedly made it very plain. I suspect He looked Judas squarely in the eye when He said some of this and made it very plain what He was talking about because of the next thing we read.

Judas betrays Jesus: Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 14:10-11 and Luke 22:3-6.

Matthew 26:14-15, "Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priest, and said, 'What are you willing to give me, and I will betray Him to you?' And they agreed to give him thirty pieces of silver." Judas was a traitor. Christ didn't do things Judas' way. In fact, Christ saw through Judas, and instead of Judas repenting, he became resentful to the point that he thought, 'I'll fix You; I'll get even with You.' So, he went.

Now why were the leaders willing to pay Judas this large sum of money? Thirty pieces of silver was a significant sum of money. They wanted to get Him, to arrest Him, but they did not want to try and seize Him at a public occasion because of fear that there might be a riot on their hands. As a result, they had been trying to lay wait for Him, but they never could catch Him. They wanted to seize Him privately, and Judas came and said, 'I will give you an opportunity. I will point Him out to you. I'll help you find Him privately, off away from the crowd.' That was what they wanted.

They wanted to do what they did quietly. They were not prepared to try it in the temple or some place like that.

The disciples prepare for Passover: Matthew 26:17-19, Mark 14:12-16, Luke 22:7-13 and John 13:1.

Matthew 26:17, “Now on the first of unleavened [the first day of unleavening] the disciples came to Jesus, asking Him, ‘Where do You desire that we should prepare for You to eat the Passover.’” I commented on this prior to the Days of Unleavened Bread. The reference here, in what is called “the first of the unleavened” or “the first of the unleavened bread,” is not a reference to the first holy day of Unleavened Bread (the first day of the seven days of Unleavened Bread) because the first day of the seven days of Unleavened Bread is a holy day. It comes after the Passover.

It is very plain in Leviticus 23. Passover is on the 14th; the days of Unleavened Bread begin on the 15th—and the first day is a holy day. The expression “the first of the unleavened bread” or “the first of unleavened” was a term that referred to “the 13th day of the first month.” In this year, it would have been Tuesday.

The Jews’ custom was that after 12 o’clock noon on the 13th, no more leavened bread was to be made. No more dough was to be put out to rise. They began to clean and gather up things, to gather the leavening. Now, they continued to eat the leavened bread that they had, but there had to come a point you stopped baking it. You know, you don’t bake right up to sunset on the 15th. There is a cutoff point. Their cutoff point was at noon on the 13th. After that they didn’t bake more leavened bread. They would continue to eat what they had from noon on the 13th to noon on the 14th. After noon on the 14th they burned the leavening or it was consumed that afternoon, prior to sunset that evening.

Most of us do that. We dispose of our leavening at least a few hours before or sometimes the day before. Maybe you have a little bit you have saved back, and you finish it off that morning. Well, they did something similar. The 13th was known as “the first day of the unleavened” because it was the beginning of the time, from noon, that they could only bake unleavened bread. It can be confusing as you read through it without knowing that phrase. It’s just a little awkward.

They asked, ‘Where do You want us to prepare the Passover?’ He told them and they did. I know that there are some who say that Christ changed

the time of Passover or some have said it in the past. I don’t know about saying it now, but some in the past have said that Christ changed the time of the Passover. I find it hard to reconcile that with the account that’s given right here.

The disciples brought it up. The clear implication from Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22 is they ate the Passover when they expected to eat the Passover. Can you imagine Jesus saying, ‘Go prepare the Passover’ the day before they had ever been doing it? ‘You know, we are going to eat Passover tonight.’ If they had always done it a night later, can you imagine Peter not saying, ‘Wait a minute, Lord, You are a day early, aren’t You? Why are we doing it tonight? That’s not till tomorrow night.’ Can you imagine Peter just letting it pass and not asking why? He asked for a whole lot less than that. That would have been pretty major.

There was never a “ripple,” never a question. It was never an issue. It never seemed to have come up. In fact, the disciples came to Him and said, ‘Where do You want us to prepare it?’ In fact, Peter and John were the ones that Christ sent. They didn’t have any questions. They weren’t surprised. They weren’t taken aback. It was just the normal course of things. They ate the Passover every year, and there is no indication here that they ate it any other time than when they expected to eat it.

It’s plain when you go through John’s account (John 19:14) that the Pharisees were observing it a day later than Christ did. I have no questions as to who knew the right time. Christ told Peter and John where to go and they did. Things were prepared; they went in to eat the Passover.

We will continue the account.

Matthew 26:20, “And evening came and He sat down with the twelve.”

John 13:2-5, we will pick up the account, “And during supper (the devil having already put into the mind of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, that he should betray Him), Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God, and was returning to God; He rose from the supper, and put aside His garments; and took a towel, and secured it around His waist. Afterwards He poured water into a washing basin, and began washing the disciples’ feet, and wiping them with the towel which He had at His waist.” The clear implication from John 13 is that Jesus washed Judas’ feet.

I wonder if you have thought about that. Suppose you knew that somebody was a traitor, someone

who purported to be your friend, had sold you out and was collaborating with people who were going to murder you. How kindly disposed do you think you'd be toward that person? To really grasp the compassion, the mercy, the attitude, and the willingness to serve, what about serving a "Judas"? It's no big deal to serve somebody who is nice to you, somebody who is your best friend and always does good things for you. It's easy to serve that person because you want to. You serve them; they serve you. What about serving a "Judas"? Do you feel much incentive to go out and serve a "Judas"? I don't think any of us do. Christ got down and washed his feet. He had that attitude, that willingness to serve, that attitude of humbling Himself; He began washing the disciples' feet. We went through the account at Passover. I won't go into the details.

Judas dips the sop and then leaves: Matthew 26:21-25, Mark 14:18-21, Luke 22:21-23 and John 13:18-32.

Matthew 26:21, "And while they were eating, He said, 'Truly I am telling you, that one of you shall betray Me!'" It is plain that they were still eating the meal because different ones began to ask about it. This was upsetting.

John 13:24, "Then Simon Peter motioned to him [John] to ask who it might be that He was speaking about." This was a Middle Eastern style banquet. The table was fairly low to the floor, and they were reclining on cushions. The meal was on the table. John was over there right up next to Jesus, and Peter was always curious. That's why I find it hard to believe he wouldn't have asked something about Passover. He immediately kind of motioned to John and said, 'Ask Him who it is. Ask Him.'

Verse 25, "Leaning over on Jesus' chest, he asked Him, 'Lord, who is it?'"

Verse 26, "Jesus answered, 'It is he to whom I shall give this sop, after dipping it.' Then, after dipping the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, Simon's son." Now it was customary that there were not a lot of utensils that were used. Bread, even unleavened bread, would have been broken off and dipped. Often some of the food was wrapped in it and dipped in the gravy. You might compare it to a tortilla. If you have gone to a Mexican restaurant, they bring out these tortillas, and you wrap some of the food in it, using it to hold the food. Well, that's similar to what He did. He tore off a piece and wrapped a morsel of meat in it, dipped it in the gravy and handed it to someone. The dish was evidently there near Him.

He just quietly said to John, 'It will be the one that I hand this to.' And He handed it to Judas.

Verse 27, "...Jesus therefore said to him, 'What you are going to do, do quickly!'"

Verse 30, "After receiving the sop, he immediately went out:" Judas got up and left.

Verses 28-29, the others really didn't grasp it; they thought that maybe Judas was being sent out to buy something for that evening or to give something to the poor—since he claimed to be so interested in them. They didn't really grasp what had happened, but in reality, Judas had gone out to betray Him. This was during the meal portion.

Eating the unleavened bread: Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-24.

Matthew 26:26, "And while they were eating, Jesus took the bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.'" This makes it plain that it was at the conclusion of the meal, as the meal was drawing to a close, that Jesus then took the bread and the wine and gave a special significance. He took the bread, broke it and gave it to them; He said, 'This is My body, broken for you.'

Verses 27-28, "And after taking the cup, and giving thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'All of you drink of it. Because this is My blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" He took the cup and said, 'This is My blood shed for you.' This was obviously something that was done in a special way at the end of the meal to give significance to it. Judas had gone by then. It was certainly appropriate that Judas was not there to partake of the symbols of Christ's sacrifice because he didn't really accept those symbols. He did not partake of that although he was present at the foot washing. Jesus was willing to wash his feet, but Judas did not partake of the symbols of the New Covenant.

In this context, there was a contention.

Luke 22:24, "And there was also an argument among them about this: which of them should be thought to be the greatest." They got to arguing about who was the most important. Who's going to have the greatest job in the Kingdom?

Verses 25-27, "And He told them, 'The kings of the nations lord it over them; and those exercising religious authority over them are called benefactors. But with you it shall not be this way: but he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he who leads, let him be as he who serves.'" Christ made it plain that the real key to greatness is service and

humility—willing to serve and not to exalt the self.

John 13:34, “A new commandment I am giving to you, for this purpose, that you should love one another; in the same way as I have loved you, this is the way you also should love one another.” That’s the way. Not simply love. Our relationship with one another is not simply as neighbors. You are to love your neighbor as yourself. You are to deal fairly and equitably with him. Your neighbor is anybody you may come into contact with. Deal fairly and above board with all people.

But with the brethren, we are told that we’re more than neighbors—we’re brothers. We are not simply neighbors—we are family. Christ said, ‘This is the commandment that I am giving you. Don’t simply love your brother as yourself, love him the way I have loved you—with a sacrificing kind of love. We’re not commanded to love our neighbor that way. We’re commanded to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We deal with him the way we want to be dealt with. Treat him fairly. Treat him the same way we wish to be treated. That’s certainly expected. But we’re told with the brethren we are to even go beyond that. We need to have the kind of attitude that Christ Himself had.

Peter denies Christ three times: Matthew 26:31-35, Mark 14:27-31, Luke 22:31-34 and John 13:36-38.

Matthew 26:31, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘All of you will be offended because of Me during this night: because it has been written, “I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered abroad.”’”

Verse 33, “And answering, Peter said to Him, ‘Even if all should be offended in You, I will never be offended!’” Peter was quick to tell Him, ‘I don’t care who forsakes You; I don’t care who leaves or who does what. I will never back down. I will never turn away from You. I am prepared to go to the bitter end.’

Verse 34, “Jesus said to him, ‘Truly I tell you, that during this night, before the cock crows, you will deny Me three times.’” Christ said, ‘You don’t really know what you’re saying. Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.’

Verse 35, “Peter said to Him, ‘Even if it were needful for me to die with You, in no way will I deny You!’ And all the disciples answered in the same way.” Peter was just adamant; he knew he wouldn’t do that. Well, Christ knew he would because as I’ve mentioned before, there was a lesson Peter had to learn.

Peter had not come to realize that his strength was inadequate. We need more than what we can supply. We need God’s strength. Our strength is inadequate. Our strength can fail us. Peter learned that in a very humiliating experience. He learned that and he simply didn’t make the mistake of relying on his own strength anymore. He was clearly not converted at this time.

Luke 22:32, “But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail: and when you are converted, establish and strengthen your brethren.” When you are converted! That would, of course, be at the Day of Pentecost.

Next, we find Christ’s message to the disciples on that final evening of the Passover.

John 14:2, “In My Father’s house and family there are many positions and offices.” There are many responsibilities and offices.

Verses 2-3 (NKJV), “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” Christ makes it plain. He didn’t tell the disciples that they would go to heaven.

Some want to quote, “In My Father’s house there are many mansions.” I can remember as a child growing up in the Baptist Church, the preacher would read, “In My Father’s house are many mansions.” Many times they do that at funerals. At that point they would close the Book and begin to talk about how the dear departed were in heaven.

As a child I remember my concept when somebody said “mansion,” the only thing I could think of was some of these antebellum-style homes. My concept, as a child, was that the streets of heaven must be lined with great big white houses with great big white columns. Many mansions—just filled with mansions.

The preachers want to stop there and give you the impression that you are going to go floating off up there; you check into that great hotel in the sky. You get your room, and you don’t check out. That is not what Christ said.

Verse 3, He said, “And if I go and prepare a position and place for you, I am coming again, and will receive you into a close personal and intimate relationship with Myself; so that where I am, you may be also.” Christ made it plain that we are not going up there and meeting Him. He is coming here to us. He didn’t say, ‘I am going away, and I will leave you a road map as to how to get there.’ He said, ‘I am going to come back.’ The term “My Father’s house” was a reference to “the temple,” which the Jews understood.

Matthew 21:13, Christ had said just a few days earlier, "...It has been written, 'My [Father's] house shall be called a house of prayer.' But you have made it a den of robbers and thieves!" The temple was symbolic of the Father's house. The temple did not symbolize heaven. The Holy of Holies and the ark of the covenant symbolized the throne of God. There were many compartments and apartments. There were many places in the temple that were assigned to various offices and functions of the priesthood. The particular office or dwelling that particular ones held was in accordance with the position that they held there in the government. These apartments or places were around on three sides of the temple. They were part of the temple.

The concept given is that the New Jerusalem is going to come down from God out of heaven (Revelation 21:2). Christ is going to prepare a place and He's going to bring it with Him. It's ultimately going to come down. He's going to come down and assign offices and responsibilities. There's an analogy here, and it's plain that He's going to come back to bring the reward.

John 14:16, "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that It may remain with you forever, even into the ages of eternity."

Verse 26, "The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in My name, It will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things, whatever I have said to you."

One of the things the Holy Spirit does is open our mind to understand spiritual things. One of the reasons we need God's Spirit is that it helps us to learn to grasp spiritual things. On our own and with God's Spirit working *with us*, we can make changes (certainly God's Spirit is with all of us here), but until you come to a point of conversion, until you come to really truly repent and be baptized, there is a difference. The difference is that with God's Spirit *with you*, you can make progress, grow, make a certain level of progress or go to a certain point on your own. You can go to a certain point, but then it's like you come up against a brick wall. You've made progress, changed, done certain things and gone as far as you can go, but you can't seem to get beyond that point. That's the point beyond which you can't go without God's Spirit *in you*! The Spirit had been *with* the disciples, but it hadn't yet come *into them*, which it would on the Day of Pentecost.

With young people growing up in the Church or new people coming in—perspective members—the Spirit is working with them, but they'll only make progress to a certain point. Beyond that point they cannot go until they surrender, make that commitment and the Spirit comes into them. Then it is like somebody tore down the wall. Progress is still a step at a time and a day at a time, but there's no longer a limitation beyond which you can't go. At that point, God's Spirit is the unlimiting factor.

Christ makes it plain there is no so-called "independent" Christian.

John 15:1-4, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that is not producing fruit, He takes it away: and every one that is producing fruit, He cleanses and purges it, so that it may produce more fruit. You are already clean through the word which I have spoken to you. Remain and live in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch is not able to produce fruit by itself, all alone, except it remain and live in the vine; in exactly the same way, neither can you produce fruit, except you remain and live in Me."

Imagine cutting off a branch, tying it to a fence post or a telephone pole and expecting it to bear fruit. Of course not! You cut off the branch, and it is not receiving nourishment anymore from the trunk—it dries up and withers.

Verse 6, the only thing you can use it for is firewood. Christ made that plain. All the branches have to stay attached to the main trunk. We have to be unified. The source of our ability comes through Christ. It comes through being attached to the body. Christ also made it plain to the disciples.

Verse 16, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you. Also, I have ordained and appointed you, that you should go out and produce fruit, and that your fruit should remain: so that whatever you may ask of the Father in My name, He may give it to you."

Why are you here? Why am I here? Well, God called us; God chose us. I am not here because I figured it out for myself, and you're not here because you did it yourself. God sought us; God called us. Christ said, 'You haven't chosen Me; I have chosen you.' We didn't take the initiative, God did. He took the initiative in our lives. If God had not taken the first step, we would still be in our sins.

Christ then went on talking about how we would have trials and tribulation. Why did He tell us we should take courage?

John 16:33, “I have spoken these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good courage; I have overcome and conquered the world!” ‘I have overcome! I have conquered!’ We can have courage in facing whatever problems, whatever trial, whatever difficulties in this world, realizing that Christ has already won. The battle is won. The war is won, and all we have to do is hang on to the winning side. It’s already determined.

I am not going through every detail here in John 14, 15 and 16. We went through that on Passover. I’ll hit some of the high points. We note here they had been there in the upper room where they had the Passover service.

Jesus comes to Gethsemane to pray: Matthew 26:36, Mark 14:32 and Luke 22:39.

Then Christ and the disciples left and on the way out to the Garden of Gethsemane, they were discussing some of the things that are here in John 15 and 16. We have the account of what Jesus was telling them as they were walking along. By this time they came to Gethsemane.

Matthew 26:36, “Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane: and He said to the disciples, ‘Sit here, while I go and pray nearby.’”

Jesus takes Peter, James and John with Him: Matthew 26:37-38, Mark 14:33-34 and Luke 22:40

Matthew 26:37, “Then He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee: and He began to be extremely sad and deeply depressed.” The whole reality of what was happening began to converge on Him, and it just overwhelmed Him. He felt just absolutely overwhelmed at the thought.

Verse 38, “Then He said to them, ‘My soul is extremely sad, even to death: wait here, and watch with Me.’” ‘I just feel so depressed that life is a burden. I am just extremely overwhelmed with this sense of what is happening.’ He said, “Wait here and watch with Me.”

Jesus prays for three hours: Matthew 26:39-44, Mark 14:35-40 and Luke 22:41-46.

Matthew 26:39, “And after He had gone forward a little way, He prostrated Himself, face down, and prayed, ...” What did Jesus do when He reached that point when He began to be overwhelmed with this discouragement and this depression? He went to God with it! He went to God and made His request known.

Verse 39, continuing, “...saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as You will.’” He came and had this request. He said, ‘I don’t want

to go through with this, but help Me—not My will but Your will.’ Jesus prayed to come to that point of absolute total surrender. There is a serenity that comes from surrender. When you really put it in God’s hands, there is a peace of mind that you have. There is peace and Christ had that. He wrestled through it in prayer. He had total surrender. He was asking God to help Him get rid of any vestige of holding on to His way. ‘Let it be Your will.’ And when you really turn loose and you know it is in God’s hands, you can relax and have peace. We have the account in John 17, some of the prayer that He prayed. Then He began to get His mind more and more on others because He had peace in Himself.

The time of betrayal: Matthew 26:45-46 and Mark 14:41-42.

Matthew 26:46, “‘Get up, let us go. Look! He who is betraying Me is approaching.’” Finally, He told His disciples, ‘Come on, let’s go.’ He was ready.

That’s the key. He understands what it’s like to be depressed, to be discouraged and to be absolutely overwhelmed. As the reality of what He was facing, what He was going to have to go through and what it was going to be like started to come to mind, it was just overwhelming. But He turned loose. He knew that God knew what He was doing and He prayed it through. We have to come to that point of surrender. Once you really turn loose, then you can have peace because you know that God is going to work it out.

Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss: Matthew 26:47-49, Mark 14:43-45, Luke 22:47-48 and John 18:1-9.

Matthew 26:47-49, “And while He was still speaking, suddenly Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people. And he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, ‘Whomever I kiss, He is the One: seize Him.’ And immediately he came up to Jesus, and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ And with an outward show of love, he kissed Him.”

Now, they had paid this sum of money. Judas would lead them to where He was privately. They were just a small group, away from the crowds. The other thing was that as they came in with a group like this, it was dark and they had these torches. These were men all about the same age and would have been similar in appearance. They weren’t sure of being able to pick out Christ in a group of other young men about His age. These were men around age 30. Jesus was

age 33, so I think it is safe to say the disciples were pretty much in the 25-35-age bracket. They would have been men right around that age. Christ was standing there, and they weren't sure they would pick Him out in a crowd like that where it was dark and torches and everything. But Judas would have known Him well; he went up and kissed Him. It's apparent that Jesus didn't have a halo over His head to where you could see Him because He glowed in the dark. No, He looked just like an ordinary Jew of His day. And they paid Judas a considerable sum of money to "tip them off" as to where He was and then to go and point Him out.

Peter cuts off ear of high priest's servant: Matthew 26:50-55, Mark 14:46-49, Luke 22:49-53 and John 18:10-12.

Matthew 26:50, "But Jesus asked him, 'Friend, for what purpose have you come?' Then they came to Jesus, and grabbed Him with their hands, and arrested Him."

All was done to fulfill prophecy: Matthew 26:56 and Mark 14:50-52.

Matthew 26:56, "...Then all the disciples, deserting Him, ran away." The disciples left. Everybody split.

Jesus led to high priest's house: Matthew 26:57, Mark 14:53, Luke 22:54 and John 18:13-14.

Matthew 26:57, "But those who had arrested Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled."

John 18:13, "And they led him away to Annas first; because he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year."

Peter follows into the courtyard: Matthew 26:58, Mark 14:54, Luke 22:54-55 and John 18:15-18.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all make plain that a couple of disciples followed Him. Peter followed Him. Peter is mentioned in all of the accounts. John makes it plain that he was with Peter. The two of them followed Him.

John 18:15-16, "Now following Jesus were Simon Peter and the other disciple [John]: but that disciple was known to the high priest, and he [John] entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter stood outside the door. Then the other disciple [John] who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in."

John was actually a witness to the trial because he entered into the room and stood there and watched. He was evidently known and had some

connections. He showed up there, and whoever was at the door let him come in. He stood there and watched. Peter was outside waiting.

Verse 24, "Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest." All of this commotion was going on, and then they brought Him in.

Chief priests illegally condemn Jesus: Matthew 26:59-65, Mark 14:55-63 and Luke 22:63-65.

All the accounts bring this in.

Matthew 26:59-60, "And the chief priests, and the elders, and the entire Sanhedrin, tried to find spurious evidence against Jesus, in order that they might put Him to death. But they did not find any: yes, even though many false witness had come forward, they did not find any." Now here we are in the wee hours of the morning. What kind of people do you find on the streets in the wee hours of the morning? They had false witnesses in there. If you notice the story, the false witnesses couldn't get their stories together.

Mark 14:56, "For many gave false testimony against Him, but their testimonies were not in agreement."

What had they done? They had gone out, dragged the streets and grabbed a few drunks in off the streets. They had gone out, grabbed some of these drunks that left the bar about one o'clock in the morning. Who else are you going to find on the streets in the wee hours? They got this crowd in there, and these guys couldn't even get their stories straight. They were all willing to go in there and give false testimony. They were trying to maintain the outward appearance of legality, so they needed two witnesses. They got this bunch of drunks, and they couldn't even find two of them who could remember the same story. So they had confusion there for a while until finally two of them managed to land on the same story. They said, 'Okay, that's it!'

Matthew 26:61, "But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, 'This Man said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it again in three days."'" You talk about a "stacked deck" in a courtroom. The judge starts parading witnesses through and finds two that agree. 'Those are the right ones. I know because they agree. It's clear.' All you have to do is go through the account and you can see what a trumped up false thing this was. It was an outward sham. They were ready to crucify Him, to take Him to Pilate.

Sanhedrin condemns Jesus and sends Him to Pilate: Matthew 27:1-2, Mark 15:1, Luke 22:66-73:1 and John 18:28.

Matthew 27:2, “And after binding Him, they led Him away, and delivered Him over to Pontius Pilate, the governor.”

At this point, we will stop here this evening. The next Bible study we will conclude with Jesus before Pilate, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension into heaven. The final events will be covered in the next Bible study.

Hopefully, as we have been going through this series on the harmony of the Gospels, we can gain a little more insight into what Jesus did, what He said and taught, and gain a deeper insight into the day-by-day things that transpired. We see the development through His ministry, as it was finally time for things to culminate. He came in full force there to Jerusalem realizing that things had built up and the foundation was laid. When the foundation is laid, the full force doesn't take long.

I think from our standpoint, we need to realize that we are right now in the position of finishing the foundational structure in terms of the work. When the time comes that we “hit it” with full force, it won't take long. But we are in that position right now of completing the foundation. With that we will be concluded this evening.

Bible Study # 39
August 8, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Matthew 27:1—28:20; Mark 15:1—16:20; Luke 22:66—24:53; John 18:28—21:25

Everything has been building to this point—to **the events that culminated in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ**. He came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He was that final Passover Lamb that God provided.

Last Bible study we went through the events of the final Passover supper that He observed with His disciples. We saw the events that culminated with His arrest and ended with Peter's denial. There is an important lesson that we are to gain from that. God ensured that Peter learned the lesson, and then he went on to serve God in powerful ways. When we rely on human strength, it will fail us and let us down at a crucial time. Peter felt that when the going got tough, he could handle things.

Jesus had gone aside that evening and prayed. He went a little further and prayed fervently. His disciples dozed off and fell asleep. Jesus recognized the crucial nature of the events He was going to be going through. He saw the enormity of what lay ahead, more than anything ever. The disciples did not recognize how powerless they were. If they had, they would have found it a little bit easier to concentrate. There was an illusion of the suffering. Peter went through a bitter experience and recognized his own weakness. At a crucial time his strength failed, and he learned a crucial lesson. He learned the lesson to never depend on his own strength. Strength was something that came from above.

John 18:28, "Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium [which is the judgment hall]: and it was early. Now they did not enter the Praetorium, so they might not be defiled: but that they might eat the Passover." The members of the Sanhedrin did not go into the Judgment Hall to talk to Pilate. They didn't go in the Judgment Hall so as to not be defiled by coming into contact with Pilate. Many of the Jews observed the Passover on a different day than Jesus and His disciples—who had observed it on the previous night. The members of the Sanhedrin and others had not observed it yet. We follow the practice of Jesus.

Notice the hypocrisy of their thinking. It would be a terrible thing if they would come into contact with the Italian governor. They would be defiled and couldn't eat the Passover. They built up this attitude in their minds. Like Jesus told them, 'they strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.' Defilement originates in the heart and mind.

Judas repents and hangs himself: Matthew 27:3-10 and Acts 1:15-19.

Matthew 27:3-4, "Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he regretted what he had done, and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' But they said, 'What does that matter to us? That is your problem.'" 'Big deal! What do we care? What you did was a sin, but paying you was not a sin.' They had paid the bribe and didn't feel guilty. Then they had a great discussion.

Verse 5, "Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple, and left, and went out and hung himself."

Acts 1:18, "(Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst in the middle and all his entrails gushed out." He evidently hung himself in an out-of-the-way place; the body hung, fell down and burst. If you put the two accounts together, you have the full story. Matthew tells us how it started; Luke tells us how it ended.

Matthew 27:6, "And the chief priests took the pieces of silver, saying, 'It is not lawful to put these coins into the treasury, since it is the price of blood.'" 'We used this to cause a man to be betrayed and murdered. We can't put it back in the temple treasury.'

Verse 7, "After taking counsel, they bought the potter's field with those coins, for a burying ground for strangers." They bought a parcel of ground and used it for a cemetery.

Jesus condemned before Pilate: Matthew 27:11-14, Mark 15:2-5, Luke 23:2-4 and John 18:29-30.

Luke 23:4, "Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitude, 'I find no fault, nothing to condemn, in this man.'" Pilate found Him innocent. 'This Man hasn't done anything.'

Verse 5, "But they were indignantly insistent, saying, 'He stirs up the people, teaching throughout the entirety of Judaea, beginning from Galilee even to here.'" This mob was agitated. 'He has stirred up the whole nation. He started in Galilee.'

Verse 6, “But Pilate, when he heard Galilee mentioned, asked whether the Man were a Galilean.” When Pilate heard this, he thought he was going to get “off the hook.”

Verse 7, “And after finding out that He was from Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also at Jerusalem at that same time.”

He said, ‘That should be Herod’s jurisdiction.’ Pilate was a politician, and they had been doing that for years. He wanted to “pass the buck” to Herod.

Verse 8, “When Herod saw Jesus, he was extremely pleased: for he had been wishing for a long time to see Him, because he had been hearing so many things about Him; and he was hoping to see some miracle or sign performed by Him.” Herod heard about Jesus and was really excited. He had heard about all these miracles and had never seen a miracle.

Verses 9-11, “And he questioned Him with many words; but Jesus answered him nothing. And the chief priests and the scribes stood and vehemently accused Him, and Herod and his troops were arrogantly insulting and ridiculing Him. And after mocking Him, they put a gorgeous robe on Him, and sent Him back to Pilate.”

When Herod didn’t see any miracles, he let his troops abuse Him and sent Him back to Pilate. Here was a man who had an obligation to enforce justice, but he didn’t want to “make waves.” If he could “pass the buck,” he would.

Pilate finds Jesus innocent: Luke 23:13-15 and John 18:31-38.

John 18:31, “Then Pilate said to them, ‘You take Him, and judge Him according to your own law.’ But the Jews answered him, ‘We are not permitted to put anyone to death...’” They didn’t want to do that. They wanted Him taken out and executed. They wanted a horrible death for this One whom they hated. Pilate spoke to Jesus in a little more detail.

Verses 33-36, “Then Pilate entered the Praetorium [the judgment hall] again, and called Jesus, and asked Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you asking this of your own self, or did others tell you this about Me?’ Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own people and the chief priests have delivered You up to me. What did You do?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would fight, that I should not be delivered up to the Jews. But now My kingdom is not from this world and society.’”

Christ and His disciples did not get involved in the politics of this world. He came as an emissary of a Kingdom to come; as His followers, we find ourselves in the same situation.

Pilate releases Barabbas and crucifies Jesus: Matthew 27:15-23, Mark 15:6-14, Luke 23:16-23 and John 18:39-40.

Matthew 27:18, “Because He knew that through jealousy and envy they had arrested Him.”

Mark 15:7, “And there was one called Barabbas, who was imprisoned with his confederates after making insurrection. And during the insurrection, he had committed murder.”

Luke 23:18, “But they cried out in unison, yelling, ‘Away with this Man, and release Barabbas to us!’”

John 18:40, “Then they all shouted again, saying, ‘Not this One, but Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas was a robber.” Barabbas was the terrorist leader of his day. Pilate knew that through jealousy and envy they had arrested Jesus Christ. He knew that was what it was. He desired to turn Him loose.

Matthew 27:24, “When Pilate saw that nothing could be done to change their minds, but instead a riot was starting, he took water, and washed his hands in front of the multitude, proclaiming, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this righteous Man. You must tend to it yourselves.’” He saw a riot was on the verge of starting. He was concerned about his own political future, not what was right and wrong. That is what is wrong with human government. They know what they should do and have some inclination to do it, but pressure is brought—and they back down. He said, ‘I am going to wash my hands of it.’ He thought he could wash away the guilt.

Pilate set Barabbas free and sent Jesus to be crucified. They beat and scourged Jesus Christ. They brought Him out and were still demanding that He be crucified. Finally, Pilate “caved in” and they led Him away to be crucified.

Soldiers lead Jesus away to be crucified: Matthew 27:31-33, Mark 15:20-22, Luke 23:26-31 and John 19:16-17.

John 19:17, “And carrying His own cross, He went out to the place called The Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha...”

Matthew 27:31-33, “And they led Him away to crucify Him. And as they were coming out, they found a man, a Cyrenian, named Simon; and they compelled him to carry His cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means, Place of a Skull...”

He started out carrying His cross, but because of the brutal beating, He was unable to continue.

Simon of Cyrene carried the cross the rest of the way. Simon of Cyrene later came into the Church and his children are mentioned in Paul's epistles. We are not told if he knew anything about Jesus Christ. This had quite an impact on him. Later his family is mentioned—his sons, Alexander and Rufus, are mentioned in Mark 15:21.

Title and accusation written on cross: Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38 and John 19:19-22.

As we continue the account, we find there was a sign that was made. This is a good example of how the Bible interprets itself. Every writer gave a summary account. You give the information that impressed you.

Matthew 27:37, “And above His head they put up His written accusation, ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’”

Mark 15:26, “And the inscription of His accusation was written over Him, ‘The King of the Jews.’”

Luke 23:38, “Now there was also an inscription written over Him in Greek and Latin and Hebrew, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’” Luke tells us something Matthew and Mark didn't tell us. It was written in three languages. They summarized the title.

John 19:19-21, “And Pilate also wrote a title, and put it on the cross. It was written, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’ Then many of the Jews read this title: because the place where Jesus was crucified was close to the city (now it was written in Hebrew, in Greek, and in Latin). Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, ‘Do not write, “The King of the Jews”; but rather, “He claimed, ‘I am King of the Jews.’”” The Jews wanted to change the sign to that *He claimed* He was King of the Jews.

Verse 22, “Pilate answered, ‘What I have written, I have written.’” Enough is enough. This was a testimony written in languages that everybody present could read, a testimony any literate person in that area could read. Here was something that testified in each of those languages. Every account gives a little more detail that the others didn't give. That is how the Bible is written.

Two thieves crucified with Jesus: Matthew 27:38, Mark 15:27-28, Luke 23:32-33 and John 19:18.

Luke 23:33, “And when they came to the place called a Skull, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right side, and one on the left.”

Matthew 27:38, “At the same time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right hand, and another on the left hand.” This tells us that He was placed in the midst of those.

Jesus is mocked and reviled; darkness: Matthew 27:39-45, Mark 15:29-33 and Luke 23:35-44.

Luke 23:35, “And the people stood gawking. And the rulers were also sneering and ridiculing Him with them, saying, ‘He saved others! Let Him save Himself, if this is the Christ, the chosen One of God!’”

Matthew 27:44, “And in the same way the robbers also, who were crucified together with Him, insulted and reproached Him.” He said, “robbers”—plural.

Luke 23:39-40, “Now one of the criminals who had been crucified blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us!’ But the other one rebuked him, saying, ‘Don't you even fear God, seeing that you are suffering the same condemnation?’” Luke tells us that one was joining in, but the other was not.

Both said something at the beginning. But Luke says one continued to taunt; the other one rebuked the other. ‘Don't you even fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation? You are going to be dead and face God in the judgment.’

Verse 41-42, “‘And we truly are condemned justly; because we are receiving a due payment for what we did: but this Man did nothing wrong.’ And he said to Jesus, ‘Remember me, Lord, when You are coming in Your kingdom.’”

Note here the attitude of conversion. What does it take to be converted? —Basically to repent of our sins and to believe the Gospel. The thief demonstrated this attitude of repentance. He said that he was getting what he had coming. He offered no excuses. He made no attempt to minimize what he had done. ‘I am getting what I had coming. I have sinned.’ That is not the normal carnal approach. ‘I have broken the law of God, and I am getting my just consequences.’ When you talk to anybody in prison, they always say they got a “bum rap”; he is on appeal and everybody is against him. Talk to anyone in law enforcement.

What we have here is something different. He acknowledged himself as a sinner. Did he have faith? Did he believe the Gospel? Here he was hanging there, a man whose life was ebbing away. He said, ‘I know that You are going to come into Your Kingdom. I believe that You are the Messiah, the King, and that You are going to

establish that Kingdom. When You do, please remember me.’ Here was an act of faith.

There’s no evidence to the fact that Jesus was going to do anything except die. But he believed that this Man was Who He said He was. He believed that and he said, “Remember me, Lord, when You come into Your kingdom.”

Verse 43, “And Jesus said to him, ‘Today I am truly telling you, you shall be with Me in Paradise.’” The punctuation has caused some misunderstanding. ‘Today you will be with Me in Paradise.’ –That is not what it said. The question is: did Jesus go to Paradise that day? Three days later He told Mary, ‘Don’t touch Me; I have not ascended to My Father’ (John 20:17).

Ecclesiastes 9:5, “...the dead know nothing, ...”

The thief did not expect to go to Paradise that day but when Christ came with His Kingdom. Perhaps he had heard the message that Christ preached. Here was Jesus who could see into the hearts of men, could see that this man had made a commitment and that he was prepared to stick with it. God looks on the heart.

How long does a person have to be converted? Some people have misunderstood. How many Sabbaths do you have to keep? It is not a matter of that, but how many are you willing to keep? What are you willing to do? Repentance is a willingness to turn from the works of man. Our willingness to do those things is an evidence of repentance and a desire to do what God says—but it is not our physically doing them. It is an important principle that we learn from this account.

John 19:25-27, “And standing near the cross of Jesus was His mother, and the sister of His mother, and Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. Therefore seeing His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, Jesus said to His mother, ‘Woman, now this is your son!’ Then He told the disciple, ‘See, this is your mother!’ And from that very hour the disciple took her into his own home.” One of the last things He did was to ask John to take care of His mother. Here was Jesus still thinking of others at the last part of His life. He asked John to look after her.

Jesus is forsaken, offered vinegar; spear thrust into His side; He dies; veil torn in two:

Matthew 27:46-51, Mark 15:34-38, Luke 23:45-46 and John 19:28-30.

Matthew 27:46, “And about the ninth hour Jesus yelled out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani:’ That is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me.’”

Verses 49-50, “But the rest said, ‘Let Him alone. Let us watch, and see if Elijah comes to save Him!’ And another took a spear, and thrust it into His side, and out came water and blood. And then Jesus yelled out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His Spirit.”

Luke 23:45-46, “And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was ripped down the middle. And crying out with a loud voice, Jesus said, ‘Father, into Your hands, I commit My Spirit.’ And after saying these things, He died.”

John 19:34, “Rather one of the soldiers had already pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water had gushed out!”

Matthew 27:51, “And suddenly the veil of the temple was ripped in two from the top to the bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks split and cracked.” There was an earthquake. The veil was torn in two. Previously, direct access to God the Father was not available. When Jesus died, the veil was torn in two to demonstrate that there was no longer a barrier. He had done away with what separated us from God the Father. We have direct access because our sins have been paid for.

Verses 52-53, “And the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints which had fallen asleep arose, and walked out of the tombs after His resurrection, and went into the Holy City, and appeared to many.” There was a literal resurrection that occurred. The tombs opened. They did not come out of their graves until after Jesus was resurrected. They were resurrected to physical life.

What happened to the saints? The same thing that happened to Lazarus—eventually he died. These saints were resurrected to physical life. Evidently, they were people who were known in the community. The whole purpose was to witness to the resurrection. If someone appeared and said they were Abraham Lincoln, you wouldn’t believe it. But if your next-door neighbor, whose funeral was last week, suddenly was resurrected, that would get your attention. These were people that when they were resurrected, it created a stir. They had probably heard the message. Some would be there for the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), receive the Holy Spirit and will be in the first resurrection.

John 19:31, “Then the Jews, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (because it was a preparation day, since that coming Sabbath was a great day, a holy day [the First Day of Unleavened Bread]) [NKJV, “a high day”], requested of Pilate that their legs

might be broken, and their bodies taken away.” They didn’t want the bodies to remain on the cross on the Sabbath. But it didn’t bother them to murder an innocent Man. They wanted to break their legs. When they were hanging and once the legs were broken, the pain was so excruciating; they couldn’t push themselves up to get a breath every so often. They would die in a few minutes. He had a very gruesome death. They did not break Jesus’ legs because He was already dead.

Verse 33, “But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.” They were not to break any bones of the Passover lamb. This was prophetic.

Many of the women watch to the end: Matthew 27:55-56, Mark 15:40-41 and Luke 23:48-49.

Matthew 27:55-56, “And there were many women standing at a distance, looking on, who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him. Among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.” Jesus died at three o’clock in the afternoon.

Body of Jesus laid in tomb: Matthew 27:57-61, Mark 15:42-47, Luke 23:50-55 and John 19:38-42.

Matthew 27:57-58, “And as evening approached, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, Joseph by name, who also himself was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered to him.”

Luke 23:50-51, “And then a man named Joseph, from Arimathaea, a city of the Jews, being a counselor, and a good and righteous man, (He had not voted with the counsel, and did not approve of their actions,) who also himself was waiting for the kingdom of God.” We are given a little more insight. Joseph had not voted with the Sanhedrin. He was a disciple, but he had concealed it.

John 19:39, “And also Nicodemus, who at the beginning had come to Jesus by night, came carrying a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about one hundred pounds.”

They were evidently the two members of the counsel who had not gone along with it. They had been afraid to take a public stand before this. They had done what they had done quietly. They were men of wealth and importance, afraid of what people would think, but when it came “down to the wire,” they took a stand and made plain where they stood. When they saw what

the leaders were doing, they couldn’t go along with it.

Mark 15:44-45, “And Pilate was amazed, and wondered if He were already dead. And when he called the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead very long. And after he knew it from the centurion, he granted permission to Joseph to take the body.”

Pilate asked, ‘Is He already dead?’ He sent a soldier to go and check; he came back and said, ‘Yes, He is dead.’ Pilate then wrote a release for the body to be released to Joseph and Nicodemus. This was at sunset.

Verse 46, “And he had bought a linen cloth: and after taking Him down, he wrapped Him in the linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of a rock; then he rolled a stone to cover the entrance of the tomb.” They took the body of Jesus and very quickly wound it with linen. They did what they could and buried it in a nearby tomb. They buried the body very quickly prior to sunset. We are given that account.

Now let us notice the three days and three nights. Matthew 27:57, “And as evening approached, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, Joseph... a disciple of Jesus.”

Verses 59-60, “And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb,” Let us see what happened.

After Holy Day women buy and prepare spices: Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56.

Mark 16:1, “And after the Sabbath was past [the first holy day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread], Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought aromatics and spices, that they might come and anoint Him.” This tells us plainly it was after the Sabbath was past that they bought the spices to prepare Him.

Luke 23:56, “And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments [on the day following the holy day Sabbath], and on the [weekly] Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.” Look at what Luke tells us. They prepared the spices and then rested on the Sabbath. How could they buy the spices after the Sabbath and prepare them before the Sabbath. The key to the mystery is made plain.

John 19:31, “Then the Jews, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (because it was a preparation day, since that coming Sabbath was a great day, a holy day [the First Day of Unleavened Bread]),” (NKJ, “Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on

the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day),” It was the preparation day. The coming Sabbath was a high day—a holy day, the First Day of Unleavened Bread—that was an annual Sabbath. The preparation day on which Jesus was crucified was for an annual Sabbath, a high day. They prepared the spices and rested on the regular Sabbath.

When you put it together, He was crucified on the preparation day of an annual Sabbath. After that holy day (the First Day of Unleavened Bread) had past, they purchased and prepared the spices and then rested on the (weekly) Sabbath day. Then early Sunday morning as soon as dawn began to break, they made their way out there to embalm the body. But when they got there, the tomb was opened. If you go through all the accounts, it becomes very plain.

Women come to tomb early first day of week; Jesus already resurrected: Matthew 28:1-8, Mark 16:2-8, Luke 24:1-12 and John 20:1-10.

Matthew 28:1, “Now after the [two] Sabbaths [the first holy day during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the weekly Sabbath], as it was getting light toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.”

Mark 16:9, “Now after Jesus had risen, early the first day of the week He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.” He was already gone from the tomb on the first day of the week. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene.

John 20:1-2, “But on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came very early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance of the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved [that was the way John referred to himself], and told them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him!’” She went and got Simon Peter and John.

Verses 4-6, “And the two ran together: but the other disciple ran ahead, faster than Peter, and came to the tomb first. And stooping down and looking in, he saw the linen clothes lying there. However he did not enter. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen clothes lying there.” When they got there, John, being cautious, stopped; Peter, not being cautious, rushed right on in.

Let me point out something here in John 20. You have all heard of the shroud of Turin. It was a

fraud and we knew it. The Turin was one garment.

Verse 7, “And the handkerchief, which had been upon His head, was not lying with the linen clothes, but was folded up and was lying in a place by itself.” He was wrapped in two different things. There were two separate garments used to wrap His head and His body. The people who forged the garment back in the Middle Ages should have made two separate pieces. The selling of relics was a very popular and lucrative business. They should have made two different pieces. Peter and the others came and looked and went away. Mary came back.

Verses 11-12, “But Mary stood outside the entrance of the tomb, weeping. And as she was weeping, she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And suddenly she saw two angels dressed in white. And they were sitting, one at the head, and one at the foot, where the body of Jesus had been laid.”

Verses 15-16, “Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ But thinking that He was the gardener, she said to Him, ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away!’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ Turning around, she said to Him, ‘Rabboni!’ That is to say, ‘Teacher!’” When He said it that way, she turned.

Verse 17, “Jesus told her, ‘Do not even touch Me; because I have not yet ascended to My Father. But go to My brethren, and tell them, ‘I am ascending to My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.’”

Later on He did let the disciples touch Him (Matthew 28:9; John 20:27). But not until the wave sheaf, the first of the first fruits was offered in the temple.

Matthew 28:11-15, “And as they were leaving, some of the guards went into the city, and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. And the chief priests assembled with the elders; and after taking counsel, they gave the soldiers a large amount of money, instructing them ‘To say [Say], ‘His disciples came at night, and stole Him away while we were sleeping.’ And if this be heard by the governor, we will convince him, and you will have nothing to worry about.’ So they took the money, and did as they were instructed. And this report is widely circulated among the Jews to this day.”

The three days and three nights was a special witness to the priests. Remember when they asked for a sign? That sign was a special sign, in

a unique way, to the religious leaders of the day. Remember when He was buried. They had gone to Pilate saying that Jesus had been saying He was going to be resurrected and that the disciples were going to steal the body (Matthew 27:62-66). The soldiers were a witness to what happened, and the priests told them not to tell anybody. 'You tell everybody that you went to sleep, and if you get into trouble, we will get you out of it. But you need to spread this rumor.' If you pay somebody to tell a lie, there are two people who know it is a lie—and this was the situation here. It was a witness to them because they knew it was a lie.

The disciples had trouble handling the event of the resurrection.

Luke 24:10-11, "Now it was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary of James, and the rest of the women with them, who told the apostles these things. But their report appeared to them like idle talk, and they did not believe them." They didn't really believe it.

Verse 12, "Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb; and as he leaned over to look in, he saw the linen clothes lying there alone; and he went away, wondering in himself at what had occurred." He wondered what happened.

John 20:7, "And the handkerchief, which had been upon His head, was not lying with the linen clothes, but was folded up and was lying in a place by itself."

A very minor point—Jesus took time to fold them up and put them away neatly. In the excitement of the moment, you would have wanted to just put them away. But it showed His character. Jesus was a neat person. He cleaned up after Himself. The ushers would have had an easy time to clean up if they came around where Jesus sat. Anywhere you went behind Him, you would find it very neat. He cleaned up after Himself and folded up His garment. If He thought it was important at a time like that, then we should do so, also.

Jesus appeared there and began talking to them, and they couldn't believe it.

Luke 24:31, "And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him. Then He disappeared before them." When they realized who He was and their eyes were opened, He disappeared.

John 20:19, "Then, it being evening on that same day, the first day of the week, when the doors had already been shut where the disciples were assembled, because they were afraid of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the middle of them, and

said to them, 'Peace be to you!'" That scared them. Here they were in a locked room.

Matthew 28:10, "Then Jesus said unto them, 'Don't be afraid! Go tell My brethren that they must go into Galilee, and there they shall see Me.'"

Luke 24:36-37, "And as they were telling these things, Jesus Himself stood among them, and told them, 'Peace be to you!' But they were terrified and filled with fear, thinking that they were seeing a spirit." They thought they were seeing an apparition and were scared to death.

Verse 38-39, "And He asked them, 'Why are you disturbed, and why do these imaginations spring up in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. You can see that I AM! Handle Me, and see for yourselves; because a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.'"

'It is Me! I am here. You can touch Me. I have flesh and bones.' It didn't say anything about blood. He showed them the wounds. They couldn't believe it. They had seen Him die and knew He was dead. It was like their whole world had been shattered. They couldn't fully accept what it was.

Verse 41, "But, while they were yet disbelieving for joy, and were wondering, He asked them, 'Do you have anything here to eat?'"

Verses 44-45, "Then He said to them, 'These are the very words which I spoke to you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which have been written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me.' Then He opened their understanding and comprehension, that they might understand the scriptures." He explained the scriptures to them.

John 20:24-25, "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not present with them when Jesus came. Then the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I can see in His own hands the scars and holes of the nails, and put my own finger into the scars and holes of the nails, and put my own hand into His side, I will not believe; no, not ever!'"

Eight days later they were assembled again. Thomas had been saying he wouldn't believe it until he could touch Him. Ever "sounded off" and said something?

Verses 26-27, "But after eight days His disciples were again assembled inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, after the doors had already been shut, and stood in the middle of them, and said, 'Peace be to you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach here with your own finger, and look at

My hands; and reach out with your own hand, and put it into My side: and do not be faithless and unbelieving, but believing and filled with faith!” Jesus told Thomas to come and stick his hand here. Jesus knew what Thomas had said.

Verses 28-29, “Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, Thomas, you have believed: blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed!’”

Verses 30-31, “Therefore, Jesus did many other signs also in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these have been written, that you may believe and have faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in and through His name.”

1 Corinthians 15:4-7, details not given in the Gospels, “And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain until this present day, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then by all the apostles.” Paul mentions He was seen by the twelve, and there were over 500 that saw Him at once.

The disciples left Jerusalem and went to Galilee.

John 21:1, “After these things Jesus manifested and revealed Himself to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. And He manifested and revealed Himself this way...” They were at “loose ends.” He would appear and leave. They were having trouble putting things together.

Verse 3, “Then Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will go with you, too.’ They left, and immediately boarded the boat; and during that night they caught nothing.” Peter was an impulsive sort.

Verse 9, “Therefore, when they came up on the shore, they saw a fire of coals burning, and fish lying on it, and bread.”

Verse 12, “Jesus said to them, ‘Come and dine.’ But none of the disciples ventured to ask Him, ‘Who are You?’ knowing it was the Lord.” They didn’t quite know what to say.

Verses 14-17, “This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested and revealed to His disciples, after He had been resurrected from the dead. Therefore, when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I have deep personal affection for You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My

lambs!’ He asked him again, a second time, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I have deep personal affection for You.’ He said to him, ‘Shepherd My sheep.’ He asked him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, do you have deep personal affection for Me?’ Peter was grieved and hurt because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you have deep personal affection for Me?’ and said to Him, ‘Lord, You know and understand all things. You know that I have deep personal affection for You!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep!’”

This was in a spiritual sense. He went through this three times. It is connected to the fact that Peter had denied Him three times. He kept stressing, “Feed My sheep.”

Verses 18-19, “Truly, truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you dressed yourself, and walked wherever you desired. But when you become old, you shall hold out your hands, and someone else shall dress you, and take you where you do not desire.’ But He said this, signifying by what manner of death he would glorify God. And after He had spoken this, He said, ‘Follow Me!’” What manner of death? The time would come when he would be taken against his will and be executed.

Verses 20-21, “Then as Peter turned around, he saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following him; who also had reclined on His chest at the supper, and had asked, ‘Lord, who is it that is betraying You?’ As Peter saw him, he asked Jesus, ‘Lord, what about this one?’”

When Peter saw John, he asked, ‘What is going to happen to him? All of this is going to happen to me. What about John, he is not going to get off scot-free, is he?’

Verse 22, “Jesus said to him, ‘If I desire that he remain alive until I come, what does it matter to you? Follow Me!’”

Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I come, it is none of your business. You follow Me!’ This is Jesus’ answer to all of us! When we look around and see what our neighbor is doing, we want to make sure that if we “get it,” everyone else does, too. ‘You don’t worry about him. That is between him and Me. You follow Me! What you need to do is follow Me.’ We have to follow Him. That is a statement to all of us. If you want to follow somebody, you have to keep your eyes on them. If we keep our eyes on Christ, then we don’t have to worry about anybody else.

Christ's commission to the disciples: Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-20, Luke 24:49-53 and Acts 1:8-11.

The great commission is given in Matthew 28.

Matthew 28:18-20, “And Jesus came to them, and spoke to them, saying, ‘All power and authority in heaven and earth has been delegated to Me. Go therefore, teaching and making disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things, whatever I have commanded you. And listen, I am with you always, every day, even until the completion of the age. Amen.’”

Mark 16:15-16, “And He commanded them, ‘Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to all the creation! He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; and he who disbelieves shall be condemned.’”

Luke 24:49, ““And listen, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you: but you must remain in the city of Jerusalem, until you be clothed and imbued with power from on high.”
‘Wait here until you receive power from on high. You can’t do it on your own.’

Acts 1:8-11, ““But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’”

We have an overview with the events that culminated with the resurrection. We have the events of Christ’s life and His ministry. We see the fact that He truly came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. He laid down His life for us. He triumphed over death; through that power we can triumph.

We are going to continue on through the book of Acts and on through the New Testament Church in the book of Acts in the next Bible study.

Bible Study # 40
August 22, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Acts 1—9

This evening we are continuing in our survey series. We finished up the Gospels last Bible study and we **are continuing into the book of Acts**. The book of Acts is a direct continuation of the Gospels. It was originally written as a continuation of Luke's Gospel. In fact, *Luke and Acts really could almost be viewed as two volumes of one work*.

Luke 1:3, you might note, "it seemed right and proper to me also, since from the first I had been acquainted most accurately with everything, to write these things in sequence, most excellent Theophilus..." Luke addresses his book to an individual by the name of Theophilus. It was a style of writing that was common in the Greek world when addressing a patron. Luke was written to give a detailed story of the things that Jesus taught and did. He addresses it to Theophilus.

Acts 1:1-3, note, "The former account [KJV, "treatise"] I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

Now the former account (treatise) is the book of Luke. Here you have, in effect, two volumes of the same work. Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke that told the story of Jesus and what He did. It gave the account of His life and ministry from the beginning and continuing until the crucifixion and the resurrection. Then in the Acts of the Apostles (the book of the actions of the apostles of Jesus), the story continued. Luke picks up the story in Acts exactly where he left off in the book of Luke. He picks it up with Christ's ascension into heaven and then comes forward with the story of what happened. The two books go together to tell what Jesus did and said in His human ministry and then the continuation of His ministry.

Christ's ministry is still going on through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church that Jesus built is functioning to do His work. He came to do the will of the Father. He left behind His

disciples and went to the Father in heaven; He empowered them through the Holy Spirit to do the work that He had begun. So, we have the continuation here in the book of Acts.

I think I mentioned before that the original canonization of the New Testament, basically 22 books by the Apostle Peter, was in about 67 A.D. There remained one final canonization, one final adding of scripture which was by the Apostle John 30 years later. John added in his own five books. The 22 that Peter codified would have corresponded to the 22 that the Jews reckoned in the Old Testament. In that original reckoning, the Gospels would have been Matthew, Mark, Luke, and then Acts would have come next. Luke and Acts would have been together and read as two volumes of one work—one picked up the story where the other one left off. It's kind of like going through Samuel and Kings or something of that sort. There is a break and then you pick it right up.

John, about 30 years later, gave us the New Testament in the form that the Greeks have preserved it. He added in at that point his own five books: the Gospel of John, the epistles of 1, 2, 3 John and the book of Revelation. This was the final capstone of God's revelation to mankind that was to be preserved in Scripture. Of course, the only logical place for the Gospel of John is with the four Gospels. It was the last written. It did not follow exactly the story of the other three. The other three are much more similar than John. There was no point in John writing something that was going to simply rehash what the others had already told from several different standpoints. John focused on the information that needed attention.

By the end of the first century, it was apparent that there were things that needed to be focused on, details that needed attention that the others had not seen a need of at an earlier time when they had written. John's Gospel comes in at the end of the Gospels and it is "sandwiched" between Luke and Acts. Sometimes we don't stop to think about it; we don't realize the extent to which there is a story flow that comes right on over into the book of Acts. Acts is a continuation of the Gospels. It is an integral link in the New Testament. Acts picks up the story where Luke leaves off in his Gospel account.

One of the main purposes of the book of Acts is to show the continuity of the ministry of Jesus Christ through the work of the ministry of the early Church. The ministry of Jesus Christ did not end with His ascension into heaven. Christ

did not go into retirement. There was a work to be done.

Luke, of course, begins Acts with the ascension of Christ from the Mount of Olives and the role of the 12 apostles there in Jerusalem. We will note that the narrative begins to narrow its focus. We find that Peter and John are the ones that are primarily focused on for the first 12 chapters. Others are mentioned somewhat incidentally. The rest of the 12 apostles pretty much drop from view and are just incidentally mentioned. *The attention of the first 12 chapters of Acts is primarily on what Peter and John were doing.*

Beginning with chapter 13 to the conclusion of the book, the focus switches from Peter and John to Paul. James, the brother of Jesus, was not one of the twelve, but he was certainly one that occupied that office and played a very major role presiding at the Jerusalem Church throughout his lifetime. He appears off and on throughout the book as a major figure. He is the one there in Jerusalem.

We note here the focus in Acts. Have you ever wondered why the book of Acts ceases to focus on the 12 apostles after Acts 12? After Acts 12, it concentrates primarily on the Apostle Paul. One of the reasons is that after Acts 12, the 12 apostles drop from view—they left the area of Judea. Christ had given them a specific command that their primary commission was not to the Gentile nations. They were told by Jesus to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6). That's where the twelve went.

Paul, on the other hand, had as the primary focus of his mission to preach in the Gentile world throughout the Mediterranean area. It was not God's purpose that the location of the lost sheep of the house of Israel should be made clear back at that time. It was a part of God's purpose to allow the identity of Israel to be lost from view. And because that was God's purpose, He did allow the identity of Israel to be lost from view. The attention was not focused on where they went and what they did because if it did, we would have the story of the travels to Britain and to areas of France. Perhaps some of them went in the area of Scythia and Northern India where certain of the tribes were and later migrated up into Northern Europe. Since where they went would be very clearly identified, we change focus. Certain ones drop from view. It was not God's point to preserve all of those details at that time and in that way.

There is another reason for focusing in on Paul's ministry. The latter part of the book of Acts gives

us the details of Paul's ministry. It provides for us the background of Paul's epistles. Paul's epistles make up the backbone of much of the New Testament. Paul wrote 14 books. They are the most detailed explanation of the teachings of the New Testament Church on various doctrinal subjects. Paul addresses any number of things. Yet we could not really understand what Paul had to say if we weren't provided some of the background for his epistles. To whom was he writing? What were the circumstances? What were the situations? Luke gives us a background from which we can begin to understand more clearly some of the things that Paul had to say.

Another thing we note, as we go through the book of Acts, particularly in the first few chapters, there is a heavy emphasis on the miracles that God wrought through and on behalf of the early New Testament Church. We have in Acts 2 the miracle of languages on Pentecost. In chapter 3, we have the healing of the lame man. In chapter 5, we have God's punishment of Ananias and Sapphira. We have the account even of people being healed by just Peter's shadow passing over them. We have an angelic deliverance of the apostles from prison.

These things all serve to illustrate the dramatic way in which God made known to all in Jerusalem that He had taken the Kingdom from the Pharisees and Sadducees and given it to a people bearing the fruits of it (Matthew 21:43). Jesus had told the Pharisees that the Kingdom was going to be taken from them. He indicted them for the way in which they misused their authority. He told the people that the Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2-3). 'All they bid you do and observe, but don't follow their example.' He began to indict them. But earlier, He had told the Pharisees that the Kingdom, the authority, the government of God was going to be taken from them and it was going to be given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

Acts 2 makes that transition plain. God made it plain in a very dramatic way, to all in Jerusalem who were interested in looking, through whom He was working. God never leaves His people in the dark. If God makes a transition, God will make it plain. God will make it apparent through whom He is working. He doesn't leave His people in a quandary where you cannot tell and you don't know. This was the case here.

Go back and read Mr. Herbert Armstrong's autobiography of the period during which this era of the work, the Philadelphia era, came into

existence. When you read the early period of his ministry in the 1930s, God made it very apparent to the Church at that time and to all who had the wit to see what was the live branch of the Church that was bearing fruit—through whom God was working—and what were the dead branches comprising the Sardis era.

It was very apparent because of the miracles and because of the works. Some of the most dramatic miracles and works that God accomplished in this era were done back in that period of the 1930s. It was back in time when there was a transition being made from one era to the next. It was made apparent to all with the wit to see what part of the tree was dead and what part had life and was bearing fruit. When God makes a transition that way, He makes it apparent. He never leaves His people in a quandary.

We have a dramatic focus on this kind of thing in the early part of the book of Acts. Then we will note, as we go through the book of Acts, that this dramatic upsurge of public miracles at the beginning begins to gradually fade somewhat as the Church became established. God had demonstrated where He was truly working.

We will note, this evening, that there was a time when the apostles were put in jail, and the jailers hardly got back to town before God sent an angel and brought them right out. You had dramatic interventions in that way. By the time we get to the end of the book of Acts, Paul had been put in jail and had stayed there for years. It was not that God began to run low on miracle-working power. It was a matter that God was working to accomplish His purpose—God’s purpose in our lives.

At an earlier period in Paul’s life or Peter’s life or some of these others, God had a job for them to do. He wanted them out where they could travel, where they could speak, where they could do certain things of that nature. If a man sought to stop it by putting them in jail, God just simply sent an angel to solve that problem right away. Paul was still just as anxious to get out, but later on there came a period in Paul’s life where he had reached another phase of his ministry. He wound up languishing in one place for a long time. He had a lot of time to sit and think. Some of the most important contributions that he wrote for the New Testament were composed at that time. You see, he was in a different phase of his ministry, not because he chose it, but because God, who had an overview, knew what was most important for Paul to do at the time.

We have to understand that God may intervene in our lives in one way at one point in our life and then in another point in our life, He may choose to deal in another way. What is important is that we are close to God and we can look to Him. As we look to Him and let God rule in our lives, there may be different things that are more important for us at different times in our life. We may not know what those are.

We will also note as we go through the book of Acts, in chapters 8 and 9, we are given our introduction to important figures in the early history of the Church. We are introduced to Saul, the persecutor, better known as Paul the apostle. We are also introduced to Simon the Sorcerer, known in history as Simon Magus. He was a Samaritan who played a very important role in Church history. We will note some of that as we go through.

We saw that Acts is a continuation of what Luke had written previously. We might note that here again.

Acts 1:1-3, “The former account I made [the Gospel of Luke], O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Note here what Jesus preached.

In the beginning of Christ’s ministry, He started out preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Mark 1:1, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...”

Verse 14, “Now after John was arrested and put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God...”

Acts 1:3, “...being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

In the book of Acts, we find the conclusion of Christ’s ministry—after His crucifixion, His resurrection and immediately prior to His ascension into heaven. What was He teaching the apostles during these 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension? He was teaching them things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Jesus started out preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and He ended up preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. We note in the beginning of the book of Acts, at the beginning

of the history of the New Testament Church, Jesus was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

What do we find Paul preaching at the end of his ministry?

Acts 28:30-31, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.” The book of Acts ends up by saying Paul was preaching the Kingdom of God.

Jesus came proclaiming a message, the message of the Good News about God’s coming government. He preached that all through His human ministry. He continued to lay stress on it to the apostles after His crucifixion and resurrection, and we find it preached throughout the book of Acts. When we come to the end of the book of Acts, we find the last thing we have recorded is Paul was still preaching the Kingdom of God. It’s very apparent, when we look from a biblical standpoint, that the message that Jesus brought was not simply a message about the person of Christ. It is the message that Jesus Himself brought and preached. It’s the good news Jesus proclaimed which is the good news of the Kingdom of God. The apostles understood that because notice the last question they asked Him.

Acts 1:6, “Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?’” He had been talking about a literal kingdom, a literal government. He talked about it all through His ministry. He talked about it here after His resurrection. They asked a logical question: ‘Well, Lord, is now the time? You’ve gone through all of this. You’ve been resurrected from the dead. Are You, at this time, going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?’ They kept expecting the establishment of the Kingdom.

Verse 7, “And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.’” It was not God’s purpose that they, at that time, should fully perceive those things in terms of more clearly understanding God’s time plan.

We find some of that later on into the New Testament period. We find Peter mentioning in 2 Peter 3:8, God’s 7,000-year plan: comparing the days of the week with 1,000-year time periods. Peter gives a little bit of insight.

John makes it plainer in Revelation 20:4-5 as he gives the capstone and makes it clear for the first time. John defines the length of time that the Kingdom of God is going to rule in the days of the Messiah. It will last for a thousand years. We talk about the Millennium so much that, many times, we don’t stop to realize that the only place the length of the Messiah’s reign is clearly defined is in the book of Revelation.

If you didn’t have the book of Revelation, you couldn’t prove that it’s a thousand years. You don’t find that in the book of Isaiah or in the book of Daniel. You find prophecies of the Messiah’s coming and the Kingdom of God, but there’s no place where it says that it will be a thousand years. It says so in Revelation. He will reign for a thousand years. Revelation is progressive. Some of these things were made clearer and clearer as time went on.

Christ had a job for them to do. It was not something that they needed to fully understand at the time. Christ didn’t tell them “yes” or “no.” He just said that the Father has reserved certain things for Himself. God has a time plan. That time plan is seasonal in nature. The times and the seasons the Father has put in His own power. God has a time plan that is seasonal. We picture it through the seasonal observance of God’s Festivals. God knows what He is doing. God is right on schedule.

Christ gave them instructions. They were gathered there and were in anticipation of the establishment of the Kingdom because Jesus had talked of it so much. He appeared to them and dealt with them from time to time over this period of 40 days beginning with the Wave Sheaf Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread (when He first manifested Himself to them) and then for 40 days—a number for trial and testing.

Acts 1:4, “And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ...” Jesus told them that they should not depart from Jerusalem but wait for the promise of the Father.

Verses 8-10, “‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, ...” He told them, ‘At this time you have a job to do, but

you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses unto Me.’ When He had spoken these things, He ascended to heaven. They watched Him as He ascended up from the Mount of Olives and out of their sight.

Jesus gave them a job to do, but He stressed to them, ‘Don’t go out and try to do it on your own. You need the promise that the Father has made. You need the fulfillment of the Father’s promise. You need to be endued with power from on high.’ They didn’t know exactly when they were going to get that power. He told them to go back to Jerusalem and wait.

We find out when they did.

Acts 2:1, “Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” They were there to observe God’s holy day.

Verse 2, “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.” That power came upon them suddenly.

This was ten days after Christ’s ascension. They didn’t know it would be ten days; they didn’t fully realize it. They may have wondered if that was going to be it, but Christ didn’t tell them to go back and wait ten days. He said to go and wait until it happens. That’s always a difficult thing for us to do. We don’t like to wait, particularly when it’s open ended. We like to know when. That was the last thing they asked Him, ‘When are You going to do all this stuff You have been talking about?’

That’s probably the question you and I would have asked. When? Isn’t that the question we ask now? When? When? When do you think? Christ made it plain what the concern needed to be. The concern was doing and accomplishing the job that God had given to be done. But that job could not be done and accomplished on the basis of human skill and human power. It’s not just human wherewithal. There was a need for the power of God to make possible the accomplishment of the job God had given them to do.

That is a very important lesson for all of us to realize. No matter what talents, no matter what skills, no matter what things are available to us to accomplish God’s work, the most important tool is not human skill. The most important tool we have in accomplishing God’s work is not the printing press. It’s not the computer, the automobile or the airplane. It’s not the radio; it’s not television. *The most important factor in*

accomplishing God’s work is the Spirit of God!

That is the most crucial factor in the accomplishment of God’s work—not some physical device or tool. Those things are well and good and they certainly have their place. God has provided that those tools are available to us, but the crucial ingredient is the power of God’s Spirit.

Acts 1:9, they stood there and watched Him as He ascended. They stood there staring and “gawking,” as would be the case. Just imagine as He began to rise and finally got so high the clouds obscured Him.

Verses 10-11, they just stood there with their mouths open and their eyes looking toward heaven. Finally, a couple of angels appeared and said, ‘You men of Galilee, what are you looking up into the heavens for? What are you staring at? This same Jesus whom you’ve seen going up is going to come back, just like He said. He will come back in the same manner as He left.’

Verses 12-14, then they went to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. They came to an upper room—evidently an apartment or place they had used—where the apostles were residing. They were staying in Jerusalem. The group continued in one accord in prayer and supplication, seeking to understand and grasp the full impact of what was going on and what God wanted them to do. We find, in verse 15, there were 120 disciples altogether. It says the number of names together were about 120.

By the way, this is a digression, but I would call your attention to it. Let me show you a good example of how a verse can be taken out of context. What I am going to tell you is literally true. You remember the story of Galileo and the telescope? Galileo discovered and taught that the earth was not the center of the universe, but rather it revolved around the sun. Feticus came up with the idea, but Galileo proved it with his telescope and promulgated that.

Well, this created a problem for Galileo. He got in trouble with the Pope who already had infallibility and had proclaimed that the earth was the center of things and everything revolved around it. So, there was a cardinal at the Pope’s behest who wrote a book as a counterblast to Galileo. Of course, Galileo was threatened with ex-communication and everything else. He was dragged up there and threatened with worse than that. He was threatened with dire physical harm if he didn’t “see the light.” It struck me as funny, as far as how a verse can be taken out of context. The Vatican quoted this verse in this particular

papal bull to prove that people shouldn't be looking in telescopes. They quoted a portion of Acts 1:11, "... 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?'" 'You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into the heavens?' That was the only part of the verse that they quoted to prove that the Bible said you shouldn't be looking up into telescopes. You've heard people say you can prove anything from the Bible. You really can't prove "anything" from the Bible if you take the Bible for what it says. If you lift things out of context, take a word here and a word there and stick it all together, well, there is no telling what you would come up with. But that's not an honest use of the Bible.

Verses 15-20, we note at the end of Acts 1, Peter who is the leader of the twelve—we notice that all through the Gospel accounts—stood up and addressed the 12th apostle being chosen. Twelve, of course, is the number of organized beginnings. The nation of Israel began with 12 patriarchs, and the Church clearly needed to begin with 12 apostles, 12 witnesses. In addition to being apostles, they were the foundation of the New Testament Church (Ephesians 2:20). They were to be eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ and His ministry, right on up through His resurrection.

Verse 22, they concluded that whoever was chosen to take Judas' place should be one who had been in the group of disciples from the time of John's baptism on up. It needed to be someone who had association with Jesus throughout the entirety of His ministry. The twelve were not the only disciples. Disciple and apostle are not interchangeable. "Disciple" simply means "learner."

In Luke 10:1, you read one of the places in the Gospels where Jesus ordained 70 and sent them out two by two. But the twelve were set aside as apostles. There was a need for this 12th one.

Acts 1:23, they came up with two names that met the criteria. They did not know which of the two God had chosen, so they prayed.

Acts 1:24-26, "And they prayed and said, 'You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.' And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

You might note as you come through the rest of the book of Acts or in any other later portion of Scripture, that you will never find another example of this term "cast their lots." You know

what the difference was? It's what came next. What happened right after they had chosen the 12th apostle by lot? The Day of Pentecost came! And what happened on the Day of Pentecost? The Holy Spirit was given. Prior to that time, the Holy Spirit had not been given. After the Holy Spirit as given, there was no longer the need for casting lots, or something like that, to determine God's will. It was something that had been utilized from time to time in the Old Testament period and was utilized prior to the giving of God's Spirit.

Now in Acts 2, we find the Day of Pentecost came. We find this miraculous gift was given. It was a gift of speaking in foreign languages. That is made very, very apparent.

Acts 2:4, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance." Now what was the purpose of that?

Verses 5-11, "Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, 'Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.'"

Here were people of all different nationalities. They were Jews, but just as today, the Jews in the United States speak English, the Jews down in Mexico speak Spanish and the Jews in France speak French. The Jews normally are going to speak the language of the country where they reside. If they are Orthodox Jews and practice their religion, they may know a smattering of Hebrew, but very few Jews, other than those living in Israel, are really that fluent to where they can carry on a comfortable conversation in Hebrew. That was the case here. The average Jew of the time, who was a practicing Jew, knew certain phrases in Hebrew, but even the Scriptures were not commonly read in Hebrew outside of Palestine because most Jews were not that familiar with it. It was the language of

liturgy. They used certain words and certain expressions in religious terms.

Like some of you who had a Catholic background, years ago when the Mass was said in Latin, you may have been familiar with certain Latin phrases and religious terms that were commonly used, but you couldn't carry on a conversation in Latin. If the Pope had given a speech in Latin, you wouldn't have gotten a whole lot out of it. You may not have gotten much out of what the priest said, and that wasn't a whole lot. In other words, while persons may recognize certain words or expressions, they aren't fluent in the language.

With all of these people in Jerusalem, the only way they were going to clearly hear and understand what was said was in their own language. God performed a miracle. The miracle that God performed is quite a contrast to what the modern group that calls itself "Pentecostal" practices. To begin with, the first difference is that the apostles were keeping one of God's Holy Days. How many Pentecostals do you know who keep God's Holy Days? They don't keep God's Festivals. The apostles were doing that. They were gathered together to keep one of God's Festivals.

Acts 2:2, the next thing we note, "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven," This just came suddenly. It didn't say that Peter had been there working up the crowd for about an hour or two, playing all this music, getting all "jazzed up" and getting the crowd to answer him back—kind of working the crowd, building up and getting this excitement building.

Verse 3, "Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them."

I can remember years ago when old A.A. Allen (some of you may remember him) would get on the radio and ask, 'You want that baptism of fire?' Well, he didn't really want that baptism of fire if he had gotten it. When you understand what the baptism of fire is, it's not these tongues of fire. Being baptized is "plunged into." If you get that baptism of fire, you get immersed in fire—known as the lake of fire. I don't think he really wanted that baptism of fire. The "Pentecostals" don't have cloven tongues of fire that appear. They are not speaking in languages that all of these people of every nationality understand. No, that is not the case.

Jimmy Swaggart says that he has the gift of tongues. He's gone all over the world preaching. When he goes to Japan, why doesn't he speak

Japanese if he has the gift of tongues? And in Mexico or South America, why doesn't he speak in Spanish? Why doesn't he speak in a language that somebody understands if he has the gift of tongues? He goes all over, but he needs somebody there who speaks that language because he doesn't have the gift of speaking any language that anybody understands.

The apostles didn't get up and work themselves up until they were just mouthing a bunch of "gobbledygook" that nobody understood. They were preaching a message. The apostles weren't just reciting certain catch phrases over and over again, just kind of building up speed and repetition. The apostles were preaching a message that proclaimed God's message. We see many, many differences that occurred right here.

Peter gave the main sermon. He really indicted them for what they had been a party to, and we find the question that they asked.

Acts 2:37, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"

Verses 38-40, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.' And with many other words he testified and exhorted them," He went on and explained a lot of things.

They believed the message Peter brought. Their response to their belief was, 'What shall we do? We believe you. We have heard the Gospel message and believe it—what shall we do?' Now Peter didn't tell them what some would have today: 'Well, you don't do anything. You just believe, brother; you don't do anything.' Peter didn't tell them that. Peter said, 'Repent. That's what you do! You turn around and go the other way. You've been going the devil's way; now turn around and go God's way. You need to change direction in your life.' That's what repentance is. It involves surrender to the will to God. Peter made it plain that there was something to do. There must be a change of direction, a surrender of our will.

Then he told them, on the basis of their faith and repentance, they should be baptized as an outward sign and they would receive the gift of God's Spirit. This was a promise that extended to them and also to their children. The obvious

implication is, of course, young children who were at home still being taught and trained by their parents. As a result of God's calling, these people have access to God and their children at home, who were growing up and being taught by them, also had access to God. They weren't cut off from God as the rest of the world was. They could have an understanding. Here was a promise that was available if they would reach out and take it. The promise extended to them and to their children. It also extended to any elsewhere that God would individually and specifically call.

We might note in Peter's sermon on Pentecost a couple of comments that would be quite at variance with what most modern-day Pentecostals would say. Peter was not preaching about going to heaven. In fact, he made it very plain that the saved don't go to heaven.

Acts 2:29, "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day."

Verse 34, "For David did not ascend into the heavens, ..." David has not gone to heaven? Now we are looking at ten days after Christ ascended to heaven. Christ was already in heaven. Everybody that was going to go to heaven had gone (John 3:13). Peter made plain that David wasn't up there. David hadn't ascended up to heaven. 'David is dead and buried and his grave is right over there. That's where David is; he's in the grave.' Quite a contrast to what most people believe.

Verse 41, we note also, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." There were about 3,000 individuals that day.

Verse 42, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." There was doctrine taught. There was a way of life being taught. There was more to it than "believe." The individuals who were being converted and being baptized were individuals that continued steadfastly, resolutely, in the apostles' doctrine and in their fellowship. There was a closeness that was there. It says, "in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." What is this "breaking of bread"? Some people think that means communion, 'Boy, just have communion everyday.' No, that's not true.

Verse 46, notice, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from

house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart..."

"Breaking bread" simply means "having a meal together." They didn't just go down to the store and buy Wonder Bread enriched 12 ways. The wonder is that you eat it and live to tell the tale when you find out all the stuff it has in it. And Holsum Bread—which isn't. The bread that they ate was bread that was literally broken. It was similar to Pita bread. This was a very common style of bread that was utilized. It kind of doubled as something to put the other food in.

Bread was a common part of the meal. In certain parts of this country—certain parts of the South—inviting somebody to break bread with you simply meant to have a meal. A lot of times, the kind of bread people ate was cornbread or something of that sort. Sometimes that was what they literally did—they broke bread. Going back to the time when that was the way bread was divided up, it was broken into pieces.

There is nothing here that refers to them having communion every day, but 'with gladness they broke bread from house to house and ate their food with gladness.' They were spending time with one another. They were eating at one another's homes day by day.

One of the things to realize is that a large portion of the Church that began on the Day of Pentecost were Jews from elsewhere in the Roman Empire. There were Jews who didn't live in Jerusalem. Remember there were people from all over the Empire to observe Pentecost and this event occurred. Now, none of them wanted to go back home. There was excitement, exhilaration and the thrill of all of the things that was going on here. They didn't want to be separated from that, so they stayed. How did they stay? They had things in common. They shared; they moved in with someone. Those who were from out of town only had enough money to maybe have been there for a short period of time for the Festival. Once that was gone and if they were going to stay, they would have to stay with somebody. So, they all pitched in. They shared. You see this type of thing.

Verse 47, "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." God calls—people don't just join on their own initiative. God adds those whom He is calling.

Acts 3:1, "Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour." The "hour of prayer" was an expression

the Jews had that referred to the hours of the morning and evening sacrifice.

Verses 2-8, we have the healing of this lame man who had been there at the gate of the temple.

Verses 9-11, this created quite a stir because this individual had been there for an extended period of time. Thousands of people had seen him; when he was suddenly healed, it really created a stir. This also antagonized the religious leadership. Peter preached a very powerful sermon. He didn't pull any punches.

Acts 3:19-21, he told them, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

The restitution of all things is when God's Kingdom is going to be established.

Acts 4:1-7, we find that the priests were all upset because of the people who believed the word.

Acts 4:8-12, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: if we this day are judged for a good deed done to the helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the "stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.'" Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'" He didn't pull any punches in speaking to them.

Verse 12 makes it plain that there is only one way to salvation and that's through Jesus Christ.

As we continue, we see the power that God's message had. At this point, time had passed. There were people who were liquidating property and donating it to the Church to provide for all of the new converts who had stayed in Jerusalem.

In Acts 5, we read of a certain couple, Ananias and Sapphira who sold a possession and kept back part of it. Then they came and brought it to the apostles. This is a very dramatic event. We see Ananias being struck down dead and then Sapphira. Now notice here because some have had the idea the New Testament practiced communism and didn't believe in private

property. Well, that's not true. The Bible certainly teaches private property. One of the commandments teaches, "Thou shall not steal." This presupposes there is something to steal. If everything belongs to everybody, then how can you steal?

Acts 5:4, "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." Ananias and Sapphira didn't get in trouble because they didn't donate everything. They were in trouble because they lied to the Holy Spirit.

Notice what Peter told Ananias, "While it remained, was it not your own?" "It was your property. You could do with it as you wished. It was yours; after you sold it, it was in your own power—it was still your money. You have conceived this thing in your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. You brought this part over here and said it was everything. You tried to aggrandize yourself as though you were sacrificing and giving everything; you weren't. It was your property; you didn't have to sell it at all. After you sold it, you could have given any part you wanted or you could have kept it all. It was your property. Nobody made you give any of it. The Church didn't say you had to sell your property. You "cooked up" a scheme really to lie to the Holy Spirit because that's whom you were lying to. You weren't simply lying to a man; you were lying to the Spirit of God."

This account makes it plain that the property belonged to the member. It was not some New Testament enforcement of communism or something of that sort. People have had all kinds of ideas that they dreamed up.

Verse 15, "so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them." Things had gotten to the point that even the shadow of Peter passing over them caused some people to be healed.

Verses 17-20, "Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation [jealousy], and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 'Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.'" They threw them in jail.

Verse 21, “And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.” They said, ‘Okay, bring these guys in. We are going to have a trial.’ They sent the officers to the prison and they came back and said, ‘They’re gone. Where are they?’

Verse 25, they said, ‘Well, I think they are over there in the temple preaching. How did they get there?’ Things were moving with power. God made it very plain. Things continued right along.

Peter made it very plain that if we are confronted with a requirement of men to disobey God, what should we do?

Verse 29, “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” When there is a conflict between our duty to God and our duty to man, God comes first.

Verse 40, these things continued. There was increasing antagonism that the Jewish religious leadership had—even to the point that they sought to beat up Peter and some of the apostles.

Verse 41, “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” That was their attitude toward persecution. It was persecution for righteousness sake. There is nothing wonderful about being persecuted in and of itself; it’s only if we are persecuted for righteousness sake. Peter and the others were persecuted for righteousness sake.

Verse 42, “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”

In Acts 6, as the Church grew very rapidly, there arose a problem. One of the things we should learn is that even in the Church there can sometimes be misunderstandings, cases of hurt feelings or whatever. Here was a problem that arose.

Even though the entire Church consisted of Jews, some were Jews of the Diaspora called Grecians or Hellenists. Others were Hebrews or Jews of Judea. The Jews of Judea looked down on the Jews of the Diaspora because of their contact with the Gentiles. The Jews of the Diaspora tended to look down on the Jews of Judea as being pretty limited and narrow in scope and not really as educated and sophisticated. There was a certain antagonism that was common in the

Jewish world. There were certain prejudices that people had.

It’s not uncommon for people to have prejudices. You can go all over the world and find groups of people who look down on somebody else and have some prejudice against some other group. You can go to any continent or nation and find some of these groups of people having all kinds of problems. You and I couldn’t tell them apart. They’ve been having rioting in Bulgaria of ethnic Bulgars and ethnic Turks. Now you line them up—chances are that most of us couldn’t tell which one was which. But they can tell. There have been thousands of ethnic Turks fleeing across the border in Bulgaria over into Turkey. You can go around the world; there is a certain antagonism between people. Satan always likes to play on this kind of thing and stir up people. Here, even in the Church, there arose a problem because there were these two groups. Even though they were both Jews, there were certain cultural differences because of background. All of the leadership were Judeans. After a while some were kind of grumbling and saying, ‘I don’t think our widows are being paid enough attention to. I think some of those who are seeing after the widows are not paying enough attention to ours.’

Verse 2, the apostles finally got called in on this. They said, ‘We have more important things to do. We can’t stop doing the work of proclaiming the Gospel and get out there, count out exactly how much every widow is receiving and attend to waiting tables. If we spend all our time looking after all the physical details, we would never get around to doing what we have been commissioned to do.’ They recognized that while it was an important matter that needed to be tended to, it was not their primary job to get bogged down in the physical administration of things. They wouldn’t have the time to concentrate on the spiritual job. So they instituted an office in the Church—the office of Deacon.

Acts 6:3-6, “‘Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Pramenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set

before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.”

Men who had spiritual qualifications were appointed to a physical responsibility. They were men who could see after this matter and make sure that there was no inequity in how it was being carried out. They were ordained, set apart, for this office.

Verse 7, we find as a result of taking an action such as this, of becoming more highly organized and becoming more efficient, the number of the disciples multiplied. God blessed and multiplied what was going on as they properly handled their responsibilities.

Verses 8-10, we find that there was an individual, in fact one who had been ordained, a man by the name of Stephen who was a remarkable individual. The religious leaders were very antagonistic toward him because when they would bait him with questions, they simply could not withstand his answers. They decided what they were going to do. They were going to arrest him and do something to get rid of him.

Verses 11-13, “Then they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.’ And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law...’” They hired false witnesses.

In Acts 7, we find Stephen on trial. We find the sermon he gave. As they had him there, he gave a very powerful message to the court that was standing there. Then, we find that they killed him.

Acts 7:59-60, “And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” They threw stones and rocks at him and killed him. Notice Stephen’s attitude that he expressed right in the end was ‘forgive them’. He was a remarkable man.

Here was the first death that occurred. About two years had passed since the Day of Pentecost. Things were growing and multiplying, but everybody was bunched up in Jerusalem. Nobody wanted to leave. Stephen’s death launched a persecution.

Acts 8:1, “Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all

scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

Saul is introduced here. He was a young man at the time. He stood there and watched this. We find that as a result of this persecution, there was a scattering. The disciples were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles. So, there was now a scattering. Everybody was all bunched up together, and then this tragic event occurred. It undoubtedly had a tremendous impact. People must have had their faith shaken. How could this be? How could God allow this to happen? Just a matter of months earlier, the apostles were thrown in jail and God sent an angel and delivered them. He could have sent an angel and delivered Stephen.

What was the result of this persecution? The Church was scattered! Was that bad? No, not in God’s overall plan. It caused the disciples to have to spread out, and now the message could spread. God is sometimes working out a plan that we don’t understand. We look at an event and we say, ‘Why would God let that happen?’ Well, God’s ways are not our ways. We don’t always know where God is going in terms of how He is going to accomplish His overall purpose.

Verse 5, “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.” Philip went down to Samaria and began to speak to people.

Verses 9-10, “But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God.’” We are introduced to a man by the name of Simon. He used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria. He was the religious leader of the Samaritans.

Verse 11, “And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.” He worked lying wonders. He was a sorcerer.

Verses 12-13, “But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.” It seemed the whole city believed Philip’s teaching—what he was telling them about the Kingdom of God. They were baptized. Simon

himself was rather impressed and thought he had better get baptized, too—and he did.

Verse 14, “Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them...” There is government in the Church; they found out there was something going on in Samaria. It took a little time for word to travel. They sent Peter and John to see what was going on.

Verses 15-17, “who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He [It] had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” Philip had baptized them, but he had not laid hands on them for the receiving of the Spirit.

Verses 18-19, “Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’” Simon noticed what was going on and he came to Peter and offered money.

Verses 20-23, “But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.’”

Now I want you to notice that expression “part nor portion” (KJV, “lot”). ‘You have neither part nor lot in this matter.’ Hold your place here and turn back to Acts 1.

Acts 1:25-26, they had chosen Matthias, that he may “...take part of this ministry and apostleship.... And they cast their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”

The lot fell upon Matthias. That expression, “part nor portion”, has reference to an apostleship. Simon was trying to buy the office of apostle. Peter said, ‘You have neither part nor portion in this matter. You have no part of an apostleship. You were not chosen by lot, you have no part in this apostleship.’ He went on to emphasize that Simon was “bound by iniquity,” of lawlessness. He was “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquities.” He was a slave of lawlessness. Peter saw through him. Simon was the religious leader of the Samaritans in Samaria.

What many don’t realize—just as the Jews had a Diaspora and were spread throughout the Roman Empire—the Samaritans had also been scattered at an earlier time by Alexander the Great. There were sizable Samaritan communities in Alexandria, Egypt and Rome, Italy. It was the nucleus of Samaritans in these areas that gave heed to Simon.

We will note at a later time the role that Simon played in the beginning of a great false church that called itself “Christian.” In reality, it traces back not to the leadership of Simon Peter, but to the leadership of Simon the Magician. He was the “*pator*,” the Babylonian or Samaritan word for the “opener” of the old Babylonian Mystery religion that had come to Samaria. We are introduced to Simon in somewhat detail here in Acts 8 so that we might understand the background later on.

As we look through Acts 8, a little later, verses 27-40, we have the conversion and baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch. I might comment on that. From the time of King Solomon, many of the upper class leaders in Ethiopia practiced the religion of the Old Testament. For literally hundreds and hundreds of years, the ruling families and the upper classes of Ethiopia practiced the religion of the Old Testament, to the point that it was not uncommon that they were circumcised. That’s why an Ethiopian could come to the temple and go right in to the same court at the temple that any of the Jews could because they were circumcised. Right to this day, particularly among the leadership classes, the Ethiopians have continued to practice the religion of the Old Testament. It was not uncommon for them to travel to Jerusalem. It was obviously those who had the money and the wealth to do so.

Verse 27, this Ethiopian was a man of great authority. He was an Ethiopian that was there. In one sense he was the first Gentile baptized and, yet, is not considered such because he was in that sense a convert to Judaism first. He was not converted to Christianity directly from a Gentile pagan religion. He had undoubtedly, as many of the upper class in Ethiopia, practiced the religion of the Old Testament. He had gone to Jerusalem and was traveling back.

Verse 28, he was sitting there in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah.

Verses 31-35, Philip preached the Gospel to him from the book of Isaiah.

You know, the Old Testament is a guide to salvation. Peter preached his sermon in Acts 2

out of the Old Testament. Philip preached to the Ethiopian eunuch out of the Old Testament. It is made very plain.

Acts 9, we are introduced in more detail to the Apostle Paul or the one who became the Apostle Paul in his conversion.

Verses 3-4, Saul, the persecutor, was struck down on the road to Damascus. You are familiar with the account.

I would call your attention to a three-fold commission God had in mind for him.

Acts 9:15, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.’” Those were the three parts of the commission that God gave to Paul.

But God, even in working with Paul, continued to work through the government of His Church.

Verses 8-12, God struck Paul blind, and he was blind for a period of three days. God sent Ananias (no relationship to the Ananias of Acts 5 who had been struck dead) to anoint him.

Verses 17-18, “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me, that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.”

Ananias anointed and laid hands on him; he was healed. He talked to him, counseled with him and baptized him. God does things in an orderly fashion through the government that He has established in His Church, even when He is going to work with someone in a unique manner.

Next time we will pick up the story with Paul. We will focus in on that in more detail next time.

Bible Study # 41
September 12, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Acts 10—17

This evening we are continuing our survey in the book of Acts. We **are up to the middle section in the book of Acts—chapters 10—17**. One of the things that we will note, particularly this evening, is the issue of Gentiles. *One of the great issues of the early New Testament Church involved the acceptance of the Gentiles into the full fellowship of the Church.* Now let me preface that by saying that the issue was not simply a matter of accepting Gentiles. *It was a matter of accepting uncircumcised Gentiles.* That was the issue. The great issue had to do with circumcision.

It wasn't simply a matter of ethnic origin. If you want to note the contrast in Acts 8, we have the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. There wasn't any controversy concerning that. In Acts 10, when we come up with Cornelius (who was Italian by ethnic background), all of a sudden, we have a major controversy that, to an extent, occupies the next five chapters. It really isn't settled until after Acts 15; even after Acts 15, it resurfaces from time to time. There was a reason for that. I think I mentioned this last time.

The Ethiopians, particularly the leading upper class in Ethiopia (the educated class), had practiced the religion of the Old Testament from the time going back to King Solomon (almost 1,000 years earlier). Many of them were circumcised. There were many Sabbath keepers among the ruling class in Ethiopia. It was the only example of a Gentile nation, over any period of time, where a significant portion of the population took it upon themselves to follow many of the principles of the Old Testament. It goes back to the account of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10). In fact, the last emperor of Ethiopia who died several years ago, Emperor Selassie, traced his genealogy in an unbroken line back that far. The Ethiopian royal line held the throne of Ethiopia for almost 3,000 years. There was continuity.

For someone who was circumcised, such as this Ethiopian who had come to Jerusalem, there was no problem. He could enter into the inner courtyard of the temple. He could enter into the court of the Israelites. He was not confined to the outer court of the Gentiles. The issue had to do

with the physical sign of the covenant. The Jews were prepared to accept a Gentile into religious fellowship if he took upon himself the outward sign of the covenant with Abraham, which was circumcision.

Now the issue arose, beginning in Acts 10, concerning the spiritual necessity of a Gentile man taking upon himself that outward sign of the physical covenant that God had made with Abraham. Was it necessary? You see, the position of many of the religious Jews who were being converted was that if a Gentile wanted to come into the Church, fine, but first he had to become a Jew. Salvation is of the Jews. If you want to become a Christian, first you had to become a Jew—then you become a Christian. This was the controversy.

There was a lot that needed to be resolved in terms of what were the spiritual requirements for salvation. We might also understand the term "Gentile" because the term that is translated "Gentile" throughout the Old Testament, the Hebrew word "*goyim*," simply means "the nations." It was *a general term that referred to everyone except the 12 tribes of Israel.* Gentiles could be of any race or ethnic background. They could be white, black or yellow. They could be any number of ethnic backgrounds because it was an inclusive term that simply meant everyone except the descendants of Jacob.

Abraham had other children besides Isaac. But the promise line, the seed of promise, came through Isaac. Abraham's other children would have been considered Gentiles. Ishmael, the Arabs, and all of those that descended in that way were considered Gentiles. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. But because the promise came through Jacob, Esau's descendants would have been considered Gentile. Jacob (his name was changed to Israel) had 12 sons. They became the ancestors of the 12 tribes. The descendants of the 12 tribes, the descendants of Jacob (or Israel) was, let's say, the dividing line. It was a general term. It referred to Israel and then everyone else was "the nations" or "Gentiles."

The Jews had developed this separateness by the time the New Testament was written. The other tribes of Israel had been dispersed in captivity and disappeared from the scene several hundred years earlier. The Jews were the only ones who were still living there in the Middle East. They were the only ones who preserved and maintained their identity and association with the Promised Land. So, they tended to view themselves as separate and distinct people. God

had laid great importance on the fact that Israel maintained their separate and distinct identity from the nations around.

The problem that had developed by the time of the first century was something that went beyond recognizing the need to avoid the corrupting influence of the world and the society around. This is a struggle that God's people all through the centuries have had. You can go back to the beginning of God establishing a people, which was Israel being called out of Egypt. The great battle all the way down has been the tendency of the people of God, collectively, to have that contaminating influence of the world around. It is a necessity that God's people maintain their separate identity because if we're going to please God, we have to conform to God and His ways—not to the world and its ways. The world takes its standards from the devil, in terms of value systems and priorities.

The real problem was the Jews had taken this concept and had developed it into a purely physical concept to where they really looked down on all of the other people as being in some way polluted and dirty. That's why it was such a novel concept.

Even to this day, there are *three requirements for a man who wishes to convert to Orthodox Judaism*. They have maintained these requirements for many centuries. The *first* one was ritual circumcision. The *second* was what they called the "*mikvah*," which was the "ceremonial washing" or the "ritual bath." The *third* was the offering of a sacrifice (a sin offering) there in the temple. Today a convert to Orthodox Judaism goes through the circumcision and the "*mikvah*" and simply makes a pledge that, if the temple is rebuilt in his lifetime, he will offer the appropriate sacrifice.

The concept was that all "the nations" are born in sin; they are dirty and they have to be washed. They are unclean. However, when a Jewish baby is born, they are circumcised and a sacrifice is offered, but there is no "*mikvah*"—no ritual bath. Their concept was that they are born clean and everybody else is born unclean; they are better than everyone else. That's why when John the Baptist came and said, "Repent and be baptized," that was a novel concept. The Jews were familiar with this practice of immersion. They were familiar with the Hebrew term "*mikvah*," the immersion, the washing away, but it was something they only applied to Gentile men.

Interestingly enough, at the time of the first century, they also applied it to Jewish women,

but they didn't apply it to Jewish men. They considered themselves as having been born clean. That's why Christ told them, 'If the Son shall set you free, then you'll be free indeed.' And boy, they got indignant and said, 'We are Abraham's seed; we have never been in bondage to any man (John 8:32-33). What do you mean "You'll set us free"?' We don't need to be set free; we're okay.' When John the Baptist came and preached the message, "Repent and be baptized," this was a radical departure. It had never occurred to them that they also were unclean.

The thrust of John the Baptist's message in preparing the way for the Messiah was the fact that you are unclean. You need to be washed and cleansed. You need a Savior. You are born in sin.

Romans 3:23, as Paul stressed it, "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." It is not just the Gentiles that have sinned, but all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Nobody has a spiritual "leg up" based on their ancestry. It's as simple as that.

The issue of baptism was a difficult concept for many of these first-century Jews to grasp. John the Baptist came preaching baptism and many were baptized. They were convicted at least of the fact that they were unclean and needed to repent and be forgiven. Jesus preached baptism and His disciples practiced it. That was never the issue. But the issue of circumcision was another thing. Many of the Jews could accept the fact, 'Alright, we all need to be baptized; we all need to be washed from our sins, but these Gentiles need to be circumcised if they are going to be as good as we are. They need to take upon themselves the outward sign of the covenant that God made to Abraham.' God made it plain in dealing through Peter that circumcision was not a spiritual matter of salvation.

Now there is nothing that was ever said to discourage the continuing practice among the Jews to circumcise their children on the eighth day after birth. There was never anything to discourage the descendants of Abraham to continue the physical sign of that physical covenant, but it was not a spiritual matter of salvation. It didn't have bearing on salvation. That was not what was involved. God, dealing through Peter (who was the chief of the twelve), revealed that the Gentiles were not in some separate category in that way. And of course, Peter had this vision (Acts 10) that prepared him

for this event. It was a major event. As we go through, we recognize the magnitude of it.

I would like to mention something that is sometimes overlooked. When you go through the book of Acts, you see what an issue circumcision was, particularly starting here in Acts 10. For chapters it keeps coming up and coming up; then Paul mentions it in his epistles. It was an issue for years, literally for several decades as long as the Church was centered in Jerusalem. From the time of the first Gentile converts and for a good 20 years, it was really an issue; it did not entirely cease to be an issue until the Church was no longer primarily centered in Jerusalem and in Judea.

But consider—with the modification that was made in regards to circumcision, it was explained that this was not a spiritual requirement of salvation. Spiritually, circumcision was of the heart (Romans 2:25-29) and was not necessary to be performed in order for someone to be saved. If the issue of circumcision created this much controversy, how is it that people think that the Sabbath was changed? You never read a whisper of the controversy in the New Testament.

If circumcision was a big deal to the Jews, do you know what an even bigger deal was? The Sabbath! The two biggest things to the Jews in the first century were idolatry and Sabbath keeping. The prohibitions against idolatry and Sabbath keeping were major issues. That's why meat offered to idols kept coming up. It was a controversial issue. In fact, the Jews had made such an issue of the matter of idolatry that there were riots in Jerusalem when the Roman troops displayed the imperial insignias in a flag over the citadel. The Jews considered it an idolatrous emblem and there were riots all over Jerusalem. In order to maintain peace in Jerusalem, the Roman troops didn't display the imperial insignias (the Roman eagle) on their flags. The Jews considered it idolatrous because of its connection with Roman gods.

They had such an issue over idolatry and they took it to such a point—that's why you had all the issues about eating meat offered to idols. It's why you will find, to this day, certain wines that are labeled kosher wines. Ever noticed that? There are wines that are labeled kosher wines. Do you know why? It's not because any unclean food is used in making any wine. The issue of kosher wine goes back to this time. At the time of the vintage when the wine was made, it was the practice or the custom of the Gentiles in the Greek and Roman world that the first cup would

be poured out in an offering to the god of the vintage—to Bacchus or the various gods. The Jews saw it as everything out there being polluted. It had been offered to idols. Here, this cup had been poured out in front of that idol. They wouldn't touch it. They would make their own. And to this day, that is where kosher wine comes in. It goes back to the idea that they didn't even want to take a chance that there may have been a cup of this poured out in front of an idol. They wanted nothing to do with idolatry. That's why you also find the subject of meat offered to idols that comes up. It was something that had to be resolved in terms of the way it was dealt with.

You never find a mention or a breath of controversy about the Sabbath. Paul was never accused of teaching the Gentiles to break the Sabbath. Now, they got all upset; they accused him of bringing in an uncircumcised Gentile into the inner court of the temple (Acts 21:28), which he didn't do. But they provoked a riot that led to Paul's arrest over that issue. Nobody ever accused him of breaking the Sabbath or teaching against the Sabbath. How can anybody say that the early New Testament Church moved from the Sabbath to Sunday and think that there would never be a hint of a controversy over the subject in the New Testament. Boy, I tell you—the "ripple" about circumcision would have been minor compared to the controversy that would have been had they taught that it was permissible to desecrate the Sabbath and do something else. That is just a sub-point to bring in, which I think is good for us to realize.

In Acts 10:44-48, we are going to notice that when the first uncircumcised Gentiles were baptized (Cornelius and those with him of his household) there was an unprecedented event that occurred in that context. It is the only example that we have given in Scripture of people who received the Holy Spirit prior to baptism. There was a reason for that miracle.

It was such a hurdle for Peter and those there with him to accept the fact that God was ready to accept the Gentiles on a spiritual basis without their having carried through the physical ritual of circumcision. It was such a major hurdle for them to get over in their mind, that God performed this miracle of giving the Holy Spirit before baptism. Peter looked around at the others and said, 'God has accepted them; how can we not!' And he went ahead and baptized them. It was, again, a specific example where this miracle of speaking in other languages was worked at the time of

their conversion. There's a reason why that miracle occurred. You don't read of that normally happening when people were baptized and received the Holy Spirit. Why did God perform that miracle for Cornelius and his household?

It's very evident as to why God had performed that particular miracle for the apostles and for those who were there on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). They were speaking to a multi-lingual audience. Why the necessity of this miracle for Cornelius and his household? I think if we look at it, it is apparent that God performed the same miracle when the first Gentiles were converted as He did when the first Jews were converted. If He didn't, the Jews could have still said, 'Yeah, but yours is still not as good as ours. We are still "one up" on you.' God knew human nature and certainly knew the way that people would reason.

God knew the tendency of people to compare themselves among themselves, so the same miracle was performed to make it apparent that God had not in some way made a spiritual distinction. God does not make spiritual distinctions based on physical criteria. Now obviously, there are physical distinctions. We are male and female. That's pretty physical. But we are heirs together of the grace of life. Spiritual distinctions are not made on physical criteria. This was emphasized.

We will note some other things. In fact, we will note something a little later in the book of Acts that will show the extent of some of the multi-ethnic background of many of the early New Testament Church, even the leaders of the New Testament Church. A lot of people have read over and not realized that the early New Testament Church didn't all come from an exclusively ethnic Jewish background. We have already mentioned the Ethiopian eunuch who was a clear case in point. But let's continue. We will come to it.

In Acts 10:1, we noted the first uncircumcised Gentile convert. This was Cornelius, the Roman centurion. He was an Italian and a leader of a group stationed in Judea. There were a significant number of soldiers who were stationed in Judea as a part of Roman troop detachments, as well as others who came in contact with the Jews who were impressed with the teachings of Scripture.

The bankrupt pagan mythology that was extant in the first-century Greek and Roman world had long since lost its hold in terms of really filling

any kind of void for people who did much thinking. Many of the Gentiles in some of these areas who were exposed to Jewish culture were impressed with the teaching of Scripture. They recognized standards and recognized answers that were something beyond anything that they had from their background. Many of these became proselytes or converts. They were called "proselytes of the gate." In other words, if they came to the temple, they never could go past the gate because they did not become circumcised and take upon themselves the full commitment of the covenant, which circumcision involved. But they attended the synagogue and would listen to the Scriptures read. They would practice many of the principles of the law. They recognized its moral value and worth. They saw that there was something here, but they stopped short of becoming circumcised and becoming, in the eyes of Greek and Roman society, a Jew. This was a major step to take and most did not do that.

Verse 2, Cornelius, we are told, was a devout man. He, evidently, had been exposed to the teaching of Scripture there in Judea. He had, undoubtedly, spent time attending synagogue and hearing the law read. He was impressed with many of these things. He had come to believe in the true God—the God of Israel. He recognized that the idols that the Greek and Roman world worshiped were nothing. There came a point in time when he was sincerely seeking God; God heard and honored his request.

Verses 3-8, Cornelius was told where to go and find Peter.

Verse 9, it was around noon (we are told the sixth hour, which would have been noon counting from sunrise) when Peter went upon the housetop to pray.

Of course, their housetops were a flat style and not what we think of as housetops with the Acadian style as here in south Louisiana. That would have been kind of a difficult place to navigate. You wouldn't want to climb up on that kind of roof to pray—you definitely would not feel like praying if you were balanced precariously up there. That's not the kind of housetop Peter was on. In an area where there isn't a lot of rain, they utilize a flat rooftop. With a little bit of drainage, it wasn't a problem. There wasn't much rainfall. It was often an area that expanded the living area. You'd get up there in the cool of the evening or when the sun began to set. It was a little cooler up there; you would pick up a little bit more of a breeze.

Verse 10, Peter had gone up there. It was a private place and he was waiting for them to prepare lunch. He was hungry and went up there to pray. While he was up there praying, waiting for the meal to be prepared, he went into a trance and had a vision.

Verses 11-12, in this vision he saw a sheet come down from heaven. On this sheet was every kind of creature you can imagine. Now this is proof that Peter did not come from south Louisiana because when he saw all those creeping things, he didn't jump up and have a crayfish boil.

Acts 10:13-14, "And a voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.'" When he was told to rise, kill and eat, he said, 'No, I can't do that.'

Verse 16, now this vision was repeated three times.

Peter was really scratching his head. He couldn't figure out what it meant. A lot of people today jump to the conclusion that they know what it means. They think that they can eat anything that doesn't eat them first. Almost all of us (you did and I did) grew up eating all kind of things. I think about some of the things I used to eat and it spoils my appetite to even think about them. I don't even want to describe it at mealtime. I'm sure you are the same way. But there was a time when we ate it and didn't think anything about it. But Peter didn't jump to that conclusion. He couldn't figure out what it meant.

Peter had spent three and one-half years with Jesus Christ, living with Him, spending day after day together. They camped out together, ate meals together and spent hours together, day after day over a period of three and one-half years. There was nothing that Christ had ever said which in any way gave Peter the indication that he should be eating unclean foods. Peter had never eaten anything common or unclean. It's obvious that Jesus didn't either because Peter was with Him and they ate the same thing during the years of His ministry. Peter didn't jump to the conclusion that the laws of clean and unclean had been done away. That never occurred to him.

Verse 17, "Now while Peter wondered within himself..." He wondered—doubted—what this vision he had seen could mean. He couldn't figure it out.

About this time word came to him.

Verses 18-19, somebody downstairs wanted to see him. There were three men sent from Cornelius—Gentiles.

Verses 20-23, he was told to go home with them and not to worry or be disturbed about it. He went down and found out what the situation was. They explained it to him and Peter accompanied them. Several of the other brethren went with them and came to Caesarea.

Verse 24, Cornelius was waiting for them. He had called together his relatives and his close friends.

Verse 25, when Peter came in, Cornelius met him, fell down at his feet and worshiped him. Now if Peter had been the Pope, he would have told him, 'Here, kiss right here on this big toe.' Peter didn't tell him that. It is pretty good evidence that Peter didn't view himself as the first Pope. He didn't have people bowing down and kissing his feet. When the man did that, he told him to stand up, 'Don't be groveling down there on the ground trying to kiss my feet.'

Verse 26, 'Stand up; for I am a man just like you are. I am a human being.'

Cornelius had come from Rome and from a religious background where the religious leaders were venerated in that way. Well, that's not God's way. God's way is certainly a way of respect.

God tells us to respect those who are older, respect our elders, rise up before the hoary (gray) head (Leviticus 19:32). Certainly we are to respect our elders and use terms of respect that are appropriate. Just as we show respect to those who are elders, physically, it is certainly just as appropriate and just as proper to show respect to those who are our spiritual elders. To show proper respect for another human being or respect for an office or age is one thing and it's something we should show to one another. But there's a difference between an appropriate respect and an attitude of veneration, worship, adoration and this type of thing.

That's why in God's Church we don't use some specific religious titles. We don't call ourselves "reverend."

Psalm 111:9 (KJV), "...holy and reverend is His name." Since that's God's name, we never talked about Reverend Armstrong. We don't use those terms because they would be inappropriate. 'Holy and reverend is God's name.' We refer to spiritual elders respectfully in the same way we refer to older people or to any people we would hold in respect. We refer to our spiritual leaders with a courtesy title of respect that we use in this society, not with a religious title.

We see here this attitude. It is good to notice that a lot of the things associated with a certain

religion, where the head of it calls himself the successor of St. Peter—he doesn't follow the example of Peter. If you are going to claim to be Peter's successor, then you need to be held to the same standard of doing what Peter did. Do you practice the things that Peter practices?

A little while later, it began to dawn on him what his vision had been.

Acts 10:28, "... 'God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.'" Now Peter got the point of his vision. He realized what this was all about. He had been putting people, human beings made in the image of God, in the same category as an unclean animal. Peter was viewing them in kind of the same context, using the same terms, and he had come to realize and to see that was wrong. That was an attitude of prejudice. That was not reflective of God's perspective at all. Peter recognized that.

As we go through Acts 10, we note the rest of the story of Cornelius and his household receiving the Holy Spirit prior to baptism.

Verses 44-48, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 'Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days."

This, of course, demonstrated that a man did not have to be circumcised first before he could be part of the Church. God made it clear. If there is something of this magnitude, God makes it clear. God does not make a change (that is a change from God) in some obscure way that leaves people confused, where you can't know which is which. When God made a specific change, in terms of circumcision, He made it plain to the New Testament Church. He did it in a very plain and a dramatic way that was a clear basis that anyone could look to. God's will was plain.

Acts 11:1-3, "Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, 'You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!'" Peter came back to Jerusalem and, needless to say, there were people who were upset. 'You ate with

uncircumcised men!' Boy, they were upset about that. There was a prejudice that was there. It had its origin, in terms of religion, that carried over in all of these ways. Obviously, it came down to viewing every non-Jew in an unclean category. The average Jew wouldn't think of going in and eating a meal at a Gentile's table. That was unthinkable. They were pretty upset when they heard Peter had done this.

Verses 4-14, Peter then explained the matter from the beginning. He went through and told them the story; he made it clear that it was from God.

Verse 15, then he says, "'And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.'" It was not the way the Holy Spirit normally came every time. It was, 'the way the Holy Spirit fell on us at the beginning.' We go back to that point. God wanted to make it plain that Gentiles didn't get a second-rate baptism or a second-rate conversion. Peter goes through and explains what happened.

Verse 16, in light of what had happened, he began to understand some scriptures that he had not previously understood.

Verses 17-18, when all this was explained, those who were there glorified God and said God was also granting repentance to the Gentiles.

Verse 19, in the meantime, the Church had been scattered. There was a persecution that had arisen after the stoning of Stephen. Much of the Church had been scattered. For the first couple of years the Church had remained right there centered in Jerusalem. When Stephen was stoned in 33 A.D., persecution broke out. The result was it forced people to begin to leave, to spread out. There had been a reluctance to leave the center of action. The result was that, as people began to spread, the knowledge of the truth began to spread.

Verses 20-22, it had come to the attention of the apostles that there were a number there in Antioch.

Verse 19, there were some from the area of Judea who had gone there; they had been talking about the truth, about the Church and the knowledge of the Messiah—but only to the Jews. They had been doing so, certainly, in the synagogues at Antioch.

Verse 22, when word came to Jerusalem, the decision was made at headquarters that since there was interest in Antioch, they needed to send a minister who would go to Antioch to take charge of the situation. Here we see a clear account of Church government. The people in Antioch didn't get together and send a pulpit

committee out to find somebody to preach what they liked and invite him to come there. When something came to the attention of headquarters, the apostles in Jerusalem sent Barnabas. He was sent down there as the pastor.

Verse 25, when Barnabas came, he went on to Tarsus—which was not all that far away—to seek Saul.

You remember that Saul, or Paul, had been converted several years earlier. He had been struck down on the road to Damascus. He had come to repentance, been baptized and converted; he had gone to Jerusalem but had not been that well accepted. They had accepted him, but they really didn't want him hanging around there. Because there was a little bit of skepticism, he stayed there about two weeks, got acquainted with several of the apostles and left.

In Galatians 1:11-18, we find that Paul spent a period of about three years in Arabia, there in the desert, having been taught directly by Christ. He came back through Jerusalem and was there for a short time. But at that time, there wasn't a place for him. He was told, 'The best thing for you to do is to go back to Tarsus where you came from and get a job. Don't call us; we'll call you!' So, that's what he did.

Acts 11:25-26, Paul knew that God works through the leadership He has established and ordained. When Barnabas, whom Paul had met and talked with right after his conversion (and evidently kept tabs on him), was sent to Antioch to pastor the Church, he went to Tarsus and brought Paul back to Antioch with him. Paul was evidently ordained as an elder at that time because we will note later that Paul was an elder in the Church at Antioch, although he's listed in the tail end of the list of the ministers serving there in Antioch (Acts 13:1).

Barnabas went to Tarsus and Paul entered the ministry full time. Saul (as he was known then) came back to Antioch to assist Barnabas. There's a period of a year that went by and the Church built up there in Antioch.

Verses 27-29, we find that there were prophets from Jerusalem that came down to Antioch with the message of a famine. There was a certain relief that was sent.

In Acts 12:1-2, we pick up the story of the first apostle to be martyred. Herod had James killed. This was James, the brother of John. When he saw that this was popular, he decided that he would finish off some of the others as well.

Verse 3, he arrested Peter and was going to execute him after the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Verses 5-11, the Church prayed and besought God's intervention. God intervened in a very dramatic way. He sent an angel and brought Peter out of jail.

Verses 12-16, when Peter came there to the house where all the people were praying, they were so shocked that they almost didn't believe their prayers had been answered. That's sometimes the case. We pray for a miracle and then we are amazed when it occurs. We need to not only pray for it, we need to expect it! This created quite a stir.

Verse 25, Barnabas and Saul remained there in Antioch. They had come down to Jerusalem and had returned to Antioch.

Acts 13:1-3, "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away."

Now, who laid on the hands? Well, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen. These were, evidently, prophets who had been sent down from Jerusalem. We are told they are prophets and teachers. Barnabas is listed first in the list because he was pastor of the Church. He had been sent down from Jerusalem as the Church pastor. These others who had evidently come down from Jerusalem were prophets from Jerusalem.

They were given revelation from God because what we have here is the ordination of Paul and Barnabas as apostles. This is what we have—an ordination. They fasted and prayed and laid hands on them; then they sent them away. They were sent out. That's what "apostle" means. They were sent forth. This is the ordination.

I think it is interesting to note—I mentioned the multi-ethnic background of the leadership of the early New Testament Church. 'Simeon that was called Niger'—"Niger" is the Greek word for "black." It specifically refers to Blacks from the area of West Africa. We have today the Niger River, the nation of Nigeria. It comes from the same term. The term "Ethiopian" was used as a general term to refer to Blacks from East Africa,

just as the term “Niger” was used as a general term to refer to Blacks from West Africa.

The Roman Empire took in portions of Northern Africa. Cyrene was in North Africa in the area around where Tunisia is today. That was a part of the Roman Empire, but the Roman Empire did not include East or West Africa down in the area of Ethiopia. Ethiopia maintained its independence and so did certain kingdoms in West Africa. There was trade and commerce. There was a familiarity in the Greek and Roman world with people of both East and West African origin. There was trade and a certain amount of commerce there on the border of the Empire. It was not uncommon.

We are not introduced to anything of the background of this individual (this Simeon called Niger), except that it is clear from his surname what his origin was. He was a West African from the area that we would refer to as the area of the Niger River in West Africa. We are not given any details at what point he came into the Church or at what point he had been ordained in the ministry. We are not given background on that. We are simply introduced to him, as well as to Lucius of Cyrene of whom we are told nothing else. The only thing we know about Manaen was that he was of an aristocratic background. He had actually grown up with Herod. He had been a friend and companion of many of the upper class.

What we see is that the leadership of the New Testament Church had been called from a variety of backgrounds, ethnically and culturally. It was no longer exclusively Palestinian Jews. In fact, Simeon and the other two were the ones by whom God actually ordained Paul and Barnabas as apostles. We get a little bit of insight into the beginning of the impact of the New Testament Church. These prophets had been sent from Jerusalem headquarters to Antioch. God had given them that commission.

At this point, after the ordination of Barnabas and Saul, we find that Barnabas and Saul left to begin the **first evangelistic journey**. They sailed from Antioch and went to Cyprus. Then they went up to central Asia Minor and preached in the area that we know as Galatia. Then they came back overland down to Antioch. If you look at a map, you will see that Antioch is in the modern nation of Syria. They went from there across a small stretch of the Mediterranean to the island of Cyprus, then up to ancient Asia Minor (the central portion of modern-day Turkey), the area of Galatia. They went there, traveled overland

through Asia Minor (or modern-day Turkey) and then came back down the coast overland to come back to Antioch. This was the first evangelistic journey that they made. The account of it is given in Acts 13 and 14.

Beginning in Acts 13:9, there is one thing that we find plainly evident. We see that the name Paul begins to be used in place of Saul, which was the Hebrew name. Paul was the Roman name that he had and Saul was his Hebrew name. As he began traveling in the Gentile areas, he elected to go by his Roman name. We see that switchover at that time.

In Acts 13:4-5, we find Paul addressed the Jews in Cyprus and in verses 14-41, the sermon he gave in Antioch. I will refer back to this a little later.

One thing I would like to call your attention to. I mentioned earlier, in terms of the Sabbath, the fact that there was no New Testament evidence at all of any controversy about a change of the Sabbath. If anybody were going to change it, certainly Paul would have done it when he preached to the Gentiles.

Acts 13:42, but we are told, “And when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.”

Paul could have told them, ‘You don’t need to wait until next Sabbath. We are going to have church service for you Gentiles ten o’clock Sunday morning. We are going to have Sunday services. You don’t need to wait until the Sabbath. The Sabbath has been done away!’ Why didn’t he explain that? –Because it wasn’t true! These Gentiles (Greeks primarily) in the area of Asia Minor came up and said, ‘We’d like for you to preach to us next Sabbath. We would like to get together and hear you.’

Verse 44, we are told, “And the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.” It is very clear that Paul was preaching to the Gentiles on the Sabbath, as well as the Jews. Some say, ‘Yeah, Paul preached to the Jews on the Sabbath. He went to the synagogue because that’s where the Jews were. He didn’t go there because he believed it; he just went there because that’s where the audience was.’ Well, if that was the case, the Gentiles didn’t normally keep the Sabbath, so why did he preach to them on the Sabbath? Why didn’t he use that as an opportunity to introduce Sunday worship? It’s very plain when we go through the Scriptures that Paul did not institute Sunday worship among the Gentiles.

We see that the main persecution Paul faced was religious persecution from the Jewish religious leadership.

Verse 45, “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.” They were really jealous.

Verse 50, “But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.” They stirred up a great controversy.

Acts 14:2, “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.” They began to spread all kinds of rumors and gossip. There were all sorts of problems that were stirred up.

We see the account in chapters 13 and 14 of the trip that Paul made overland and the arrival back in Antioch. This was the first large-scale conversion of Gentiles where large congregations were raised up in some of these areas that primarily consisted of Gentiles with a very small Jewish contingent. The issue of uncircumcised Gentiles being accepted into full fellowship was still kind of “cooking” and there was a problem. There was a controversy that came up.

Acts 15:1, “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” There were some that came down from Jerusalem and began to tell some of the brethren that it was fine to be baptized, but they still need to be circumcised. ‘I know you’ve been baptized and received the Holy Spirit, but if you are going to be saved, you still have to be circumcised.’

It stirred up a controversy and a dispute. When this doctrinal matter came up, it was not something that could be entirely addressed locally. Paul and Barnabas decided to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders there about the question and have it resolved once and for all. There would be an official statement of Church position.

Verse 2, “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders, about this question.” We see the recognition of the concept that God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). There is peace. We see that there was a discussion. As the leadership in Jerusalem came

together, there was a lot of discussion. Peter finally rose up.

Verse 7, “And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up, and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.’”

Verses 7-11, Peter began to recount the situation from the beginning as to how God had originally opened the door to the Gentiles through him. He went through, recounted it and explained it; he brought it through, step by step, exactly what had happened.

Verse 12, “Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.” They explained all the things that God had done through them on this evangelistic journey. They added to and reinforced the things that Peter had said. Once these things had been stated, this kind of concluded the discussion.

Verses 13-15, “And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, ‘Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon [Peter] has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written.’” James got up and made the official pronouncement. He was the brother of Jesus Christ. He was an apostle. He was not one of the twelve, but he held the rank of apostle. He was the pastor there of the Jerusalem Church and presided over the conference. Since he was the one who was presiding, he then said, ‘All right, Simon [Peter] has explained how this whole matter started.’

Verses 15-17, he invoked scriptural principles from the Old Testament that backed that up.

Verse 19, “‘Therefore I judge [KJV, “sentence”] ...’” The word “sentence” is the Greek word “*krino*.” It is a legal technical term in the Greek that refers to “a judgment” in the sense that a court would make a judgment. It is in the sense of a judge passing sentence or a judgment. It was an official legal decision. He was saying, ‘All right, everything has been discussed. We have heard it. Peter has explained what God revealed to him and what God did through him. Paul and Barnabas have told you what occurred. We have listened to all of this, and the Scriptures certainly prophesied and anticipated of the event that we have experienced and gone through. Therefore, my sentence, my official statement, my official

legal decision, the binding decision of the Church is...'

Verse 19, continuing, "...that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, ...'" This was concerning circumcision.

Verses 20-23, "but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.' Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this letter by them:"

Verses 23-29, a letter was written, and it was dispatched stating the decision of the Church.

Let's note something here. Some quote this statement in verse 20 and say, 'You see, James didn't say anything about the Gentiles keeping the Sabbath. Therefore, it is very obvious that the Gentiles don't have to keep the Sabbath. All of that's done away. They weren't told to keep the Sabbath.'

Well, that's right! They weren't told to keep the Sabbath; neither were they told not to commit murder. If verse 20 does away with the fourth commandment to remember the Sabbath, it also does away with the sixth commandment not to murder because that's not mentioned either. In fact, there's nothing here that says the Gentiles shouldn't steal or shouldn't lie or covet or dishonor their parents. There are a lot of commandments that are not mentioned. Most people who want to do away with the Sabbath aren't quite so anxious to do away with murder, particularly, if they are on the receiving end of the gun. They generally figure that's a good commandment to have around.

Why isn't the Sabbath mentioned? Well, the Sabbath isn't mentioned because it wasn't a question. James didn't answer it because nobody asked the question. That simply had never come up. What had come up and was being discussed was circumcision. They addressed the subject of circumcision and they said, 'All right, circumcision applies in the spirit. It is a circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:28-29). The physical ceremonial requirement of circumcision is not necessary for salvation.' Then that raises the question of what about some of these other things that are so uncommon and strange in

the Greek and Roman world? Are they also ceremonial? What about meat offered to idols? Is there anything wrong with that? What about morality? Do the prohibitions of morality apply?

Most of us have trouble associating the concept of morality with some of these other matters. But what you have to realize is that the whole concept of chastity and morality was such an uncommon thing in the Greek and Roman world that it was looked upon as a peculiarity of the Jews. Immorality (fornication) involved in idolatrous temple worship and this kind of thing was taken for granted. Immoral practices were so taken for granted in the Greek and Roman world of the first century, that it was a real culture shock to some of these who came out of this kind of background. They needed to recognize the importance that God placed on morality. The Jews placed great emphasis on it. What the Gentile converts had to realize was that this was not simply a peculiarity of the Jews. God placed great emphasis on it.

We are almost coming back to a situation like that in our society today. There is no sense of scandal being attached to immorality in a way that was common 25 or 30 years ago when it was common that immorality was a scandal. It is so taken for granted and accepted now, that many young people growing up in this society and surrounded by the attitudes of a society evidenced at school and through the media, etc., have trouble grasping, 'What's the big deal?' Now, that's a concept that some of us who grew up 30 or 40 years ago and longer may have trouble grasping. How can you not understand what a big deal it is? We have to realize how much the culture in this nation has changed in the course of a generation—a drastic change that we could date to the 60s. You could pick various benchmarks, but I think the most recent radical change began in the 60s—particularly, by the mid-60s the toboggan slide had really begun to become evident.

These were issues in the Gentile world and they had to be addressed. What James makes plain is that these other things you wondered about are not ceremonial. You should abstain from pollutions of idols, from immorality, from things strangled and from blood. This had to do with the methods of slaughter and the use of blood as a matter of diet. There were some questions about some of these things; James summarized it to make it plain.

Now, concerning the matter of blood—the Jehovah’s Witnesses take this and make a big issue of blood transfusions. Blood transfusions are not being discussed here. It is discussing dietary laws. It is not a verse that has any bearing on blood transfusion, one way or the other. Notice what James went on to say. Why did James not feel it necessary to do anything more than clarify these points that had been raised? He answered the questions that had been asked, and he didn’t feel the need to explain more. Why?

Verse 21, “For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” It was apparent that James knew and accepted that the brethren were going to go and hear the Scriptures and the Law read every Sabbath. The Gentiles were going to the synagogue and were hearing the Law read every Sabbath. James said, ‘I don’t need to explain any further because you will hear it read in the synagogue. You will hear it on the Sabbath when you go listen to the Law being read.’ It is very apparent that James didn’t say, ‘Hey, you Gentiles are going to the synagogue on the Sabbath and listening to the Law being read; don’t you know the Sabbath is done away? The Law is done away and you shouldn’t be going. All it is going to do is get you confused.’ He didn’t tell them that did he? Again, it is important to note. The letter was written and sent forth.

Verses 40-41, “but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.” Paul and Silas were going on their **second evangelistic journey**. This time they were going to leave and go overland up through Syria and across through Asia Minor.

Acts 16:1, “Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.” They came through the area of Galatia.

Verse 3, “Paul wanted to have him [Timothy] go with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.”

You notice this. The issue had been resolved. It was not a spiritual matter, but they did circumcise Timothy. There is a reason. Timothy’s mother was a Jew and his father was a Greek. It was known in the area what Timothy’s background was. Timothy, being of a Jewish background, would have been a stumbling block

to the Jews. They would have viewed Timothy as a traitor to his own people. Paul recognized this. It wasn’t that Timothy needed to be circumcised in order to be saved, but Paul recognized that it would be a stumbling block in Timothy’s ministry if the Jews viewed him as one who was kind of a traitor to his people. They viewed it as rejecting the outward sign of the covenant, and it would brand him as one who identified with his father’s Greek heritage and rejected his mother’s Jewish heritage—which would obviously be an issue of contention in the Church. The simplest thing was that he be circumcised; it would not be an issue.

So, this was done. Paul and the group traveled across to the coast of Asia Minor and into what is Europe (modern-day Greece).

Verse 9, he saw the vision of the man in Macedonia. Macedonia is northern Greece. He crossed over from Asia Minor into Europe.

Verse 13, “And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the river side, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.” This is the first time the gospel went out in Europe.

Now, in my KJV Bible, there is a little “4” out by the word “Sabbath.” The marginal rendering is “Sabbath Days.” This has a different ending in the Greek that is like a plural ending. It means it’s not the common way of writing “Sabbath.” It would more literally be “on the day of Sabbaths.” It was a term used among the Jews to refer to Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks or the Day of the Sabbaths because you counted seven Sabbaths to arrive at it. We would date the first sermon Paul preached here in Europe as Pentecost of 50 A.D.

The interesting thing to note is the New Testament Church began on Pentecost of 31 A.D. Exactly 19 years to the day later, the gospel first went into Europe. Of course, God’s whole calendar is based on a 19-year cycle. The calendar repeats itself every 19 years. Exactly 19 years after Pentecost, the gospel first went out into Europe.

Exactly 19 years after that on Pentecost of 69 A.D., there was a voice in the temple. The Jews heard thunder, but the Christians heard a message, and the Church fled Jerusalem. In the aftermath, the Roman troops came in, surrounded the city and Jerusalem fell. It was destroyed in 70 A.D.

You can divide the organized proclamation of the gospel by the early New Testament Church into

two 19-year periods. It is just a matter of historical reference in the Scriptures.

Verse 12, we see that Paul was preaching in the area of Macedonia. Let me call your attention again to what Paul was preaching and the way he was identified. After Paul had cast a demon out of a girl, her master brought them to the magistrate.

Verses 20-21, “And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, ‘These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.’” Notice that Paul was being accused of teaching Jewish customs. That’s what they accused him of. If Paul had come in and had been preaching Sunday, Christmas, Easter and doing all this stuff, he wouldn’t have been creating a problem. They would have been familiar with all those things. Those were good old Roman holidays. He wouldn’t have been teaching customs unlawful for the Romans. They wouldn’t have identified him as being Jewish. Paul was looked upon as teaching Jewish customs.

He was accused of the same thing that the Church is accused of today. People think Paul is the one who did away with the law. It’s very plain. You never find Paul being accused of that. In fact, it’s interesting, a little later on, when Paul came to Ephesus. The people who were the angriest were the silversmiths (19:24-27) because they were in the idol-making business. They got all upset and said, ‘This guy is going to put us out of business.’ Now if Paul had been a good Catholic, they wouldn’t have been upset. They would have just switched over into making crucifixes and all kinds of little trinkets. Paul would have been good for the business. They would have been glad to see him there. It would have just added something extra to sell. But what Paul taught was going to put these guys out of business because, all of a sudden, there was not going to be any demand for all of their little idols and shrines, all their little religious figurines that dotted the countryside. I think it is important to note some of these things as we go through.

Acts is not so much the *teachings* of the apostles. Though it tells us what they said, Acts does not primarily focus on the teachings—it focuses on the *actions*. It is important that we note what these actions were. We notice how much these actions contrast with the things that pass for Christianity in our modern society and country. People accuse us of not being a New Testament Church. People say, ‘You just have the Old

Testament; you don’t really follow the New Testament!’ Well, yes we do! We follow the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament. In reality, they follow neither. They follow the customs and traditions of men. They follow the things that you don’t find here in the book of Acts.

Verses 23-24, we find Paul being thrown into jail because he was “teaching customs that are not lawful.”

Verses 25-26, they were praying. About midnight, God sent a big earthquake and everyone’s chains were loosed.

Verses 27-28, the jailer got so scared that he was going to commit suicide. He just knew all these prisoners had gotten away. Paul stopped him and said, ‘Don’t do that. We are all here.’ This jailer was so impressed that he brought these men out.

Verse 30, “And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” He was familiar with who they were and what they had been teaching.

Verses 31-32, “So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.” They went through and explained.

He was familiar with what Paul and Silas were doing. They had been thrown in jail for teaching the necessity of observing Jewish customs (as the Roman government looked upon it). He was familiar with all of these things. He was familiar with their message. He knew who they were and why they were in jail. When he saw the hand of God, he was so impressed that he asked, ‘What do I need to do to act on all of this?’ They told him, ‘You are going to have to believe, to really believe what Jesus said.’

Now, you can’t take this out of context and say that’s all you have to do is believe. They continued and spoke to him the word of the Lord. They went through and explained to him. He had already heard these other things.

Verse 33, we find that he was baptized.

Verses 34-36, the next day they found out that Paul was a Roman citizen, so the magistrate said, ‘We are just going to kind of send these guys away and get them out of here.’

Verse 37, “But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No, indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.’” Paul said, ‘You’ve beaten us openly and illegally. You want us to leave? You come ask us nicely.’

Paul was not averse to utilizing the rights of Roman citizenship. He submitted to the government authorities. But there is a time, particularly in terms of the work of God, that it is important that we avail ourselves of the rights and privileges that the laws of the land give us. Paul availed himself of those rights and privileges. But recognize that's not where our protection is going to come from. Our protection comes from God, but those things can be properly utilized.

Acts 17:1-2, "...they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures."

Verses 10-11, "Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." They checked it out. They proved it out of the Bible.

That's what is important! God wants us to prove out of the Bible the things that we hear so our faith and our confidence rest upon Him and upon His word. We are to really prove what we believe and why we believe it.

Paul went from there to Athens.

Verse 19, they took him there while he was waiting for the others to join him. They took him to Mars Hill, the Areopagus.

Verse 21, "For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." We are told they loved to discuss things, and they prided themselves on really being open-minded. They always wanted to hear something new. They were always coming up with something. We see that example. Paul took advantage of the opportunity. He went there to Mars Hill and had an opportunity to speak. He addressed them. I would call your attention to the way he handled it.

Verse 22, "Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious [KJV, "too superstitious"]...'." The KJV gives kind of a negative impression. That is not really the sense of it. Paul didn't start out in a negative way. Some of the modern translations bring it out a little more clearly. What he really said was, 'I

perceive that you are very religious.' Paul didn't start out insulting them.

Verses 22-26, he said, 'Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious people. I have noticed your devotions, the outward signs of your religion. One of the things I noticed was that you even have an altar dedicated TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. It is this Unknown God that I wish to tell you about this afternoon. He is the One you ignorantly worship, this Unknown God, who is unknown to you. You don't know Him. I want to explain Him to you today. He is the God that made the world and all things that are therein. He is the Creator.'

Paul goes through and begins to explain. He starts by introducing the Athenians to the God who is the Creator of the Greek people. He comes through and then, finally, we have the conclusion of his summary.

Verse 31, "'because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.'"

I would call your attention to something. In Acts 17, as Paul went through and addressed the issue, he didn't mention the name of Jesus Christ. If you compared the sermon Paul gave in Acts 17 to the one he gave the Jews in Acts 13, it's totally different. In Acts 13, he started out quoting the Bible. He's quoting Scripture—bang, bang, bang—straight Bible all the way through.

Why the difference? You address people in a way that they are going to be receptive and understand what you are talking about. If you are addressing people who acknowledge the authority of Scripture, then you start with the Bible and quote the Bible to them. If you are addressing people who don't even know what the Bible is, then you don't start out by quoting the Bible. There's no point. They don't even know what's under discussion.

The way that Paul addressed the Athenians was much the same way as Mr. Herbert Armstrong began his initial addresses in some of the Gentile nations—in Japan and some of these places. In fact, he used Acts 17 as a guide. This was the way you addressed people. In that context, you then bring them to the point of recognizing that there is a Messiah and there is One who is coming to judge the world.

Bible Study # 42
September 26, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

The Gospels and Acts Series—Acts 18—28

We will be finishing up our series on the survey of the Gospels and the book of Acts. There is an awful lot that we could have gone through on some of this in this sequence of studies. Hopefully, it has given you a little bit of an insight in terms of continuity and the flow of it. This evening we are continuing this series.

One of the main areas that we **will focus on this evening has to do with the imprisonment of the Apostle Paul.** I think this section is an excellent place to illustrate the point as to how God works in our lives in ways that we could not begin to foresee. We have the account of the way God worked in the circumstance of Paul's life—Paul's imprisonment or what resulted in his Roman imprisonment.

He was first imprisoned in Caesarea for a couple of years. He was in transit on a ship and was shipwrecked. He went through a lot of difficult circumstances and finally wound up in Rome. He was there for a couple of years. The whole circumstance was not at all an enjoyable sequence of activities. It was not a pleasant experience. Well, God allowed that! Don't you think the Apostle Paul must have wondered why?

You know, we have the advantage. We look at it and we read it. It only takes us a matter of a few minutes to read the last portion of the book of Acts, and we know the end of the story. He lived his life one day at a time, just like you and I live our lives and the sequence of our lives. Paul had found himself in difficult situations before. He had found himself in jail before. There was a time when he was thrown in jail. He and Silas prayed and sang hymns. About midnight, God sent a big earthquake and an angel, and they were delivered. That's pretty dramatic.

This time Paul was thrown in jail. Midnight came and there was no earthquake. In fact, the next day came and there was no earthquake. It dragged on and on. The days turned into weeks; the weeks turned into months; the months dragged out and a couple of years went by. It was a very difficult and trying experience. It dragged on and on for several years.

Now, undoubtedly, Paul must have wondered during this time why God was allowing this. 'I need to be out of this place. There are things that

I need to do, people I need to visit, places in which I need to preach and areas where the Gospel needs to be spread. There are a lot of things that need to be done.' I am sure all those things went through his mind. They would go through mine, and I'm sure they would go through yours.

We look back on it from a little different perspective because while he was in jail, the only way that Paul could really impact the areas where he had worked was to write letters. Now, we are familiar with those letters. They comprise a goodly portion of our New Testament. Some of the most important things the Apostle Paul did, he did from a jail cell. He wrote letters that had a tremendous impact. They explained many things. He was in a circumstance that writing letters was all he was able to do—and he did it.

The point is that God was working out a purpose. Paul may have looked at it at the time and wondered why he had been "put on hold." He couldn't get out and do anything. And yet, we look back on it and realize that while he was in jail, he did what turned out to be one of the most permanent, enduring and important parts of the work that he had ever accomplished. He gave us a goodly portion of our New Testament.

The point that I would like to make in that regard is that when we are going through difficult circumstances, when we are going through trials and we can't see why, we have to accept the fact God may be working out something in our lives. God may have a plan and a purpose that supersedes anything that we can see or fathom at the time. Generally, we can never see the purpose until after it is all over. We can very rarely understand the purpose of a trial when we are in the midst of it. Generally, we only see it in retrospect; sometimes it is even years in retrospect because it takes time to get it into perspective.

Paul's imprisonment in Rome allowed him to come into contact with the very top leadership of the Roman Empire. A lot of times that's not realized, but there's a lot of evidence of Paul's impact upon the very top echelon of the Roman Empire. Notice what Paul says in one of the letters he wrote in prison.

Philippians 4:22, "All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household." There were people converted in the very household of Caesar. That's getting pretty close to the top. There were converts in Caesar's household.

Philippians 1:12-13 (KJV), “But I would you should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace [margin, “Caesar’s court”], and in all other places [margin, “to all others”]...” This is often read over. We notice here that he talks about “all the palace.”

I would like to give you the RSV translation of it because it brings out an additional detail, “I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard [margin, Greek, “in the whole praetorium”], and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ...” “Praetorian” is the Greek word for “palace.” The RSV translates it, “the whole Praetorian Guard.” What was the Praetorian? Who was the Praetorian Guard? Why is that significant?

The term that is used here refers specifically to the Praetorian or Praetorian Guard. It was an elite group that was first established by Caesar Augustus as a detachment of troops to be his private bodyguard. They were an elite organization and under the later emperors came to have many special privileges. This Praetorian Guard became so powerful that they were able to raise and depose emperors at their will because after all, these were the elite troops. They were the ones who were right there in the capital city. They were the ones who were responsible for the security of the emperor. They had direct access to him in a way that no one else did. You’re at the mercy of no one more than you are at the mercy of your bodyguards. No matter what you think you have, you are no more secure than your bodyguards.

This special Praetorian Guard was ruled by the Praetorian Prefect, an individual who was second only to the emperor because he held the supreme military and judicial authority there in Rome. As the captain or Prefect of the Praetorian Guard, he was kind of a combination Joint Chief of Staff and Supreme Court. He was the commander of the Praetorian Guard, the supreme military commander of the Roman Empire. He commanded the home troops and had seniority on every other commander; he was considered the supreme military commander of the Roman Empire. He also had supreme judicial authority. He exercised the judicial authority in the name of the emperor. He had a certain amount of legislative power in control of finances and

influence with the provinces. In fact, it was almost impossible to exercise an important influence in political affairs, except in concert with the Praetorian Prefect. It was a powerful post. He was in a position of daily contact with the emperor. He had the personal command of the emperor’s bodyguard, the troops that maintained the palace and the troop right there in the capital. He was a very powerful individual.

Let’s notice Paul being brought to Rome.

Acts 28:16, “Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.”

That’s how it’s rendered in the NKJV, but if you will check it, you will find the literal rendering is, “the centurion delivered the prisoners to the Praetorian Prefect, but Paul was allowed to dwell by himself with the soldier that kept him.”

Paul was actually handed over to the Praetorian Prefect when he arrived in Rome. He arrived on an appeal, a judicial appeal to the emperor. There was direct knowledge of his circumstance. At the time Paul was delivered to Rome in 60 A.D., Emperor Nero was the ruler—he was the emperor. If you have read very much about Nero, you know what a perverted character he was and he was a pretty good size, too. He was “nutty as a fruitcake.” If you’ve read very much about him, he did some crazy things.

There were two main rival factions there in Rome. There were two individuals who had great influence with Nero. One was his mistress who, of course, had her own brand of influence. She was a woman by the name of Poppaea. The Praetorian Prefect was a man by the name of Burrus. He had risen to power in the Roman Empire. He had originally come from North Africa. He had risen to great power and influence there in Rome and Italy; he was the commander of the Praetorian Guard. He was a very close friend of the philosopher Seneca who was the great Roman philosopher at the time and had also been a teacher of Nero. Burrus and Seneca were close friends. As long as Burrus lived, they sought to combine their influence to keep Nero in check because they recognized his mental instability—the cruel and crazy tendencies that he had.

Poppaea was attracted to Judaism. She was somewhat familiar with Judaism and was attracted to that. Burrus, on the other hand, was very much anti-Jewish. Now, this sets the stage for something.

Paul had been a political “hot potato” back in Judea. The Jewish religious leadership had brought charges against him. It was primarily because of an unwillingness to create a lot of upset with the Jewish religious leadership in Judea that the Roman governors had held Paul as a prisoner, and then finally sent him to Rome. He was a “hot potato,” and they were trying to get him off their hands.

They realized that Burrus, who was anti-Jewish, would have an automatic incentive to be favorable to Paul and Paul’s appeal. He didn’t have much use for the Jews. Poppaea was the rival for the influence that he had because she had a lot of influence with Nero. She was really the only one who was in a position to influence Nero, apart from Burrus and Seneca. Burrus resented that, so for political reasons, he would have had incentive to take Paul’s side against the Jews. With this level of contact and with the attitude Burrus had, when Paul came, it evidently set the stage for allowing Paul the level of freedom and the level of contact all the way up to the palace.

Paul became well known in the Praetorian Guard and in the palace. He became very well known and had contact. Many of these people had connections with him. In fact, it may certainly have influenced even some of the later writings of Seneca. There is evidence of that. When you read some of the things that he wrote, because of the timing of it, you wonder to what extent he came under the Apostle Paul’s influence.

Paul was released from prison evidently in 61 A.D. Burrus died a few months later in 62 A.D., shortly after Paul’s release from prison. Now, with Poppaea in the ascendance, once Burrus was gone, she was able to influence Nero without Burrus’ counter-influence. It took time for the new Prefect to establish his authority. One of the things that happened was that Nero turned tolerant toward the Jews and began to persecute the Christians.

One of the things that seems to be characteristic of the demagogue type of politicians is that they always look for some group to be made the scapegoat. They like to blame all the problems on some minority—somebody that is significant enough in the minority to be noticed but is powerless enough that they are not going to be able to successfully defend themselves. You have to pick a group that is small enough that you can overwhelm them, but they are large enough that everybody notices them. You blame all the problems on them. You say, ‘They have caused

all the problems. Let’s get them.’ This is an old tactic that has been used on various groups. In some cases, it was used on the Jews.

The Jews have been a target, but they have not been the only target. There were other groups and other targets. It depends on the society and the culture at the time as to what’s used, but it is an attitude of human nature. People don’t want to take responsibility for their own problems. They want to believe that somebody else is the source of all their problems. Boy, you gang up on them, get them, and you’ll solve all of your problems. Politicians are good at that. They try to make a scapegoat out of some segment of society.

Nero, the Roman Emperor had used the Jews that way at various times. It was also a handy way to get a little cash because when you expelled the Jews from Rome, you confiscated all their property and got a little cash in your hands. You “sent them packing.” Then after a few years, they gradually drifted back.

In Acts 18:2, we read of Aquila and Priscilla who were Jews from Rome. We read that they had been expelled from Rome when Claudius kicked out the Jews. They had come to Corinth. Paul had met them and become acquainted with them. Why were they expelled? Claudius was a predecessor of Nero. They had problems so he decided to just blame all the Jews and kicked them all out of Rome. They gave them a few days to leave with what they could carry on their backs. Then they confiscated their property, which of course went to the emperor. This was the situation. Later, the Jews were allowed to come back in. They needed them for business purposes. This was the kind of situation that was going on.

After the death of Burrus, Nero began to turn his persecution from the Jews to the Christians. Because Poppaea influenced him to not be so rough on the Jews, he looked for another group he could blame all the problems on. If you can’t blame it on the Jews, there should be somebody you can blame it on. Blame it on the Christians. This led to the situation that later resulted in the Roman martyrdom of Paul and Peter and several of the other apostles. Prior to that time, the latter 60s A.D., the persecution the Church received was from the Jews. The Romans were observers. There may have been times when they didn’t step in simply because they didn’t want to risk stirring up political trouble. They just let the events take their course. They didn’t really care, one way or the other, unless they got “put on the spot” with it.

After the late 60s A.D., after the death of Burrus, then they began to turn their attention toward using the Christians as the scapegoat. Official Roman persecution began to come on some of the leadership of the Church. When the book of Acts ends, it ends with the conclusion of Paul's imprisonment in 61 A.D.; Paul left Rome. When he was let go from prison, he left Rome, went to Spain (which was where he had said he was going (Romans 15:24)) and then from Spain to Britain. There was a period of several years that went by. About three years afterwards, about 65 A.D., Paul returned into the Mediterranean area. It was shortly after that, about 67 A.D., that he was arrested and put to death. Luke ends his account in Acts with the release of Paul from prison. He didn't go further.

One of the things to note about the book of Acts is that it does not end with "Amen." "Amen" is the concluding statement, the word that gives the connotation of completion and finality that we find in the other New Testament books, with a few notable exceptions. We note it here with the book of Acts, in the book of James and in the book of 3 John. They are the only New Testament books that do not end with "Amen." There are reasons in each case.

When we go through the General Epistles, we will focus in on why that was the case in James and 3 John. We might just note that Acts was written as a book to catalog the acts or the actions of the apostles; it ends abruptly. It doesn't end with the death of Paul. It just summarizes the fact that he was released from prison in Rome two years after being brought to Rome. He dwelt in his own rented house two years.

Now, there's a reason why it ended there. God did not want the rest of the story recorded. You remember Paul's three-fold commission. He had been commissioned to take God's name before the Gentiles, before kings and before the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). That was the commission and that was the order of the commission. The book of Acts records him taking the message before the Gentiles and it brings us up to where he was going before kings. He went before governors and rulers, right on up to the Roman emperor. But it ends when he left Rome.

God did not have recorded the third part of his commission to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. God did not intend that it be clearly and unequivocally preserved in Scripture exactly where the lost sheep of the House of Israel were; otherwise, they wouldn't have been lost sheep.

God allowed that knowledge to be pretty much lost from sight. It's been available and accessible, but God allowed it to be lost from common sight. God didn't preserve that clearly.

I think it is interesting if we look at the commission God gave Paul to take God's message to Gentiles, to kings and to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. You could say that in Mr. Herbert Armstrong's case, it was the same commission, only in reverse order. He took God's message first to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, then to the Gentiles and then before kings. It's kind of an interesting reversal of the way that it went.

There is this ending in Acts. The acts of the other apostles are not noted here. Luke told a portion of the story that God wanted recorded for us. But the absence of the "Amen" gives us realization that there is more. It does not have that "ring" of finality. It was what God wanted preserved as Scripture for this time. Perhaps in the Millennium, Luke himself will write the rest of the story. Perhaps he will write the completion of the history of the Church, which is the action of the apostles.

Let's note briefly, let's summarize this portion of the book of Acts.

Acts 17 ended up with Paul having come to Athens and his address on Mars Hill.

Acts 18:1, "After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth." Corinth is a little further down in Greece. This is where he found Aquila who had lately come from Rome.

Verse 2, "And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them." Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome.

One of the ways of dating the book of Acts is that the command to expel the Jews from Rome was issued by Emperor Claudius in 50 A.D. That is simply a matter of secular history and Roman records. It is one of the ways of cross-dating. The book of Acts can be dated internally. We will go into that in a later series. We will go through a "Life and Letters of the Apostle Paul Series." We will go into detail in terms of how we date the events here. Much of Acts can be dated internally, but there are also a few places where we can check with an external date—a date from secular history—where an event of secular importance is noted. It serves as a crosscheck on

the date. This is one of those ways of cross-dating.

We see what Paul did when the Jews no longer allowed him access to the synagogue. We find that Paul simply rented a place nearby.

Acts 18:6-8, “But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.” He rented a location nearby. He went to a place that was nearby and preached to the Gentiles. This was Paul’s approach.

Verse 11, he stayed in Corinth for a period of a year and a half. He was anxious to return to Jerusalem.

Verse 21, “but took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.’ And he sailed from Ephesus.” He was anxious to go to Jerusalem.

This was the Feast of Tabernacles 52 A.D. Paul didn’t say he just wanted to go to Jerusalem because it had been a long time. He didn’t say he wanted to be there at Feast time to preach to some Jews. He said, ‘I must by all means keep this Feast!’ Now, if he was going to keep the Feast, he was going to observe the Feast.

The Protestants try to explain it away and say Paul wasn’t going to keep the Feast; he was going to be there to preach to some Jews because he knew there would be a bunch of Jews there. You can go through and read the account. That’s not what he did. He didn’t evangelize in Jerusalem at all. When he went back for the Feast, he didn’t go there to evangelize. He knew that he wasn’t a very popular person in Jerusalem, and he didn’t go there to evangelize. There’s no mention of him doing that at all. He went there to do what he said. He went to keep the Feast.

It’s incredible—if you were to ask most people, most theologians, they’d tell you, ‘Oh, the New Testament does away with the need to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days.’ And they’re sure that if anybody did away with it, Paul did away with it. Some of them will say, ‘Well, maybe James kept them or Peter did, but Paul, he didn’t fool with all those Jewish things.’

Acts 18:4, you go through the book of Acts and find, “And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.”

Verse 21, “but took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem;’” You find example after example where Paul kept the Feast and kept the Sabbath. He preached not only to the Jews on the Sabbath, but he also preached to the Gentiles on the Sabbath.

He commanded the Church, the Gentile Church, in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 5:8, “Therefore let us keep the feast,” Paul made it very plain that he kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Church should keep the Feast.

We find that Paul left.

Acts 18:22, “And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up [to Jerusalem] and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.” To go “up” means to go to Jerusalem. That is the term that is used. When a Jew speaks of going to Jerusalem, he always speaks of going “up” to Jerusalem. It doesn’t matter where he is going from; if he goes to Jerusalem, he goes “up” to Jerusalem.

A part of that is derived from the symbolism of Isaiah where it talks about how, in the Millennium, all nations will say:

Isaiah 2:3, “...‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob;’”

Verse 2, “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.” The Jews always speak of it in that term and from that perspective. From wherever you are, you are always going up to Jerusalem and going down to anywhere else when you go from Jerusalem.

Acts 18:22 says he landed in Caesarea. Caesarea was the seaport. He went up, which means up to Jerusalem. He greeted the Church. He didn’t evangelize the Jews. He went to keep the Feast. He met with the congregation in Jerusalem. Then he left right after the Feast and went down to Antioch.

Antioch was his headquarters for the Gentile portion of the work. It was the center from which he worked.

Verse 23, he spent some time there. Evidently, he wintered there. He spent a period of several months there, probably about six months, between the Feast and the Spring Festivals. Then

he left to go overland. This began his **third evangelistic journey** going up through Asia Minor—through the region of Galatia and Phrygia.

Acts 19:1, “And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus....” Paul came to Ephesus, which is located in Asia Minor on the seacoast across from Greece.

Verses 1-7, we note an example of some who had been baptized but had not received God’s Spirit. They had been baptized at an earlier time. This is an example of someone whose baptism was not valid. What makes a baptism not valid? Well, what makes it not valid is if you did not receive God’s Spirit when you were baptized. You weren’t truly converted. You really didn’t understand. Here were people who had been baptized by John the Baptist or some of his disciples, but they did not understand conversion. They didn’t understand about the Holy Spirit. Paul baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus and laid hands on them; they received the Holy Spirit and spoke with tongues and prophesied.

This is the third and final mention in the book of Acts of the miraculous gift of foreign languages at the time of receiving the Holy Spirit. This was not something that happened every time. It was something that happened only on special occasions, and this is the third occasion that is mentioned. God gave that original gift on the Day of Pentecost—that marked the beginning of the establishment of the New Testament Church. We’ve gone through and read that and saw reasons why that particular gift was chosen and given at that time.

Acts 10:44-48, later on, when the first Gentiles were converted, God worked the same miracle. God wanted it clearly shown that the Jews would not consider that the Gentiles had gotten a second-rate baptism, so it was the same miracle. Here in this place, God again put His stamp of approval in a very clear way. Here was a decision that had to be made. Here were people who had been baptized earlier by John the Baptist or his disciples. After Paul counseled with them, he determined that their baptism was not valid and he re-baptized them. God put His clear stamp of approval in a very dramatic and miraculous way to clearly evidence that the decision had been a valid one. God made this clear distinction.

We find that he went into the synagogue.

Acts 19:8-9, “And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom

of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.”

When trouble came up and he no longer had access to the synagogue, he rented a school, a school of Tyrannus. Evidently, a fellow by the name of Tyrannus had a school there. Paul utilized that and separated the disciples.

Verse 10, he stayed there for a period of two years and evangelized the whole area—the Roman province of Asia. What we would think of today as the Western portion of Turkey was the Roman Province of Asia—a portion of Asia Minor.

Paul remained there in Ephesus for an extended period of time. Various events took place. One thing we might note simply by way of example is in Acts 19.

Verses 11-12, “Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.”

As Paul was preaching there in Ephesus, people sent word to him of illnesses and of problems. Paul was certainly not able to go and personally anoint and pray for everyone who sent word of being ill. With transportation being what it was, it would be far more difficult than it is today. It is not always immediately possible and practical to go today, and far less so at that time. What did Paul do when he was unable to go and personally anoint and pray for someone? He anointed a cloth. “Handkerchief” or “aprons” just means “a piece of cloth.” He took a piece of cloth, anointed it, laid hands on it and sent it to the individual. God honored that.

Many, many years ago, back in the early 1930s, as Mr. Herbert Armstrong was preaching on the radio, there began to come in requests for him to pray and to anoint someone for illnesses. He was unable to go and personally do that everywhere. That would have been impossible. He looked here and saw the example of what Paul did when he was in that circumstance and he followed that example.

That, of course, is what we do today. If it is possible for us to do so, we go and personally anoint those who are sick. In some cases when that isn’t possible, we will anoint a cloth and send it. It is not the physical act that does the healing. God is our Healer. God has chosen to designate that. God utilizes the laying on of

hands. Laying on of hands is listed in Hebrews 6:2 as one of the basic doctrines of the Church. The laying on of hands has to do with Church government and the fact that God works through human instruments. We find the laying on of hands utilized in cases of ordination, receiving of God's Spirit at baptism and in cases of someone seeking God's intervention in healing. It designates the fact that God is working through human instruments. God could do it some other way, but He has chosen to do it that way to make plain His working and the continuity of His working through human instruments. It shows the fact that we need to go through God's government in certain areas.

One of the things we run into in the book of Acts is the problem that came up with the silversmiths in Ephesus. I think it is interesting to note why the silversmiths were mad at Paul.

Verses 24-27, "For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: 'Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout most all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.'"

'By this craft we have our wealth. Now this Paul has persuaded people to get rid of all these idols and our craft is in danger. He's going to put us out of business.'

This is a good place to go to prove that Paul was not a Catholic because if he had been a Catholic, the Ephesian silversmiths would not have been mad at him. He would have been good for business. They would have added a new line of crucifixes, Madonnas, all kinds of trinkets, saints and medallions. They would have had a whole new line of products. Paul wouldn't have been bad for business. They wouldn't have had any complaints about him. But they did. Why? – Because Paul told the people to get rid of that junk! 'That is idolatry; get rid of those things. Throw them away. You don't want those things around.'

It makes a contrast. I think it is good for us to note the clear evidence of the departure of what calls itself "Christianity" and what calls itself

"the Church that Jesus built." It is important for us to note how far departed it is from the teachings and the practices of Jesus and the early apostles. Paul did not preach a message that was compatible with idolatry and the use of all kinds of shrines. You can't drive down the street without seeing all these little shrines out in front of the houses and all the various things. That's what they had in Ephesus. But the people that believed Paul got rid of those things, just as you did when you came into the Church. All of us, when we came into the knowledge of God's truth, had things we had to get rid of because we realized that was not God's way. There got to be so much of a problem in Ephesus that Paul finally had to leave.

Acts 20:1, "After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to him, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia." He left and went to Macedonia.

Verse 3, we find Paul had gone from Macedonia and had crossed back into Asia Minor.

Verse 7, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." Some had tried to take this out of context and say that Paul was having a Sunday morning service and they were having communion. On the first day of the week, Paul was over there to say mass and have communion early Sunday morning. Well, that's not what it is talking about at all.

Verse 6, notice when it was, "But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days." Oh, they were keeping the Days of Unleavened Bread! Luke and the group with him had been in Philippi for the Days of Unleavened Bread. Paul was in Troas. Why was Paul breaking bread? "Breaking bread" just simply means "eating a meal." Why was he breaking bread and eating a meal with the disciples on the first day of the week?

Verse 7, "Paul, ready to depart the next day." Paul was getting ready to depart the next morning. He ate this meal and the speech lasted until midnight. Now, what is the evening or night portion of the first day of the week? It's not Sunday night. It's Saturday night! If Paul was gathered with them breaking bread on the first day of the week and their meeting lasted until midnight, when was this? This was Saturday night. This was after the close of the Sabbath. They had a going-away dinner for Paul. He was getting ready to leave; after the Sabbath they had

a going-away party, so to speak, and Paul spoke. When he got “cranked up,” he just kept going and it lasted until midnight.

Verse 9, there was a fellow sitting there by the name of Eutychus. He got sleepy, which occasionally occurs. The only problem was that they didn’t have air conditioning and the windows were open. He was sitting up there in the loft and was evidently trying to get a little fresh air. He dozed off and the next thing you know, he fell out of the window, which is even worse than falling out of your chair. It’s bad to go to sleep and fall out of your chair. But what was really bad, he was sitting up there by the open window and he fell out.

Now can you imagine how Eutychus is going to feel when he comes up in the resurrection and finds out the only time that he got his name in the New Testament was one time when he fell asleep in Church. Luke had to write it down and put his name in there so that everybody who has ever read the Bible, all the way down through the centuries, the only thing they know about Eutychus is that he went to sleep in Church and fell out of the window. If I were Eutychus, I think I would have a few words with Luke. I would want to ask Luke, ‘Did you have to mention my name? Couldn’t you just say “somebody”?’ Anyway, he went to sleep and he fell out.

Verses 10-12, Paul went down and prayed for him. He raised him up and he was healed. They went in and ate some more. They broke bread and ate again because it was late. They talked a long while, even until the break of day. So, this thing lasted all night. The moral of that story is that if you’re going to go to sleep, don’t sit next to the window. Everybody else was either wide-awake after that time or they stayed away from the windows because we don’t have a record of anybody else falling out.

Verse 13, Paul left early the next morning. What happened (if you look at a map) is that the others had left and sailed around the peninsula. Paul was able to walk straight across it. He stayed there on the Sabbath and Saturday night. Early Sunday morning when it was daybreak, he took off on a 20-mile hike. That’s what he was doing Sunday morning. He stayed there until daybreak. Sun-up Sunday morning, he took off on a long hike across this peninsula and met the ship on the other side. He had quite a day’s walk—I say 20 miles, maybe 17 or 18, but that is a pretty good walk. I think that’s usually about as much walking as most of us would care to do in a

day—and then a little bit. There’s certainly no Sunday morning church service going on here.

Paul sailed by Ephesus. He didn’t want to spend time there.

Verse 16, “For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.” Here he is observing the Day of Pentecost. He was on his way to Jerusalem to observe the Day of Pentecost.

Verses 17-36, he had sent word and the elders of Ephesus met him at the Port when he came; he was able to speak to them.

Notice the emphasis that he gave and the message that he preached.

Verse 25, ““And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, . . .” Jesus came teaching the Kingdom of God. Paul taught the Kingdom of God. It was a message about the establishment of God’s government. The God of heaven is going to set up a Kingdom. You find that emphasized throughout.

Acts 1:6, the last question the disciples asked Jesus was, ““Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”” Why did they ask that? He kept talking about a Kingdom and the establishment of a Kingdom. They understood what a Kingdom was, and they just wanted to know *when*, which is the question most of us have. ‘*When*, Lord, are You going to restore it? Right now? Five years from now? *When*?’ Well, that’s the question they had.

He told them to wait until they received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4, 8) and then to go and do the Work. That’s what we are to do until the Kingdom comes. We are to be busy doing the Work. That was Paul’s message here to the Ephesians elders.

Acts 20:29-30, he warned them about the falling away and the things that were going to happen. There were already things coming in that were setting the stage for the apostasy—the falling away and the false church that would occur.

Acts 21:8, “On the next day we who were Paul’s companions departed and came to Caesarea, . . .”

Verse 15, “And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem.”

Verses 17-18, “And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.” James was an apostle and the brother of Jesus. He was the apostle who presided over the Jerusalem Church.

This was the headquarters Church in the New Testament period. This was the area from which everything centered. When Paul arrived at Jerusalem, he went to James.

Verse 19, all the other ministers were gathered there and he greeted them. He gave them a report of the things that God had been doing. They were very thankful and they updated him on the work that was going on there.

Verse 20, “And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law.’”

Now notice. Had Christians in the headquarters Church in Jerusalem been taught that Christ did away with God’s law? James was the brother of Jesus. Surely, if Jesus had done away with the law and nailed it to the cross, He would have let His brother know. James is saying, ‘We have a lot of people here, and they are all zealous for the law!’ James didn’t say, ‘We are trying to tell them that the law is done away.’ Paul didn’t say, ‘Why haven’t you told them it was nailed to the cross?’ People just read right over that and want to say, ‘Well, the law was done away.’ James didn’t think it was done away. He said they were all zealous for the law.

Verse 21, “but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.”

‘They have been misinformed about you.’ Things were wrongly stated. Word had gone out that Paul was teaching the Jews who lived in the Diaspora, the Jews who lived in the Gentile areas, that they shouldn’t circumcise their children. That was not what the Church taught at all. The Church did not teach against circumcising the children on the eighth day. That was not what the Church taught at all.

The decision of Acts 15 did not say that there should not be circumcision any more. They said that circumcision is not a matter of spiritual salvation, and when Gentiles who are uncircumcised are converted, they don’t have to go through the ritual of circumcision to be a part of the Church. It is not something that is necessary. It is not part of conversion. If you were uncircumcised when you came into the Church, there is no reason for you not to remain that way.

But in the case of Jews, circumcision was the physical sign of the covenant God made with

Abraham. There was nothing the Church said in any way to discourage the continuation of that practice, most specifically, by those who were themselves the descendants of Abraham. There was nothing there to discourage that. And the Church had never discouraged it in that sense, as a physical matter, but it is not a part of salvation. If someone is uncircumcised when they are converted, there is no need for them to make a change in that. It has no bearing on their salvation.

Paul’s statements had been misinterpreted. Paul had never said that, but some of the Jews had believed this rumor that Paul was telling Jews in the Diaspora to just ignore the instructions on circumcision of their children. They came up with an idea.

Verses 23-24, “Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.” They said, ‘We want the Jews here to recognize that you are not anti or against or disparaging of the custom that we observe, even as a part of the temple ritual.’

There were some individuals who had a vow. You have to understand that there were things that could be carried out when the temple stood that simply can’t be carried out today. You could not take upon yourself a Nazarite vow today because a part of that vow involves a temple ritual at the end of it. When the vow expires, you have to go to the temple and do certain things. Today there isn’t a temple to go to. If you can’t do exactly as God says, you leave it alone.

That is why the Jews don’t offer sacrifices today. It’s not because they consider that the need for them is done away, but because they recognize the instructions in Deuteronomy 12 that say you can’t do it just anywhere you think of doing it. You have to go to the place where God has set His name. You have to do it at the altar that is sanctified and the Levites and the priests have to perform it. They recognize that if there isn’t a sanctified altar and a Levitical priesthood to carry out the ritual, it is something that they can’t do. It will occur, but they won’t do it until that is re-instituted.

There was nothing here that restricted those who had access to the temple from taking part in certain rituals, which were not wrong and which had their place. Since Paul was not against that,

he was going to be involved in this. The intent was to have his presence there in the temple, bear the cost of these individuals ending their vow, and let it be seen that Paul was not the kind of individual that he had been represented to be. But that was not the way the story went.

Verses 27-28, “And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.’”

We see a mob. A riot starts—this kind of lynch-mob mentality. People get in a mob and they don’t think. Rumors go out and people believe the craziest things. Here they were. The rumor went out that Paul had brought Gentiles into the inner part of the temple; he had brought in some who were uncircumcised and who would not have had access beyond the outer courts in the court of the Gentiles. The rumor went out that he brought them in and had defiled the temple.

They said, ‘This man has so little regard for the temple that he has brought a couple of uncircumcised Greeks in here, and they have defiled the temple. He has nothing but contempt for the temple.’ This was the rumor that began to run rampant. There was a riot that started.

Verse 33, the police force came and arrested Paul. They didn’t know what was going on.

Verses 37-38, “And as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, ‘May I speak to you?’ He replied, ‘Can you speak Greek? Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago raised an insurrection and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?’”

The commander (captain of the guard) makes it plain. He said, ‘Aren’t you that Egyptian fellow that had started a riot and led a bunch of robbers off into the desert?’ He was surprised when Paul spoke Greek to him. From all the commotion going on, he thought he was arresting the “Al Capone” of his day. He thought he must have the public enemy “number one.” It turns out that he said, ‘You are not that guy. I can see you and listen to you talk. You are not that fellow that did that.’ Paul said, ‘No, I’m not.’

Verse 39, “But Paul said, ‘I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.’”

Verse 40, Paul began to speak there. He spoke in Hebrew to the crowd.

Acts 22:2, “And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent.” They quieted down when he began speaking in Hebrew—both out of respect for the Hebrew language as well as the fact that they generally had to “listen up” in order to hear it better because Hebrew was not the everyday spoken language in Judea at that time. Aramaic, which is similar to Hebrew, was the common language. Of course, a lot of the Jews who were there from other areas for the holy day understood only a small amount of Hebrew or they were “rusty” with their Hebrew. When Paul began speaking in the “real thing,” they had to really “listen up” to try to understand what he was saying. They were doing so, and he went through and spoke to them.

Verses 21-22, everything was fine until he began to talk about preaching to the Gentiles. When he mentioned going and speaking to the Gentiles, this really stirred them up. To them this was the unforgivable sin. They were ready to start a riot again. Such was their attitude.

Verse 24, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks (KJV, “castle”). The commander decided that there had to be something to this. He didn’t know what was going on, but he took him in there and gave him a good working over—gave him the “third degree.” Then they would see what story he would tell.

Verses 25-26, they tied up Paul. Paul asked the centurion, ‘Is it lawful for you to do this to me, a Roman citizen, and un-condemned? I haven’t had a trial. I haven’t been convicted of a crime. You’re going to take me in there and give me a beating. I’m a Roman citizen.’ Well, then the centurion got scared and went and got the captain. ‘You had better watch it; this guy is a Roman citizen.’

Now, Roman citizens had rights. Most people in the Roman Empire were not citizens. Originally, the only ones who were Roman citizens were the inhabitants of Rome. Later, Roman citizenship was extended to all the people of Italy. Everyone else that they conquered were subject peoples—they weren’t citizens. They were subjects of the Roman Empire, but they weren’t citizens, which meant that they didn’t really have any rights. The only ones that had any rights were the citizens.

There were a number of rights. Rome practiced the rule of law, but the law only applied to the citizens—and there weren’t a whole lot of citizens. The automatic citizenship, there in Rome and Italy, was extended out to a few

other localized areas. Individuals could obtain Roman citizenship granted on a one-by-one basis. Generally, the way you got it was you bought it. Kind of like the way you get things today. If you have enough money, you can probably buy just about anything. You could probably get a Russian citizenship or whatever citizenship you wanted if you had enough money. It's amazing when you pay off the right people. The emperors were always willing to sell a few things, a few citizenships, and raise a little cash.

Citizenship was hereditary in the family. If your dad was a citizen, then you inherited that citizenship. Once a family received Roman citizenship, then from that time on, that family had that citizenship. Paul had inherited his citizenship. He was born a Roman citizen. Paul invoked the legal rights that he had and utilized them.

Let's quickly summarize here as we get to the situation where he went to trial before the Sanhedrin. Paul used wisdom. There is a time to use wisdom.

Acts 23, Paul was on trial.

Verses 6-7, when they brought him before the Jewish court, it didn't take him very long to realize that half of them were Pharisees and half of them were Sadducees. Now, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection. They accepted the doctrine of the resurrection, but the Sadducees didn't.

When Paul got in there, the first thing he said was, 'You know I was born a Pharisee; I am the son of a Pharisee. I am in here because I've been called into question of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.' Immediately, this began to set things "abuzz."

Verses 8-9, the Sadducees were upset because they didn't think there was any resurrection. They began arguing with the Pharisees who said, 'Yes, there is.' Then the Pharisees said, 'This fellow doesn't seem like such a bad fellow; we think you should turn him loose.' The Sadducees were mad. The Pharisees and Sadducees began squabbling and fighting among themselves. Paul just used a little bit of psychology. He picked the point that they did not agree on and got them arguing among themselves.

Verse 10, that got so much commotion going that they were about to get into a fight over him. The soldiers came in and took him back to jail. They said, 'This is getting out of hand.'

In Acts 24, they brought him before Felix the governor. Now the Jews had hired a real

"hotshot" lawyer—a fellow by the name of Tertullus. He was one of those real "hotshot" types, a kind of the "Race-horse Haines" of the day or whatever the famous lawyer. He came in there. Notice the "syrupy" way he started off. When he was called, Tertullus began to accuse Paul to Felix.

Acts 24:2-7, "And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying, 'Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought in this nation by your foresight, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands.'"

Does that at all bear any resemblance to the truth? He comes in here "laying it on really thick." He was saying, 'This fellow, he's a troublemaker, a ringleader of this sect—this cult, this sect of the Nazarenes. (Boy that sounds bad.) He's just stirring up trouble everywhere. He was going to profane the temple, and all we were trying to do was bring him to court. We are peaceful, law-abiding people. We were arresting him for breaking the law and we were going to take him to court. These soldiers, these policemen, just came in there swinging their Billy-clubs everywhere. They just knocked us all around and just took this guy. Boy, police brutality! They were just trampling all over us, just terrible, terrible! You need to speak to that chief of police that you have. I just can't believe it! Those police just came in there and they were just so ugly!'

Listen to this guy just "laying it all on." People haven't changed; it's the same thing. You can just see this lawyer up here in court, going on about his poor client. 'The police came in and it was terrible.' Well, anyway, the governor listened to all this.

Verse 9, the Jews were standing there and were agreeing—'listen to this guy.' Paul, afterward, just went down and gave the facts.

Verses 10-13, "Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: 'Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully

answer for myself, because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.”

‘They didn’t find me in the temple arguing with anybody or inciting people—neither in the synagogues nor in the city. I haven’t said anything to anybody. They can’t prove any of these things that they are saying. They have no evidence. They can’t document one thing that they say I did. I was not preaching in the temple. I was not doing anything.’ Paul had been accused of profaning the temple.

We see the situation went on. Felix listened to Paul. He called Paul and liked to listen to what Paul had to say.

Verse 25, “Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.’” When Felix heard about righteousness and self-control, this made him a little nervous. When he began to find out there was a judgment to come, this really scared him because he knew that he was falling pretty far short when it got to righteousness and self-control, and if there was a judgment to come, he really was in trouble. So, he didn’t want to hear anymore. This is the way some people are. They hear the truth and want to turn off the television. It makes them uncomfortable.

Verse 26, “Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.”

Felix kept him in jail because what he really wanted was a little “payola.” He wanted a little “under-the-table” money. He kept figuring that eventually Paul could “shake down” the Church and get some money for him. He would listen to him from time to time and kept waiting to get some money.

Verse 27, “But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.” Two years went by and Paul didn’t pay him off. So, when he was getting ready to leave office, he decided he would just leave him there. He wouldn’t stir up trouble with the Jews. Festus came in. Festus was the new governor. Well, they had to go through all the “rigmarole” again.

Acts 25:2-3, “Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him.” Festus thought, ‘Let’s just send him back to Jerusalem and have a trial.’

Verse 10, “Then Paul said, ‘I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know.’” Paul said, ‘No way. I am not going back there.’ He knew that they would try to kill him. There wasn’t going to be any trial. Paul at this point appealed to Caesar.

Verse 11, “‘For if I am an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.’” He appealed to the Supreme Court of the day. He appealed to Caesar. He was exercising his right as a Roman citizen to do so, and this solved the problem for Festus. He said, ‘I will just send you to Rome then.’

Verse 12, “Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, ‘You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!’”

Verses 13-27, King Agrippa was in town and he wanted to hear this fellow Paul. Festus decided this would be an opportunity to get in good with Agrippa.

Acts 26:1-29, Paul addressed Festus and Agrippa. Notice the situation. Paul has now had an opportunity to speak to the top echelons of government in his area. He spoke to the two Roman governors and the king over that area under the Roman Empire.

Verses 31-32, neither of them found anything wrong with him.

In Acts 27, they put him on a boat and were going to ship him off to Rome.

Verses 13-44; 28:1, on the trip from Caesarea to Rome, a storm resulted in a shipwreck on Malta where the group had to winter. Of course, Paul took advantage of the opportunity to preach.

In Acts 27:9-10, it was a time when the sailing was dangerous. In fact, Paul warned them that it was really too late in the season. But they figured, ‘What does he know?’ And they went anyway. It mentions in verse 9 that the Fast was already past—in other words, the Day of Atonement.

In Acts 28:1, they wrecked there at Malta.

Verses 11-16, when the winter was over—in the spring—they left. They landed at Syracuse, in

Sicily, and then came into the main part of Italy, south of Rome. When Paul came to Rome, he was delivered to the Praetorian Guard. He was allowed to dwell by himself. He rented a home.

Acts 28:30, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him.” He had a personal guard. He was evidently chained to the guard, but he was at least allowed to dwell in a house. He was allowed free access for people to come and see him.

Notice the reputation of the Church. Notice what they knew about the Church.

Verse 21-22, “And they said to him, ‘We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect [speaking of the Church], we know that it is spoken against everywhere.’”

‘We don’t really know anything about it; we just know that people don’t like it.’ That sounds kind of like us, doesn’t it? They don’t know much about it, but they don’t like it. ‘This sect! This cult! This crazy bunch you got mixed up with.’

There’s nothing new under the sun. That’s what they said about Paul. That’s what they said about the Church in the New Testament. Why should we expect that they think more highly of us? Christ warned us to be careful.

Luke 6:26, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you,” Be careful if everybody likes you. I don’t mean your personality. People liked Christ’s personality, but they didn’t like His message. If the world agrees with you, you have trouble. If the world agrees with you, then you have to look and see what you are preaching and practicing. The world did not agree with Christ, and they are not going to agree with us. They may like certain things about us, but when it comes down to religion, they think that’s kind of crazy.

We notice what Paul was preaching right to the end.

Acts 28:31, “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”

Acts 1:6, we open the book of Acts with the disciples asking Jesus, “... ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’” –Because that’s what He preached about. When the book of Acts ends, Paul was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Throughout, we have the clear message and teaching of the Gospel of the

Kingdom of God. The world has lost sight of that Gospel and that message, but God’s Church has preached and taught that message through the centuries.

With that, we will conclude our survey of the book of Acts. We, of course, have only hit the high spots in the book of Acts, but you have had opportunity to read the story in detail. I have tried to concentrate on matters of background that can perhaps make it a little more meaningful. We will be starting fresh on a brand new series.